

AN ETHNOLINGUISTIC STUDY OF NIITSITAPI PERSONAL NAMES

by

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Summary

This dissertation examines the uses, functions, and meaningfulness of traditional personal names and naming practices in Niitsitapi (Blackfoot Indian) culture. The current study indicates that Niitsitapi personal names appear to play a major role in capturing and conveying various aspects of traditional Niitsitapi sociocultural knowledge. Niitsitapi personal names thus appear to form an integral part of Niitsitapi oral tradition, and also seem to play a powerful role in establishing and maintaining Niitsitapi conceptualisations of individual, as well as social and cultural, identity. This dissertation supports the position that, in addition to their nominative function, names contain and communicate sociocultural meaning, based on their associations with a wide range of non-linguistic factors which form part of the sociocultural environment within which they are used. The methodological approach stresses the importance of studying personal names in cultural context and strongly emphasises the use of indigenous knowledge as a means of explaining personal naming phenomena from a native cultural perspective.

Key terms

Onomastics; Personal names; Naming practices; Native American; Niitsitapi; Blackfoot; Ethnoscience; Ethnolinguistics; Names in cultural context; Indigenous knowledge.

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Inisskimmaakii, Carol Lombard

CHAPTER 1: Introduction

1.0 Overview

In this chapter, a general background to the dissertation is provided. §1.1 outlines the purpose and main issues that are addressed by the current study, the core elements of the methodological approach, as well as some of the features that make this dissertation somewhat novel in terms of its contribution to the field of onomastics. §1.2 gives a short historical overview of the Niitsitapi people, whilst §1.3 deals specifically with Niitsitapi oral tradition, and the role of ‘story’ in this crucial aspect of traditional Niitsitapi culture. The story of how this research project originated is related in §1.4, which adds further contextual backdrop to the study. §1.5 and §1.6 are concerned with the more ‘technical’ aspects of the dissertation: the former addresses terminology use, whilst the latter summarises the sequence and content of ensuing chapters.

1.1 The nature, scope, and objectives, of the research

Up until now, very little has been written about the cultural and social significance of Niitsitapi (Blackfoot) personal names and naming practices. Existing published literature that deals with the topic (e.g. McClintock 1992; Brown & Peers 2006) provides good descriptions of how Niitsitapi personal names are given and received, but shows no serious attempt to explain the cultural philosophies, beliefs, and values, which underlie these practices. Furthermore, to the best of my knowledge, there is no published scholarly research in which Niitsitapi personal names and naming practices are the main focus of attention (§2.4.1). I do wish to point out, however, that although written academic material pertaining to Niitsitapi personal names and naming practices is somewhat scarce, a vast body of Niitsitapi oral literature surrounding the subject does exist, and is in active use, within Niitsitapi communities. This oral literature has been the guiding force behind the research that is presented in this dissertation, since I have relied heavily, and, in fact, primarily, upon it, as both a source of information, and as a basis for interpreting the data (§2.4.2; §3.5.1; §3.6).

This dissertation represents a first step towards providing a comprehensive, ethnographically-oriented account of the uses, functions, and meaningfulness of Niitsitapi personal names, within their indigenous cultural context, through an investigation of the apparently complex

and multi-faceted relationships between naming phenomena and other aspects of traditional Niitsitapi socioculture. The research that is presented here addresses, in particular, the following (interrelated) questions:

- What roles do personal names play in traditional Niitsitapi culture?
- What functions do these roles fulfil within the culture?
- How do Niitsitapi personal naming practices relate to other aspects of traditional Niitsitapi ways of living?
- Which cultural concepts, or local philosophies of knowledge, exert the greatest influence in terms of how personal names acquire meaning, and are used, in Niitsitapi society?

I wish to emphasise the fact that the foregoing were not a pre-set list of questions that were developed as a guideline prior to conducting the current research. Instead, these issues emerged over time, as the study evolved and progressed, and as I followed my own intuition based on what I was learning about Niitsitapi personal names during each step of the project. Furthermore, in order to achieve the goal of providing a culturally-relevant, and thus authentically ethnographic, account of Niitsitapi personal names and naming practices, I have allowed local, that is, Niitsitapi, knowledge systems and ways of thinking (contained in the Niitsitapi oral literature) to inform and guide almost every aspect of the research process. This means that the questions outlined above have, to the greatest extent possible, been addressed from a Niitsitapi perspective (§3.2). In essence, this approach constitutes a blend of ‘traditional’ western ethnography and ethnosciences (§2.3.1; §2.3.2), and reflects my attempt to achieve some measure of balance between the demands of western scholarship and the opinions, beliefs, and values, of the Niitsitapi people. Again, this was not a ‘pre-meditated’ approach that was decided upon before the actual research began. Although the intent to write the dissertation from a Niitsitapi point of view was there from the beginning, the method itself evolved and matured out of circumstances and experiences that came about once the project got under way; with the unintentional result that it just happened to ‘fit in’ with some of the established approaches and methods in the fields I have just mentioned.

This dissertation breaks new ground in several different respects. As indicated above, the current study is the first of its kind to focus on explaining the social and cultural significance

of Niitsitapi anthroponyms, and, in fact, to make Niitsitapi personal names the main topic of investigation. It also represents a first attempt at using indigenous (Niitsitapi) knowledge as a foundational guide for researching Niitsitapi personal names and naming practices. In this way, the project provides fresh insight into what has already been written about Niitsitapi personal naming phenomena. It also heralds a new approach for research into Native American personal names in general, since, as will be more extensively discussed in §2.4, most of the existing research pertaining to names in Native American, as well as other tribal cultures, is descriptive versus explanatory in nature, and the value of using local knowledge as a methodological and interpretative guide in such studies has been largely overlooked. Furthermore, since the current research has been written from a Niitsitapi point of view (albeit by a western scholar), it effectively comprises the first uniquely Niitsitapi contribution to the field of onomastics.

1.2 The Niitsitapi people: a brief historical background

The Niitsi'powahsin (Blackfoot) term, *Niitsitapi*, meaning 'The Real People', is a collective reference to members of the four Native American tribes or nations who make up what is known today as the Blackfoot Confederacy. These four tribes are the *Siksika* ('Blackfoot'); the *Akainaa* (also known as Kainai or Bloods); the *Aapatohsipiikani* (variously spelled Piikani, Pikanii, Pikuni, Piegan or Peigan); and the *Aamsskaapipikani* (the Blackfeet Nation). The first three tribes are from Alberta, Canada, whilst the fourth is from Montana, in the United States. All of them share a linguistic, historical, and cultural, background, although each tribe functions under its own separate leadership. Their common language is Blackfoot, or *Niitsi'powahsin*, meaning 'the Real Language', of which the two main dialects are Piegan and Blood/Kainai. Niitsi'powahsin is a member of the Algonquian language family, which includes languages such as Lenape, Mohican, Cree, Ojibwe, and Cheyenne. Currently, Niitsi'powahsin is considered to be an endangered language. Based on 2006 census data, Statistics Canada (2008) reports approximately 3000 mother-tongue speakers of Niitsi'powahsin in Canada. Very few (about 100) fluent native-tongue speakers remain in the United States (SIL 2008).

Traditionally, Niitsitapi territory extended southwards from the North Saskatchewan River in Alberta (Canada), to The Yellowstone River in Montana (United States), eastward to the Sand Hills in Saskatchewan (Canada), and westward to the Rocky Mountains (Canada and

the United States). The Niitsitapi occupied this vast area of land, known to them as *kitawahsinnoon* ‘Our Land’, hunting game (mainly bison), and gathering plants, such as roots and berries, for food and medicine (The Blackfoot Gallery 2001:4). During the colonisation era in North America, the Niitsitapi made several treaties with the Canadian and United States governments. These agreements were initially supposed to ensure the peaceful co-existence of the Niitsitapi people and the new settlers in what has always been traditional Niitsitapi territory. However, the continued and extensive migration of the colonisers into the western part of the North American continent brought much conflict and misunderstanding between the Niitsitapi people (as well as other Native American tribes) and the Canadian and United States governments, over the issues of land use and ownership. As a result, the Niitsitapi (mostly unintentionally) ceded most of their traditional land to the white settlers. Today, the Canadian and United States governments recognise Niitsitapi territory as consisting only of three Reserves in Alberta, and one Reservation in Montana (see Figure 1.1 below). It is worth pointing out, however, that, from a Niitsitapi perspective, *all* of their traditional territory still belongs to them. As such, it is now becoming fairly common practice for Niitsitapi people to visit, and even hold ceremonies at, sacred sites that lie outside of Reserve/Reservation boundaries. In this way, the Niitsitapi maintain their spiritual ties to their land, and assert their right to their continued use of it (*Akáyo’kaki*, Ryan Heavy Head, personal communication).

Figure 1.1: Map showing location of the Kainai Reserve (pink shaded area); the Siksika Reserve (dark blue); the Piikani Reserve (grey); and the Blackfeet Reservation (light blue).



1.2.1 The residential school era

The most destructive aspect of European settlement to impact the Niitsitapi people (and other Native American tribes) was the forced assimilation policy of both the United States and Canadian governments. In Canada, this policy was implemented through the Department of

Indian Affairs, who had jurisdiction over all Indian Reserves in the nation. Legislation that was passed in 1920 and 1930 as part of the Indian Act enforced the compulsory attendance of Niitsitapi children at Roman Catholic and Anglican mission residential schools. The Canadian government believed that the best way to assimilate the Indian population was to teach the children Christian beliefs, and to educate them in line with western-based values, philosophies, and cultural practices. With this goal in mind, the responsibility of teaching Indian children was given to the churches. On the Kainai Reserve, The St. Paul's Anglican Mission school was established in 1890, and the Roman Catholic mission school, which was originally named the Immaculate Conception School, was founded in 1893. In 1924, the latter was renamed as St. Mary's Roman Catholic Indian Residential School (Brown and Peers 2006:26). Today, it houses the campus of Red Crow Community College (RCCC); a Niitsitapi tribal college (see §3.4.1).

The residential school system almost destroyed the traditional Niitsitapi way of life. Children were separated from their families for long periods of time, and, whilst they were in school, they were not permitted to speak their own language, Niitsi'powahsin, or to participate in any kind of traditional ceremonies or dances. Many people tell stories of how they were severely punished for breaking these rules (e.g. Zaharia and Fox 1995; 2003; The Blackfoot Gallery Committee 2001). The following two excerpts of transcripts of interviews with Niitsitapi elders are taken from Zaharia and Fox (1995(1): 19; 94):

I started school at the St. Paul's Anglican Residential School at age nine. I got strapped whenever I was caught speaking our language or singing our songs.

I was educated at St. Paul's Anglican Residential School. While at school we had to speak English. We were punished if we were caught speaking *Kainaiwa* [Niitsi'powahsin] language.

In addition, Niitsitapi children were given 'Christian' names by residential school officials, if they had not already received 'Christian' names at baptism. The 'Christian' name would be used in combination with an English translation of another Niitsitapi name (usually the name of a father or older brother), which would function as a surname. In many cases, these 'Christian' names would be assigned arbitrarily and indiscriminately (Brown and Peers

2006:113). *Mi'ksskimm*, Frank Weasel Head (personal interview), for instance, told me the following:

When I was born, the nuns gave me the name 'Frank'. Why? They just chose it out of a hat. My Dad did not speak English, and my Mom spoke very little, so they didn't know [English names].

Another example comes from Zaharia and Fox (1995: 32):

When I was baptized at the Roman Catholic Church on March 7, 1920, I was named Violet Rose. Since my grandparents were raising me and they didn't speak English, they called me *Noosi*. When I arrived at the St. Paul's Anglican Residential School, my grandfather told Reverend Middleton that my name was *Noosi*. But Reverend Middleton understood 'Lucy' and since then I have been known as Lucy.

Although the residential schools were supposed to teach Niitsitapi children to read and write English, in order to help them assimilate into western society and culture, the oral literature indicates that very few children left school with a sound knowledge of English or other academic subjects. At the Roman Catholic schools in particular, the nuns spoke mostly French, and thus did not have the ability to teach English proficiently. Furthermore, children spent more time learning how to cook, clean, sew, and work in the fields, than they did acquiring academic knowledge (Zaharia and Fox 1995, 2003; Brown and Peers 2006). Stripped of their familial relationships, their language, their customs, and even their Niitsitapi names, many children attending the residential schools began to view traditional Niitsitapi ways as irrelevant and obsolete (Bastien 2004:19), and their concepts of Niitsitapi cultural identity started to disintegrate. It has been explained to me that, even after the abandonment of the residential school policies in both the United States and Canada, Niitsitapi children still struggled to fit back into their own culture. In many cases, for instance, poor economic conditions on the Reserves and Reservations forced older children, as well as, oftentimes, their parents, to look for work in the 'white' towns, meaning that they had to learn to speak English and adapt, at least to some measure, to western cultural ways. Thus, Niitsitapi language and cultural loss continued, despite the fact that official policies of forced assimilation no longer existed. The effects of what some Niitsitapi people refer to as "cultural

genocide” (c.f. Bastien 2004) have been felt for five or six generations, and, from what I have personally observed, are still very evident today.

In spite of all of this, however, the Niitsitapi people continue to survive in post-colonial North American society. Many have returned to living in accordance with traditional Niitsitapi ways, and the language, Niitsi’powahsin, is being spoken and taught in the schools and tribal colleges. The Blackfoot Gallery Committee (2001:84) asserts the following:

Our traditional values are still important to us. A century of forced assimilation has failed. Many of us still speak our language; our ceremonies continue and our beliefs are strong.

This dissertation illustrates some of the ways in which ancient Niitsitapi values, beliefs, and protocols continue to be taught and reinforced through the use of traditional personal names.

1.3 Niitsitapi oral tradition and the importance of story

As is the case with many tribal cultures in different parts of the world, the Niitsitapi have a rich oral tradition that has defined the way in which knowledge transfer has taken place within Niitsitapi society for many thousands of years. Story-telling plays a crucial role in this oral tradition. Usually, it is the elders who tell stories in order to instruct and guide younger people in the traditional ways of the community (Fixico 2003; Bastien 2004). The following quotations emphasise the importance of story as a vehicle of teaching and learning in traditional Niitsitapi society:

We teach our culture through stories. Everything has life and a story.
(*Mi’ksskimm*, Frank Weasel Head, cited in The Blackfoot Gallery Committee 2001:14)

Our ancient stories tell us how our traditions were given to us. These teachings show us how to live and explain our relationship with other beings in Creation. For us, these stories are true. They are the record of our history from the beginning of time...[u]sually, our old people were the ones who told these

stories...[t]hey constantly reinforced good behaviour and provided advice through storytelling. (The Blackfoot Gallery Committee 2001:10, 31)

Newcomers to Indian country did not teach us any of our history or how to tell a story. We do it ourselves...we natives preserved our history in our minds and handed it down from generation to generation, from time unknown, orally. From the time human life began. It isn't any different from the stories our white friends tell us about such as King Arthur and Joan of Arc...some of these stories may sound a little foolish, but they are very true. And they have much influence over all the people of this world, even now as we all live. (Bullchild 1985: 2-3)

These references highlight some interesting features of the Niitsitapi approach to story that have direct bearing on this research. Firstly, stories function as indices of culture and of social history (Fixico 2003). In Niitsi'powahsin, the concept of teaching history through stories might be expressed as *akáitapiitsinikssiitsi* 'stories of the past people/ancestors' (*Akáyo'kaki*, Ryan Head, personal communication). Collectively, these stories make up a body of local wisdom, *mokakssini*, through which cultural beliefs, values, and practices are taught. Not only are *akáitapiitsinikssiitsi* very important to the Niitsitapi people themselves, but, as I have learned from my own personal experience, they are also of great value to outsiders who wish to learn about the Niitsitapi way of life.

Secondly, and following on the previous point, stories are considered to be trustworthy and accurate sources of local knowledge within the context of Niitsitapi oral tradition. As such, the stories become a source of content and methodology for educating community members (Cajete 1994:168). In this regard, Niitsitapi scholar Betty Bastien (2004:104) writes that:

Our theory of knowledge is found in the sacred stories that are the living knowledge of the people. The stories explain the nature of reality, the science, and the economic and social organization of *Siksikaitsitapi* [the Niitsitapi]. They are the accumulated knowledge of centuries.

Thirdly, and again relating to the two preceding points, stories in the oral tradition appear to transcend time as they are told and re-told. As indicated in the above citations, ancient

stories are still recounted today in order to educate and instruct Niitsitapi people concerning many aspects of everyday life. In other words, it is the messages conveyed by the stories, rather than the times of when things happened in the stories, which are of more importance in the story-telling process.

I emphasise the importance of story and Niitsitapi oral tradition here because ‘story’ itself is a central theme in this dissertation. As will be explained and illustrated in §4.1, story is an integral, and indeed inseparable, element of Niitsitapi naming, in that Niitsitapi personal names are characteristically embedded with *akáitapiitsinikssiitsi*; which stories have a profound and powerful effect on the lives of the name bearers. Most of what I have learned about Niitsitapi personal names and naming practices over the course of this research has come from the stories that various Niitsitapi people have shared with me around their names. It is by listening to these (and other) stories that I have come to recognise the importance of names in the traditional Niitsitapi way of life, and to see something of the intricate connections between names and many other aspects of the culture. Furthermore, woven between the lines of this dissertation is the story of the research project itself, and the story of the personal journey that I experienced, as I pursued the knowledge that I needed to carry out and complete the study. All of these stories matter. Without them, and without the things that have been learned through them, this dissertation could not have been written.

1.4 The story behind the study

Over the past three years, many people have asked me to explain how I became involved in researching Niitsitapi personal names. As I have taken the time to reflect back on how the project originated, I have come to realise that many of the circumstances which came about, experiences that I had, and people whom I met, prior to the point at which I actually started carrying out the research, came to play both informative and guiding roles in the study once it commenced and progressed. It thus seems both relevant and appropriate for me to include, in this introductory section of the dissertation, a brief account of the story behind the project.

The opportunity to carry out the study first arose in mid-2004, whilst I was working on my BA Honours degree in General Linguistics. One of the final assignments for the course was to present a mini research project on the topic of language and gender. I decided that I wanted to try to do something different, yet interesting, and so I began looking for information on male versus female language use within the context of Native American languages and

cultures. After struggling to locate any useful amount of suitable material in the written literature, I sent out a request for help through an internet mailing list. The only response I received was from *Akáyo'kaki*, Ryan Heavy Head, who at that time was a graduate student working on his Master's degree at the University of Lethbridge. At the same time, he was teaching classes in Kainai Studies at Red Crow Community College (RCCC), on the Kainai (Blood) Indian Reserve in Alberta, Canada. Using e-mail, Ryan shared at length with me his insights regarding the language and culture of the Niitsitapi people, and with his help I successfully completed my assignment.

In the meantime, we had been having quite lengthy e-mail 'conversations' in which I expressed my interest in continuing to learn about the Niitsitapi language and culture once I had completed my Honours Degree programme. As a result, in early March, 2005, my family and I paid a visit to Lethbridge to meet with Ryan and explore the possibilities of doing further research. I immediately felt at home with Ryan and his wife, Adrienne, and during that short visit a friendship began that has continued to grow as the years have gone by. Ryan took me out to RCCC and invited me to sit in on a meeting, involving several of the elders from the Kainai Reserve and a delegation of archivists from the University of Calgary, in which some of the problems surrounding the archiving of Niitsitapi materials by western institutions were being discussed. This was my first real encounter with the topic of indigenous knowledge preservation, and the very sensitive issue regarding the ownership of, or rights to, indigenous knowledge, within the context of Native American, or (in Canadian terms) First Nations, communities, many of which are still working through various complex processes of decolonisation. Although I did not know it at the time, such matters would eventually come to play a central role in setting the foundation for my philosophical, as well as methodological, approach to the research (§2.2.2; §2.3; §3.2).

Ryan also introduced me to several of the Kainai elders, including *Ponokaiksiksinam*, Martin Heavy Head, and his wife, Pam; Alvin and Delia Cross Child; and *Mi'ksskimm*, Frank Weasel Head, and his wife, Sylvia. Although my first few visits with the elders were purely social, they enabled me to experience a central aspect of the Niitsitapi approach to learning and knowledge acquisition, which would eventually become my primary method of gathering information for the research; that is, consulting with the elders, who are the keepers of traditional knowledge (§1.5.3). Furthermore, it was as a result of visiting with *Mi'ksskimm*, Frank Weasel Head one afternoon during that first trip, that the idea to carry out a study of

Niitsitapi personal names was initially inspired. While we were sitting drinking coffee around Frank's kitchen table, Frank started to talk about names, and their importance in Niitsitapi culture. Referring to several names that are carried by people on the Kainai Reserve, he explained how names tell stories about people from the past; stories that need to be remembered and passed on to future generations, so that Niitsitapi history and cultural identity can be preserved and carried forward. Later on that same day, after our visit with Frank, Ryan and I were discussing some of the things that Frank had spoken about; and I mentioned that I was interested in learning more about Niitsitapi names and their stories. At that point, Ryan told me that one of the other elders from the Reserve had, in the past, approached him and discussed the need for a names study to be carried out in the community. Ryan, however, had been too busy to do anything about it, and the idea had been left 'on hold'. On hearing this, I asked Ryan if he thought I could take on the study myself for my Master's Degree dissertation, and he enthusiastically agreed. In those few moments, then, this research project came to life.

I should also mention that Ryan's support for the study has never wavered, and it is thus most fitting that he eventually became appointed as the Canadian co-supervisor for this dissertation. Over and above that, however, his backing is very much representative of the willingness of many people from the Kainai Reserve community to work with me on this project. Without their collaboration, it would have been virtually impossible to successfully carry out the study.

1.5 Clarification of terminology use

1.5.1 'Niitsitapi', 'Kainai', and 'Blackfoot'

As explained in §1.2, the term 'Niitsitapi' is a Niitsi'powahsin term that is used as a collective reference to the four different tribes, one being the Kainai, also known as the Bloods, who represent the Blackfoot Confederacy. Whilst this research project was carried out on the Kainai Reserve, and thus focuses on the names of people from that particular community, the discussion of naming practices that is contained in this dissertation applies to the Niitsitapi people as a whole, since all four tribes share a common cultural heritage. For this reason, I refer to 'Niitsitapi', rather than 'Kainai', personal names, in the title and throughout the dissertation. Furthermore, although the collective nouns 'Niitsitapi' and

‘Blackfoot’ refer to the same cultural group, and are often used interchangeably even by the Niitsitapi people themselves, I favour the use of ‘Niitsitapi’ in my writing. The latter term is an indigenous expression, and is thus, in my view, more fitting with the approach taken in this study, than the term ‘Blackfoot’, which is its anglicised counterpart.

1.5.2 ‘Niitsitapi personal names’

In this dissertation, the term ‘Niitsitapi personal name’ refers specifically to the traditional, or tribal, names of the Niitsitapi people, which are expressed in their native language, Niitsi’powahsin. Prior to European settlement in North America, the Niitsitapi had no concept of ‘first names’, ‘Christian names’, or ‘surnames’, and carried only tribal names. Nowadays, however, most Niitsitapi people hold both traditional Niitsitapi and European names; the latter being a lasting by-product of the imposition of western naming practices (amongst other things) on the Niitsitapi during the colonial era (§1.2).

Let me illustrate by using the example of my good friend, *Ai’ai’stahkommi* Duane Mistaken Chief. “Duane” is his English first, or ‘Christian’ name (usually these names are given at baptism); whilst “Mistaken Chief” is an English translation of a traditional Niitsitapi name which has come to function as a surname. Actually, “Mistaken Chief” is a mistranslation of the name *Paahtsiinaam*, a shortened version of *Paahtsiinaama’ahkawa*, which means ‘takes the wrong weapon or coup’ (*Ai’ai’stahkommi* Duane Mistaken Chief, personal communication). The name *Ai’ai’stahkommi* is Duane’s Niitsitapi personal name.

Many Niitsitapi people, including Duane, refer to their traditional personal names as *kitsiitsinihka’siminnoonistsi* ‘our real names’, to distinguish them from the other names that they carry. At this point in time, Niitsitapi personal names are used primarily in formal public settings, and in sacred ceremonies; whereas, in most everyday situations, people will address one another using their English names. I must add, however, that over the past two years, I have observed a marked increase in the use of tribal names in informal situations, amongst students and staff members at Red Crow Community College. This may be due to the intensive efforts put forth by the College’s eminent scholars (community elders) to encourage Niitsitapi students to speak their native language, Niitsi’powahsin, and to recognise the importance of maintaining a sense of unique Niitsitapi identity in contemporary Canadian society.

Throughout this dissertation, I have tried to remain consistent in my use of people's names. In terms of referencing, my overall approach has been to give an individual's Niitsitapi personal name (when known) in italics, followed by his or her English first name and surname; as in, for example, *Ai'ai'stahkommi*, Duane Mistaken Chief. When making casual mention of people, I use only their English names; as I would if I were speaking face-to-face with them in normal social circumstances. For the sake of simplicity, and to make for easier reading, I have not included English glosses for traditional personal names in the main text, apart from where English translations appear in the transcripts of my interviews, or where they are necessary in order to make a particular point in the discussion. In the case of other Niitsi'powahsin words, I give the English glosses only once, when these words are used for the first time in the text. A full glossary of Niitsitapi names and Niitsi'powahsin terms used in this dissertation is provided in Addendum 1.

1.5.3 'Elders'

As I mentioned in §1.4, and as will be discussed in more detail in §3.3, most of the information that I needed to collect in order to write this dissertation was obtained by consulting with Kainai community elders. Niitsitapi oral tradition affirms the elders as guardians of accumulated knowledge and experience that is contained in the sacred stories, songs, ceremonies, and social structures, of the Niitsitapi people; and, as such, it the elders who are responsible for teaching and passing down this knowledge to successive generations.

In Niitsi'powahsin, the English word, 'elder', is usually translated as *kaaahsinnoon* 'our grandparent' (plural *kaaahsinnooniksi*). Although many Niitsitapi *kaaahsinnooniksi* are indeed elderly people, age is not always the determining factor in terms of who might be considered a *kaaahsinnoon*. *Ai'ai'stahkommi*, Duane Mistaken Chief (personal communication), illustrates this from his own personal experience:

Some people call me an elder or *kaaahsinnoon* 'grandparent'...even though they themselves are older than me. They call me a *kaaahsinnoon* 'elder', or 'grandparent because [they see me as being] very knowledgeable and wise in the Blackfoot ways.

Duane also points out that even though *kaaahsinnooniksi* are, in a literal, as well as functional, sense, grandparents, they are not necessarily biologically related to those people who recognise them as *kaaahsinnooniksi*. Thus, as Duane explains:

I have fathers and mothers and grandparents who are in no way related to me biologically...but [I] treat them as if they are—complete with taboos associated with those relationships.

In conducting this research, I have had the privilege of working with many Kainai elders, both old and young, who have shared much with me about the cultural beliefs, values, and practices, of their people. Through this experience, I have come to understand and appreciate the role played by these elders in instructing and guiding those people who, like me, are still immature concerning their knowledge of traditional Niitsitapi ways.

1.6 Outline of the dissertation structure

This chapter has provided a general background to the research that is presented in this dissertation. In the next chapter, I place the study into its scholarly context through a review of the literature that I have consulted in order to familiarise myself with the existing academic discourse in the fields of onomastics, ethnolinguistics, and ethnoscience. This is followed, in Chapter 3, by a detailed discussion of the theoretical, philosophical, and practical, approaches that have shaped and defined my research methodology. In Chapter 4, I present what I have learned about Niitsitapi personal names and naming practices from the current study, and, finally, in Chapter 5, I discuss the results, and explore some implications of, the research.

CHAPTER 2: Literature review

2.0 Introduction

This chapter places the current study in context by examining a number of issues concerning research in the field of onomastics, which are of particular interest and relevance to the project. The following discussion contains an exposition of some of the main theoretical concerns underlying the study of names in general, especially regarding various theoretical stances on the definition, function, and meaning of names. Also addressed is the matter of how names acquire meaning and take on diverse roles and functions in different cultures. The role of personal names in establishing and maintaining sociocultural identity, and the ways in which names function as part of Native American oral tradition, are briefly dealt with. The means of accounting for cultural context in name study, including the current research, is explored through an examination of certain key principles of ethnolinguistics and ethnoscience (indigenous science). The importance of incorporating local, or indigenous, philosophies of knowledge into studies of names and naming practices in tribal cultures is heavily stressed. In addition, the connection between the affirmation of tribal knowledge and certain aspects of decolonisation in indigenous communities is discussed. An overview of previous research pertaining to Native American, including Niitsitapi, personal names is given. The importance and contribution of Niitsitapi oral literature to the current project is highlighted and explained, with special reference to the role of story as a vehicle for communicating traditional knowledge.

2.1 Theoretical perspectives on the meanings and functions of names

Although the study of names has traditionally been regarded as part of linguistics, onomastics has, in general, represented a very marginal area in language research (Nuessel 1992:5; Joseph 2004:12; Algeo 2006:6). Within the context of formal, or structural, linguistics, which was very much the dominant approach in the study of language up until the mid-twentieth century, onomastics theory tended to focus primarily on what Zelinski (2006:14) refers to as “the seemingly never-ending effort...to construct a precise definition of proper nouns, or names.” In line with the characteristic dichotomies of structural linguistics (e.g. Saussure’s ‘langue’ v ‘parole’ and Chomsky’s ‘competence’ v ‘performance’), it has long been assumed

that such a definition could be based on drawing a distinction between common nouns, which refer to a whole class of objects, e.g. ‘rivers’, or ‘people’; and (proper) names, which designate individual referents and distinguish them from others, e.g. ‘The Mississippi’, or ‘George W. Bush’.

Attempts to differentiate between nouns and names have been largely based on perceived differences between the two in terms of function and meaning. The nineteenth century British philosopher, John Stuart Mill (1872, quoted in Nicholaisen 1978:40-41), first introduced the terms ‘denote’ and ‘connote’ as a means of explaining the functional differences between ‘names’ and ‘words’. The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English (1995) provides the following entry for the verb ‘denote’: “1. to be a sign of; indicate (*the arrow denotes direction*). 2. (usu. foll. by *that* + clause) mean, convey. 3. stand as a name for; signify.” The same reference work defines the verb ‘connote’ as: “1. (of a word etc.) imply in addition to the literal or primary meaning. 2. (of a fact) imply as a consequence or condition. 3. mean, signify.” Similarly, Crystal (1997:101,425) explains ‘denotation’ as the objective relationship between a word and the reality (thing) to which it refers, and cites proper names such as ‘London’ and ‘Bill Brown’ (words which refer directly to actual places and people) as illustrations of this relationship. Crystal (1997: 102,103,424) defines ‘connotation’ as “the personal associations aroused by words”, and notes that these associations depend on the contexts (including cultural contexts) within which language is used. The overall difference appears to be that ‘denotation’ has to do with explicit meaning (direct reference); whereas ‘connotation’ involves additional and/or implicit meaning (indirect reference). Nicholaisen (1978:41) explains the distinction as follows: “Connotation is an inclusive, comprehending, embracing process, whereas denotation is an exclusive, isolating, individualizing one.”

According to Mill (1872, quoted in Nicholaisen 1978:41-42 and Nuessel 1992:1), the distinguishing feature of names is that they are “unmeaning marks” that have a solely referential, or denotative, function. The basic argument underlying the view that names have denotation, but not connotation, is that, unlike other kinds of referring expressions such as ordinary nouns and noun phrases, or “definite descriptions” (c.f. Searle 1969), names do not describe the objects to which they refer; thus knowing the names of objects, or people, for that matter, does not give us any facts, or information, about them (Searle 1969:163; 173). In line with this stance, Markey (1982:139) contends that “[n]ames are adjuncts of ordinary language: they have reference, but do not describe and therefore, unless considered

etymologically, have sense only as referents. Markey (1982:131) further maintains that “the knowledge of a name does not require knowledge of language...[n]ames are linguistic isolates; they are singular terms. Once *Smith* or *Springfield* has been provided with an etymology...the case is closed.”

The foregoing arguments have, however, been challenged and somewhat weakened by scholars who take alternative positions regarding the nature and functions of names. Concerning the lexical and syntactic characteristics of names, Pamp (1985:111), for instance, states that making a distinction between names, or proper nouns, and words, or common nouns, is “a terminological disaster...a misuse...since it deprives us of the only acceptable term for those linguistic units which are in print separated by space”, and pertinently points out that “if names are not words... then how can they be nouns?” Similarly, Algeo (2006:6) contends that “if we consider names apart from the things that they name, apart from the circumstances in which they are used, and apart from their users; that is, if we focus on names per se, it is clear that they are a kind of word. And words are basic features of language.” Wheatley (1965:78), meanwhile, posits that, given the existence of names such as ‘Goldsmith’ and ‘Oxford’, which appear to have descriptive origins, and the fact that some names have come to function as common nouns (e.g. ‘mackintosh’), and even as verbs (e.g. ‘hoover’, as in ‘hoover the carpet’), names are actually very much a part of language, as opposed to being marginal features of it.

New perspectives have also emerged with respect to the semantic functions of names. Of particular relevance to the current study is the view that, since names form part of dynamic linguistic systems used by real people in real space and time, they possess what has been variously termed ‘onomastic meaning’, ‘connotative meaning’ (e.g. Nicholaisen 1978), ‘associative meaning’ (e.g. Grant 2006), and ‘descriptive backing’ (Searle 1969). These expressions refer to the ways in which a wide variety of non-linguistic associations — rooted in the personal, social, cultural, psychological, historical, physical, ecological, geographical, and even spiritual, worlds of the name users — become attached to, or carried within, certain names. According to this stance, the meaning of names is derived primarily from the context/s within which they are used.

The argument, discussed earlier in this section, that names have reference but not meaning, appears to have its roots in structural linguistics, in terms of which language is studied

through the abstraction of linguistic form from context and function. This is well illustrated by Bloomfield's remark (n.d. cited in Hymes 1974:5) that, if a beggar says "I am hungry" to obtain food, and a child says "I am hungry" to avoid going to bed, then structural/formal linguistics is concerned only with what is the same in the two acts. However, the pragmatic approach in linguistics, which is concerned with the study of language as it is actually used by its speakers, holds that the literal, or intended, meaning of an utterance can only be understood if the full context surrounding the speech act in which the utterance is made, is taken into account. 'Context' here refers to factors such as, but certainly not limited to, the time and place (the physical setting) of the speech act; the identities and personal histories of the participants involved in the speech act; the relations between participants (e.g. gender, kinship, status); and the situation (e.g. social and/or cultural) in which the speech act occurs (Strawson 1950; Keenan 1971).

It is posited that recognition and understanding of context is essential for ensuring the correct application of referring expressions (such as names) in any given communicative event, so that the intended reference makes sense, or is meaningful, to the participants involved (Strawson 1950; Searle 1969). Searle (1969:87) proposes that a necessary condition of a speaker's intention to refer to a particular object, or person, in the utterance of an expression, is the speaker's ability to provide an "identifying description" of that object. Thus, in order for the hearer to identify whatever the speaker is referring to, the speaker's utterance must either be, or be supplemented by, an identifying description. Identifying descriptions may be demonstrative presentations, such as 'this', 'that', 'here', 'there'; unique descriptions, such as 'the first horse to win the Triple Crown'; or a mix of both (Searle 1969:86). According to Searle (1969:88) the identifying description provides the vehicle for saying what is meant in the reference.

With regards to the use of proper names in particular, Searle (1969:171) contends that when a name is uttered, both the speaker and hearer associate some identifying description, that is, a certain aspect (or aspects) of the name's descriptive backing, with it, so that the particular reference that was intended by the use of the name is successfully achieved. As mentioned earlier in this section, the descriptive backing of names consists of a wide range of non-linguistic factors, such as associations, connotations, beliefs, values, and motivational forces, which become attached to the names. In line with this argument, the meaning of a name is not dependent on any descriptive content that the name itself may possess in terms of its lexical

features; rather, its meaning is found in its use, or function, as a referring expression, within a particular context. Furthermore, this function is determined not by the expression, but by the language users themselves (Strawson 1950:326-327); in other words, “it is people who mean, not expressions” (Strawson 1950:328).

2.2 The sociocultural significance of names

Anthropological and ethnographic studies of naming practices in various different cultures provide extensive evidence in support of the view, outlined in the previous section, that the descriptive backing of names plays a major role in determining their functions as referring expressions, and their ability to convey meaning. With regard to personal names in particular, it is argued that the latter function not only as markers of personal identity, but that they also index sociological structure. In other words, personal names are associated with individual uniqueness as well as with various different elements of the social and cultural environments in which they are embedded (Miller 1927:586; Neethling 2005:4). The current research promotes the view that personal names do not only *acquire* meaning from their extra-linguistic associations, but that they also *convey*, or express, many different aspects of sociocultural meaning (§1.1). In this section, I shall discuss the sociocultural significance of personal names, with reference to some examples from existing studies.

2.2.1 Communicating social and cultural norms through names

Research shows that, especially in non-western and tribal societies, personal names have a variety of uses, functions, and meanings, which are strongly associated with wide range of sociocultural factors (Sapir 1924; Miller 1927; Morice 1933; Wieschhoff 1941; Beidelman 1974; Underhill 1979; Moore 1984; Salomon & Grosboll 1986; Watson 1986; Basso 1996; de Klerk & Bosch 1996; Moyo 1996; Musere & Byakutaga 1998; Onukawa 1998; Gengenbach 2000; Rymes 2000; Schottman 2000; Skhosana 2005 and Neethling 2005). Such elements include familial and social kinship ties and statuses, events and circumstances, societal values and expectations, occupations, social and cultural history, sociopolitical alliances, and spiritual beliefs, to mention a few. Musere & Byakutaga (1998:1), for instance, note the following feature of African personal names and naming practices:

Naming in the central, eastern, and southern regions of Africa is closely linked to culture. African personal names have several functions. They may identify one with an occupation or implements used in this occupation, and establish one as an associate (or relation) of a group of persons involved in an occupation. They may infer one as an inhabitant (or the descendant of an inhabitant) of a locality. Names may identify one with phenomena that are prevalent in one's area of habitation. Names may also depict the past and present modes of production and living in an area. African names often reflect negative or positive opinions of the name givers towards the child or other people (usually kin, neighbours, or friends). The child's name can commemorate significant events or circumstances at the time of birth.

Ubahakwe (1981, quoted in Onukawa 1998:73) states that:

An indigenous African name on the whole tells some story about the parents or the family of the bearers, and in a more general sense points to the values of the society in which the individual is born.

Similarly, Wieschhoff (1941) illustrates how Ibo personal names display close connections to events in the lives of name bearers, their families, and in Ibo society at large. Beidelman (1974:281) observes that in Kaguru society, each person has a series of names which fit changing social circumstances as well as changing roles in the cycle of the individual's personal development throughout life, and furthermore, that these names are related to social kinship statuses. Gengenbach's (2000) study of women's naming practices in southern Mozambique shows that these women's personal names form an integral part of female oral tradition, in that they contain and convey elements of personal and collective histories.

The same kinds of trends can be seen in the naming practices of other non-western cultural groups. Watson (1986:622), for example, mentions that Chinese personal names may commemorate past events, or mark a family's learning and status. She also highlights the metaphysical aspects of Chinese personal names; specifically, the apparent power of the names to change people's character and destiny. In this respect, Watson (1986:622) argues that "Chinese personal names *do* things: they not only classify and distinguish, but also have an efficacy in their own right". With respect to personal naming amongst the Carrier Indians,

Morice (1933: 633-634) notes that Carrier personal names may be given in memory of people's ancestors, and may also reference things such as the circumstances surrounding the birth of a child, some physical or mental characteristic of the named individual, or particular events that occurred in that person's life. Morice (1933:636) also observes that many Carrier personal names originate in dreams and thus possess "an element of mystery, if not sacredness". Similarly, Underhill (1979:37) notes that, amongst the Papago Indians, personal names were usually bestowed upon babies by the medicine man, who would choose the names from his dreams. These names were deemed to be so powerful that people did not use them later in life. As children grew older, they were given nicknames which could be freely used.

The studies carried out by Morice (1933), Underhill (1979), and Watson (1986), which I have mentioned above, as well as research in Ibo (Wieschhoff 1941), Kaguru (Beidelman 1974), Ngoni (Moyo 1996), Cheyenne (Moore 1984), Baat[unknown]nu (Schottman 2000), and Southern Ndebele (Skhosana 2005) personal names, highlight what is, in my opinion, one of the most fascinating sociocultural aspects of personal names; that is, their strong spiritual connotations, and their perceived spiritual power. This phenomenon appears to manifest frequently and strongly in non-secular cultural groups. The discussion in §4.1 will show that Niitsitapi personal names and naming practices have strong spiritual associations, which reflect the Niitsitapi belief in the metaphysical realm, as well as an overall attitude of respect and concern within Niitsitapi socioculture for the traditional sacred ways.

2.2.2 Personal naming and sociocultural/ethnic identity

Personal names are cultural universals (Alford 1988:2). In every society throughout the world, names are bestowed upon people as distinguishing markers of individual identity. However, anthroponymic studies conducted amongst diverse social and cultural groups show that, in addition to their 'deictic' function (c.f. Joseph 2004), personal names (including nicknames) also provide a powerful means of conveying conceptions of social and cultural/ethnic identity (e.g. Beidelman 1974; Drury & McCarthy 1980; Alford 1988; Onukawa 1998; Schottman 2000; Joseph 2004; Barnes & Pfukwa 2007; Lieberman & Kenny 2007). In other words, names play a role in shaping people's conceptions of 'self', as well as of how they, as unique individuals, fit into their surrounding social and cultural worlds. Some of these conceptions are those that the name bearers themselves wish to project to others,

whilst some are images or perceptions of the name bearers that are constructed by people in the larger social group.

In §1.5.2, I pointed out that many Niitsitapi people refer to their traditional personal names as *kitsiitsinihka'siminnoonistsi* 'our real names'. This emphasises the notion that, as is the case in other societies and cultures, Niitsitapi personal names index sociocultural, as well as individual, identity. It also highlights two essential aspects of this issue: firstly, that Niitsitapi tribal names — meaning those names that are articulated in the native tongue, Niitsi'powahsin, as opposed to the western names that are usually carried simultaneously by Niitsitapi individuals — are perceived by the name-bearers to be authentic markers of both personal as well as cultural identity; and secondly, that Niitsi'powahsin itself appears to be a carrier of Niitsitapi identity (Bastien 2004:130-131). This is concurrent with Joseph's (2004) view that identity is at its core a matter of language, and names are primary texts of personal and cultural (ethnic) identity (Joseph 2004:176-181).

2.3 Accounting for cultural context in names research

The discussion in the previous section has emphasised the sociocultural significance of names, and in particular, the role of names in capturing and communicating social and cultural knowledge and concepts of identity. It follows, then, that much can be learned about different social and cultural groups by studying their names and naming practices (Miller 1927:585 and Neethling 2005:4). Furthermore, it seems reasonable to argue that, in order to provide accurate and relevant analyses of the uses, functions, and meanings, of names in different cultures, we need to take into account — rather than abstract away from — the cultural context within which the names are embedded. This section examines the ways in which the issue of cultural context may be dealt with in names studies, through a discussion of certain major principles that underpin the fields of ethnolinguistics and ethnoscience. The importance of developing explanatory versus descriptive methods in cultural studies of naming is also addressed.

2.3.1 An ethnolinguistic approach to names research

The domain of linguistics that is concerned with the study of speech and language in cultural context is known as ethnolinguistics. As the term implies, ethnolinguistics is an area of

research that links linguistics with ethnography, which refers to a particular approach in cultural anthropology. Ethnography entails the description of cultures, with an emphasis on “thick description”, an expression coined by anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973), which implies the rich, detailed description of specifics. The primary research methodology of ethnography is participant observation. The latter requires researchers to study people in their natural sociocultural settings by means of direct, face-to-face interaction and participation, with the aim of understanding different ways of life from a native, or indigenous, point of view (Neuman 1997:346). Participant observation methods are dealt with more fully in §3.1 and §3.1.1.

One particular aspect of ethnolinguistic theory that has informed this study is an approach that may be traced back to the work of early twentieth century ethnographer, Bronislaw Malinowski, and which has subsequently been taken up by a number of contemporary scholars, including (most notably) Dell Hymes. For Malinowski, the major goal of ethnography was “to grasp the native’s point of view, his relations to life, to realize his vision of his world” (Malinowski 1922, quoted in Duranti 1997:215). A general principle in his approach to the study of language specifically is that language must be examined along with the indigenous cultures and environments in which it is used; in other words, language must be situated within the “proper setting of native culture” (Malinowski 1923, in Duranti 1997:216). This precept highlights two major concepts in Malinowski’s ethnographic theory of language, namely, the notion of context of situation, and the view of language as a mode of action (Duranti 1997:216).

These concepts are also central to an approach in ethnolinguistics known as the “ethnography of communication” or “ethnography of speaking”, developed by Dell Hymes. Following on Malinowski, Hymes (1974:202) contends that linguistic theory cannot become a theory of language without encompassing social and cultural meaning, and that linguistics therefore needs to form part of the general study of communicative conduct and sociocultural action. Ethnography of communication represents an orientation in linguistics research that considers speaking to be a system of cultural behaviour, and language itself as a dynamic element of culture which, like any other aspect of the latter, partly shapes the whole (Hymes 1974: 89, 127). The general goal of the approach is to investigate how language is used in situational context, and how the multifarious aspects of society and culture may influence communicative events and patterns in any particular community. Accordingly, social/cultural

context is considered to be the starting point of analysis and understanding (Hymes 1974:9). Given the apparent necessity of acknowledging the importance of cultural context with respect to names studies in different cultures, I support Joseph (2004:12), who is in favour of an ethnolinguistic approach in onomastics research in general; and I have used this approach as a methodological frame of reference for the current research in Niitsitapi personal names (§3.2).

2.3.2 From description to explanation: applying indigenous knowledge in names research

Typically, ethnographic studies of names and naming practices in foreign cultures are descriptive in nature (Alford 1988). Although description can be very useful for shedding light on *how* names are used within various cultures, research that aims to provide an understanding as to *why* names function the way they do in any given cultural context necessitates an explanatory, or interpretative, approach. Research into the names and naming practices of various tribal societies shows that there are different cultural interpretations as to the role and communicative functions of names, as well as to how names acquire and convey meaning, and what the nature of that meaning might be (see the examples provided in §2.2.1). These diverse ways of understanding are based on the traditional values, beliefs, customs, and philosophies of thought that are inherent in any given culture. Hymes (1974:65) frames this issue (with respect to language in general) in the following way: “Beyond description is the task of devising models of explanation. The many kinds of act and genre of speech are not universal; each has a history, and a set of conditions for its origin, maintenance, change, and loss.”

If such “models of explanation” are to provide culturally-relevant accounts of linguistic phenomena such as names, then it seems reasonable to propose that they should be based on a perspective drawn from within the culture/s concerned, utilising the local, or traditional, knowledge systems that define and shape native people’s perceptions of, attitudes towards, and actions within, the worlds in which they exist. The need for such an approach in the social sciences has been advocated by a number of western scholars, including Sapir (1949); Geertz (1983); and, with respect to onomastics research in particular, Basso (1996), Waugh (1998), Joseph (2004) and Holland (2006). Referring to his research on nicknames, Holland (2006:111) contends that “[t]he importance of obtaining a psychologically real model does

more than merely order the data under investigation; it provides a description of semantic characteristics that is culturally revealing”, and points out that ethnographic observations which are based on a researcher’s preconceived ideas about his or her subject/s tend to “obscure the real content of culture.”

The problem, however, is that, up until fairly recently, western science has typically disregarded indigenous knowledge, based on the conjecture that the latter represents nothing more than primitive superstition and thus provides an unreliable basis for rational interpretation and analysis of data (see §3.1.1 for further discussion of this issue). This stance has been somewhat softened over the last few decades due to the emergence in the 1960s of a research paradigm in the human sciences that has come to be known as ‘ethnoscience’, or ‘indigenous science’. The latter has its roots in cultural anthropology, but has in more recent years been applied in other fields, including theology, mythology, deep ecology, cognitive psychology, and indigenous education (Cajete 1994:195). Broadly speaking, the term ‘ethnoscience’ refers to the definition and description of the methods, thought processes, philosophies, concepts, and experiences, in terms of which a particular tribal group of people obtains and applies knowledge about the natural world; an approach to research through which “one can begin to develop an intuitive understanding of a people’s way of living, perceiving, learning and acting in relationship to their particular environment” (pp. 194, 195). The development of ethnoscience has led to a growing awareness in academics that western knowledge is just one form of knowledge out of many (Wilson 2004:361), and that indigenous knowledge systems provide an equally valid and legitimate means of understanding the natural world. In this regard, Cajete (1994:197) argues that “[s]cience is a cultural system, and objectivity is really a subjective matter. Objectivity is a relative cultural system you happen to be applying.” The ethnosciences of indigenous peoples therefore represent unique cultural interpretations of phenomena in the natural world (p. 196). In this regard, Bastien (2004) presents a fairly comprehensive outline of what is, in essence, a uniquely Niitsitapi ethnoscience, through her exposition and explanation of certain central aspects of traditional Niitsitapi theories of knowledge, philosophy, and ways of thinking. She writes from an insider’s perspective, based on personal knowledge of her own culture, as well as insight gained from collaborating closely with one of the elders from the Kainai Reserve. Given the emphasis placed on incorporating local, that is, Niitsitapi, knowledge into the theoretical and analytical frameworks of the current research (§3.2), Bastien’s (2004) work

provides a useful and authentic frame of reference for situating the study of Niitsitapi personal names in its appropriate cultural context.

The present study acknowledges and incorporates the main principles of ethnoscience, along with certain aspects of traditional western ethnography/ethnolinguistics (§2.3.1). However, the integration of traditional, or tribal, knowledge as a means of pursuing an explanatory approach appears to be a road less-travelled in onomastics research. It is true that many ethnographic studies of names in tribal societies do, to some measure, acknowledge the fact that names can provide insight into certain aspects of the cultures in which they are embedded, and that they cannot be separated from their cultural, social, and historical context (e.g. Sapir 1924; Morice 1933; Moore 1984; Salomon & Grosboll 1986; Watson 1986; de Klerk & Bosch 1996; Musere & Byakutaga 1998; Rymes 2000). Nevertheless, very few of these studies explicitly acknowledge the utilization of indigenous knowledge, particularly at an analytical or explanatory level. The result, in my opinion, is an over-emphasis on the production of descriptive accounts of names and naming practices, whilst interpretative analyses are lacking; especially the kind that are informed by indigenous theories and philosophies of thought. ‘Descriptive-heavy’ accounts of personal names can be found in, for instance, Sapir’s (1924) article on the Sarcee Indians, Morice’s (1933) paper on the names of the Carrier Indians, and Musere & Byakutaga’s (1998) book on African names and naming practices. Each of these sources contains copious lists of names and their literal (translated) meanings, but only brief and somewhat superficial explanatory remarks as to the significance of the names within the context of each respective culture. The result, in my view, is that this material comes across as being somewhat ‘distant’ or ‘removed’, and even incomplete, in terms of how data is accounted for.

Certainly, studies of a more analytical nature, which focus on cultural-specific functions of names, have been conducted. For example, extensive field research undertaken by Watson (1986) reveals that Chinese personal names provide profound insight into the ways in which gender and person are constructed in Chinese society, and Moore (1984) has used tribal census data to show how Cheyenne personal names reflect important principles of Cheyenne cosmology and ethnobiology. However, although both Watson and Moore must have had recourse to a certain amount of native insight to achieve the level of explanation that is evident in their research, neither scholar is explicit in mentioning to what extent local input may have influenced or guided their analysis, and/or how this might have been accomplished.

A more deliberate expression of the intent to utilise local knowledge in names research is found in Waugh (1998). Waugh has looked extensively to local informants for information and assistance whilst conducting field research on the toponyms of northern Scotland, Shetland, and Orkney. She highlights the necessity of utilizing native-based knowledge in order to understand something of what names mean to the people who use them, maintaining that “a little local knowledge allows us to appreciate something of the complexity of the framework within which [names] are used” (Waugh 1998:380). Waugh (1998:378) refers to this methodology as a “sociological approach to names studies”, since, as she (quite correctly) points out: “What’s in a name if not something of the history and sociology of the people who use it?” Although Waugh (1998) is not concerned with the application of non-western (tribal) lore, her work does demonstrate the feasibility and advantages of using local expertise to inform onomastics research. A good practical example of indigenous knowledge application with respect to names research in a non-western cultural context can be found in Skhosana (2005). Skhosana (2005) distributed questionnaires and conducted personal interviews amongst southern Ndebele females, in order to provide an explanatory-based account of women’s personal naming practices in southern Ndebele society.

In terms of this research project, which is situated in a Native American cultural context, it is very fortunate that a most comprehensive and relevant illustration of the application of indigenous knowledge in onomastics research appears in anthropologist Keith Basso’s (1996) study on Apache place names. A key aspect of Basso’s (1996) approach is found in his argument that “[e]very culture, whether literate or not, includes beliefs about how language works and what it is capable of doing. Similarly, every culture contains beliefs about the kinds of social contexts in which these capabilities may be realized most effectively” (Basso 1996:99) Basso refutes what he terms the “myopic” view that (place) names are purely referential, arguing that they bring forth numerous mental and emotional associations at an individual as well as community/cultural level. This, he states, is what makes an ethnographic approach to the study of names and naming a worthy objective (Basso 1996:76-77).

Such an approach, according to Basso (1996:82), entails entering the conceptual world of the native people (in the case of his study, the Apache), in order to explore the “linguistic ideology” with which the Apache “rationalize for themselves and explain to others what spoken words are capable of doing when used in certain ways” and construct a true ethnographic account of what makes a particular speech event meaningful. This is done with

the help of “experienced native instructors” who act as sources and guides in uncovering and interpreting local knowledge, most of which is unwritten. In this way, one can begin to understand why, for instance, the utterance of an Apache place name is the same as quoting ancestral speech; or how a single Apache name can accomplish the communicative work of an entire saga or historical tale (Basso 1996:30, 89). Basso (1996:82) contends that phenomena such as these can only make sense if they are interpreted from within the conceptual world of the Apache people themselves.

Basso’s (1996) work shows how the incorporation and application of indigenous, that is, traditional or tribal, knowledge in the study of Native American names and naming practices can provide rich, accurate, and authentic explanations of what names mean to the people whose names they are, because such explication is grounded in a local perspective. In line with Basso (1996), this study represents a sincere attempt to acknowledge the validity and value of Niitsitapi traditional knowledge, and seeks to utilise this tribal wisdom to the fullest extent possible, in an effort to provide a solid and well-informed explanatory account of Niitsitapi personal names and naming practices.

2.3.3 Indigenous knowledge recovery and decolonisation

For some decades now, discussions regarding the affirmation of indigenous knowledge, or ethno-science, have taken place within the broader context of postcolonial, or decolonisation, movements. The latter refers to the ways in which many tribal communities around the world are endeavouring to break free from the political, economic, as well as ideological, control of former colonial powers. I will briefly address this issue here, as it pertains to the Native American socio-political context generally, and to the current research specifically.

Throughout and even beyond colonial times, Native Americans and their cultures have been studied extensively by scholars in many academic disciplines, including (and perhaps especially) anthropology, ethnography, and linguistics. The main problem, from an indigenous view point, is that the vast majority of such research has been conducted by non-native scholars whose interpretations of their observations have been grounded in Eurocentred theories and philosophies of knowledge (§3.1.1). This situation has gone hand-in-hand with attempts by both the United States and Canadian governments to persuade Native Americans to abandon their traditional lifestyles and assimilate into the dominant cultures. It

is argued that together, these factors have caused a shift in tribal peoples' perceptions of themselves, in that they have adopted and "internalized" western beliefs and values, and thus "interpret their own experiences from [this] alien and alienating value and belief system" (Bastien 2004:152).

From a native perspective, a crucial aspect of decolonisation is the deconstruction of colonial interpretations and analyses (Bastien 2004:151). It is widely contended that the acknowledgement of the validity and reliability of indigenous knowledge systems—not only by westerners but also by tribal people themselves—plays an essential role in such deconstruction. Native American scholars whose work has drawn attention to the importance of indigenous knowledge recovery in the process of decolonisation include Deloria (1969, 1997), Cajete (1994), Deloria et.al. (1999), Fixico (2003), Bastien (2004), Greymorning (2004), McGregor (2004), Simpson (2004) and Wilson (2004).

This dissertation emphasises the use of traditional Niitsitapi knowledge as a means to providing a realistic and plausible explanation of personal names and naming practices in relation to certain key aspects of Niitsitapi culture. The fact that I have attempted to interpret my findings from an indigenous, that is, Niitsitapi, perspective situates the current research within the wider post-colonial paradigm, as well as within the specific context of Niitsitapi decolonisation efforts (see Bastien (2004) for an extensive discussion around the latter issue). It is hoped that this project will make some contribution towards the ongoing discourse in both arenas.

2.4 Research in Native American personal names

Native American cultures and languages have long been considered by anthropologists, ethnographers, and linguists, to be rich, fascinating, and rewarding areas of enquiry. Kroeber (1948), Sapir (1949), Whorf (1956), Boas (1966) and Hymes (1974, 1981) are among the more prominent twentieth-century scholars to have worked extensively on sociocultural and linguistic issues in the Native American context. Today, organisations such as the Society for the Study of the Indigenous Languages of the Americas (SSILA), SIL (originally known as the Summer Institute of Linguistics), the American Ethnological Society, and the American Anthropological Association, play a central role in encouraging and facilitating ongoing research efforts in this vast and varied field of study.

Alford (1988:6) points out that although anthropologists and ethnographers have been interested in Native American naming customs ever since Lewis Henry Morgan addressed the latter topic in 1871, personal names have rarely been made a primary focus of study. It appears that, for the most part, descriptions of Native American personal names and naming practices form part of larger ethnographic studies that are principally concerned with other cultural issues such as kinship/lineage (e.g. Gifford 1926; Roth 2002), social organisation (e.g. Gayton 1945), or ethnohistory (e.g. Salomon & Grosboll 1986; Brown & Peers 2006). The few exceptions that I have come across during my review of the existing literature include Dorsey's (1890) short paper on "Indian personal names", which refers to his descriptive study of Winnebago, Iowa, Oto, Missouri, Kwapa, Osage, Kansa, Omaha, Ponka, and Siouan names, Sapir's (1924) brief descriptive account of Sarcee personal names, Morice's (1933) study of Carrier personal names, Moore's (1984) discussion around Cheyenne personal names and cosmology, and Bissonnette's (1999) research into the naming practices of the Yokoch, Mono, and Miwok Indian tribes in the Sierra Nevada foothills. Moore's discussion is particularly interesting insofar as it shows that information gathered by using qualitative, that is, field research, techniques, such as interviewing local informants, can be substantiated by statistical analyses of the collected data. More importantly, his work illustrates, as does the current study, how research into the personal naming practices of any particular culture can yield valuable insight into other aspects of the culture concerned. On the whole, however, research in Native American anthroponyms, and especially work which takes an explanatory, or interpretative approach, appears to be a much neglected area in contemporary onomastics.

2.4.1 Research in Niitsitapi personal names and naming practices

As mentioned in §1.1, this study is the first of its kind to focus exclusively on explaining the roles, functions, and meaningfulness, of personal names in Niitsitapi culture. In general, written reference material in which the topic of Niitsitapi anthroponyms is addressed to any extent at all appears to be rather scarce. To the best of my knowledge, there are no sources that deal with Niitsitapi personal names as a primary focus of study.

American ethnographer McClintock (1992) provides a fairly good, although somewhat dated, descriptive account of traditional Niitsitapi ways of selecting and giving names, based on his own personal experiences of having lived amongst the Niitsitapi people for a number of

years. McClintock (1992:395-402) notes, for instance, that names are frequently given in commemoration of ancestors, significant events, or heroic deeds, such as a warrior's brave exploits. He also observes that names may be given as the result of dreams or communication with animal spirits; in honour of medicine animals or birds, as a means of invoking their spiritual power or protection for the name-bearer; or in remembrance of religious acts, such as healing rituals. In addition, he illustrates how naming is associated with prayer and ceremony (McClintock 1992:76-102). These observations suggest that there is a strong spiritual component to Niitsitapi naming practices. McClintock (1992) also mentions how it is common for Niitsitapi men to go through a number of name changes at different stages of their lives (McClintock 1992:399-400).

In a more recent account, Brown and Peers (2006:111-112) echo many of McClintock's (1992) early observations regarding name-giving and receiving amongst the Niitsitapi, with specific reference to the Kainai. In addition to explaining how Niitsitapi names may be chosen, and the predominantly male practice of taking on new names, they also briefly highlight some of the associations between personal names and other aspects of Niitsitapi culture, including moral values, spiritual beliefs, kinship relations, social identity, and ethnohistory (Brown & Peers 2006:111). Furthermore, Brown and Peers (2006:112-113) discuss how issues such as mistranslation and language loss in the post-colonial era have contributed to the loss of certain names on the Kainai Reserve. Other descriptive accounts of Niitsitapi naming practices, some of which provide examples of the stories surrounding certain names (§1.3), can be found in a number of local sources, including Hungry Wolf (1982), Mountain Horse (1989), Zaharia & Fox (1995), Oakley & Black Plume (1992) and Bastien (2004). On the whole, a fairly good idea as to the general aspects of Niitsitapi personal naming practices can be gained from a combined reading of the abovementioned sources.

What is lacking in this literature, however, is any attempt to *explain* what has been described about name giving and receiving, and indeed, the names themselves, in Niitsitapi culture. In other words, the cultural significance of Niitsitapi personal names and naming practices has, up until now, been vastly overlooked. The current research aims to fill this gap by providing an explanation of the cultural role of Niitsitapi personal names, based on perspectives that are drawn from local theories of knowledge and philosophies of thought. Through this approach, I hope to furnish a foundational written account which explores the 'real' significance of

personal names in Niitsitapi culture; that is, how the Niitsitapi people themselves understand their own names and naming practices. At a local level, this will have particular relevance in terms of issues such as the maintenance of social and cultural identity, and decolonisation (§2.2.2, §2.3.3).

2.4.2 Niitsitapi oral literature on personal names and naming practices

This study explores the uses, roles, and functions, of personal names within the context of Niitsitapi oral tradition. The oral traditions of diverse Native American tribes are comprehensively dealt with by many of the sources that were consulted in this research (e.g. Mander 1991; Fixico 1993; Cajete 1994; Basso 1996; Deloria 1997; Bastien 2004; Greymorning 2004). These sources reveal that story forms the basis of Native American oral tradition, since it is the primary means through which traditional knowledge is shared and transferred between successive generations. Fixico (1993:21-36), for instance, emphasises the importance of story-telling as a way of producing sociocultural history and conveying important cultural information about Native American communities. Cajete (1994:137,168) highlights the essential role of story in human experience and learning, and posits that story is a source of content and methodology for indigenous education. Deloria (1997) explains the differences between the oral traditions of tribal peoples and western science, and discusses how the latter has tended to deny the validity of traditional knowledge that is contained and produced within stories (§2.3.2, §3.1.1). Bastien (2004) deals specifically with aspects of Niitsitapi oral tradition, including the cultural practice of story-telling as a means of encapsulating and sharing traditional Niitsitapi knowledge. None of these sources, however, address the issue of how personal names might function as part of cultural oral tradition.

In this regard, Basso (1996) provides valuable and fascinating insight into the role of *place* names and the stories surrounding them, in Apache oral tradition. Basso's (1996) research shows that Apache place names are embedded with narratives that reflect many different aspects of Apache cultural knowledge. This knowledge can thus be imparted to people through the use of the names; a practice that is referred to as "speaking with names" (Basso 1996:80). Basso (1996:100) observes that "speaking with names" accomplishes a variety of social functions, including: producing a mental image of a specific geographic location; evoking prior texts, such as historical tales and sagas; affirming that value and validity of traditional moral precepts; displaying tactful and courageous attention to aspects of both

positive and negative face; conveying feelings of concern and personal support; offering practical advice for dealing with troubling personal circumstances; transforming distressing thoughts into more optimistic and hopeful ones; and healing wounded spirits. Thus, according to Basso (1996:101), “when Apache people see fit to speak with place names, a vital part of their tribal heritage seems to speak to them as well”. The discussion in §4.1 of this dissertation will show how Niitsitapi personal names, through their narrative qualities, convey various elements of traditional Niitsitapi sociocultural knowledge, and thus play a central role in Niitsitapi oral tradition.

The discussion so far in this chapter has comprised a survey of existing written literature that is pertinent to this research project, and which therefore places the study into its appropriate scholarly context. This review has highlighted an enormous gap in the literature concerning Native American personal names, in general, and Niitsitapi personal names, in particular (§2.4, §2.4.1). Whilst I have consulted this body of literature in order to familiarise myself with the scholarly discourse pertaining to the fields of onomastics, ethnolinguistics, and ethnoscience, all of which intersect with the current research, I must emphasise that the project has been informed and guided primarily by a vast body of Niitsitapi oral literature, which has been built up throughout the course of Niitsitapi history. This oral literature comprises an ongoing discourse, within the Kanai community, around the topic of personal names, which takes place in a wide variety of contexts in everyday life on the Reserve; including, for instance, in casual conversations, exchanges between teachers and students in the classroom, interviews and discussions with elders, in sacred ceremonies, and in public settings where people talk about their names, or transfer names in naming ceremonies. From an exclusively Niitsitapi perspective, then, there is no gap in the knowledge system at all. The following extracts from Zaharia & Fox (1995(2): 69, 35; 2003(4): 75) provide a good illustration of the nature of the Niitsitapi oral literature on personal naming:

My name *Aawohkitopi* [‘Rode The Enemy’s Horse’] was given to me in honour of one of our warriors. During one of the battles between the Crow and *Kainai*, *Awohkitopi* [sic] threw a Crow off his horse, jumped onto the horse and rode it back to *Kainaisksahkoyi* with a great feeling of joy and accomplishment.

Ohkotoksiisahkomaapi ['Rocky Boy'] was the name given to me by Black Rabbit...I was born on November 26, 1919 in a tent near the elevators in Cardston. My Dad was hauling grain and we were wintering there. Apparently I was sickly at first. I probably caught cold at my birth. After Black Rabbit gave me my name I got better and here I am still around.

Iitsstinnimaakii [Captures Down Woman] was given to me by my grandfather, *Isskssiinaopakstooki*, in memory of one of *A'sipiiksi* Goodstriker's exploits on the hunt/warpath, apparently. One day while the Bloods were on the warpath against the Assiniboines, *A'sipiiksi* was sent ahead to scout his party. In one of the lodges he found an Assiniboine asleep. He jumped on him and grabbed him by the neck. He took away a big knife from him. Just as he was ready to stab him one of his companions asked him to spare the Assiniboine's life. Just then he found out that he had almost killed an old Assiniboine woman.

The Niitsitapi oral literature on personal names and naming practices is, in essence, what this entire research project is all about; in that the methodology which I have adopted in carrying out the study, and the resulting content of this dissertation, has been heavily influenced and informed by the local knowledge system within which I have worked. The next chapter, for instance, sets out *how* I have engaged with the Niitsitapi oral discourse, in a variety of social situations, as a means of learning about Niitsitapi personal names and naming practices; and Chapter 4 constitutes a comprehensive review of the oral literature, through which I explain *what* I have learned through my participation in the local discourse around names.

My acknowledgement of the Niitsitapi oral literature as the main source of reference for the current research emphasises the crucial role of Niitsitapi knowledge systems in providing the basis for furnishing a true ethnographic account of Niitsitapi personal names and naming practices; that is, one which is articulated from a Niitsitapi perspective, and which leads to an understanding of the real meaning and functions of names in Niitsitapi society (§1.1). In fact, had I not been able to access the oral literature, it would probably have been impossible to carry out this study with any measure of success at all. Furthermore, this approach can be seen as an attempt to bring two very different types of literature, that is, oral versus written, and two very different, sometimes opposing, knowledge systems, that is, western-oriented

versus traditional Niitsitapi, together in dialogue around the subject of names, to see what each one might learn from the other. Some additional thoughts on this issue are shared in Chapter 5.

2.5 Summary

This chapter has presented a discussion of certain issues pertaining to names research that provide the contextual background for the current study. Some important theoretical concerns in onomastics were addressed, including the matter of establishing and defining the semantic features and functions of names. Taken into account in this regard were the views of scholars such as Strawson (1950), Searle (1969), Nicholaisen (1978), Markey (1982), Pamp (1985), Algeo (2006), and Zelinski (2006). Also considered were cultural differences in the uses and meanings of names, which were illustrated with examples from Morice (1933), Underhill (1979), Watson (1986), Ubahakwe (1981), Musere and Byakutaga (1998) and Bastien (2004). The sociocultural significance of names (personal names in particular) was discussed, with specific mention of the role of names in establishing and maintaining cultural identity, as well as the spiritual associations of names. The issue of how to account for cultural context in names studies was discussed from an ethnolinguistic perspective, with particular reference to the work of Hymes (1974). The need for an explanatory approach in onomastics was highlighted, and the argument in favour of utilising indigenous knowledge as a means to accomplishing this end was made, using Basso (1996) as an example. Indigenous knowledge utilization was related to the topic of decolonisation, with specific reference to indigenous knowledge recovery in the Native American context. Previous research in Native American, including Niitsitapi, personal names was briefly reviewed, with particular reference to McClintock (1992), Moore (1984), and Brown and Peers (2006). The vital contribution of Niitsitapi oral literature to this research project was highlighted and explained in the final part of the discussion. The next chapter sets out the methodological approach and data collection methods used in this study.

CHAPTER 3: Methodology

3.0 Introduction

This chapter provides a detailed account of the methodology that I followed whilst conducting the research on Niitsitapi personal names and naming practices. As outlined in §2.2 and §2.3, the current project is primarily concerned with the study of names in cultural context, which implies an ethnographic approach to the research. The discussion in this chapter will show that, whilst my methodological approach fits in with established qualitative research methods in the interrelated fields of ethnography, ethnolinguistics, and anthropology (see, for instance, Sapir 1949; Hymes 1974; Geertz 1983; Duranti 1997; Neuman 1997; and Johnstone 2000), it is also somewhat unique in the sense that it has been guided largely by the counsel given to me by my advisors and mentors within the local Kainai community; whose advice and teaching is grounded solely within the Niitsitapi cultural knowledge system and the body of oral literature which forms part of that system (§2.4.2). Although the scholarly literature does provide some very general guidelines for methodological approaches in studies such as the current one, it cannot possibly give specific directions to the individual researcher as to how to carry out one's work within a particular cultural and/or community setting in real time and space, where the human dynamic (the core component in ethnography), is constantly in a state of movement. As I have found out through my personal experience as a western scholar working within the Niitsitapi cultural system, the researcher's own intuition becomes a major guiding source at the micro-level, that is, in the 'field', for making decisions as to how to go about the work at hand.

In the next section, an overview of the well-established participant observer approach in western ethnographic field research, aspects of which have been incorporated into the methodology of the current study, is given. Some problematic issues concerning the use of participant observation with respect to ethnographic research in indigenous communities are then discussed. In §3.2, an outline of the methodological approach taken in this study is provided, whilst §3.3 contains an explanation of my participant role in the field, and how this ties in with some key elements in Niitsitapi epistemology. Details as to the location and duration of the field work are described in §3.4, and §3.5 provides an account of how information in the field was gathered. In §3.6, a short synopsis of data review and

interpretation procedures is given. An evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses in the methodology is presented in §3.7, and this is followed by a brief conclusion to the chapter in §3.8.

3.1 Ethnolinguistics and participant observation methodology

Research in ethnolinguistics, into which category the present study falls, aims to provide an understanding of the role played by language in different societies and cultures through the study of actual language use in context, that is, language studied within the natural social and/or cultural environments of its speakers (§2.3.1). Ethnolinguistics is, therefore, very much “a matter of ethnography of settings, situations, events, roles, groups, in complex societies” (Hymes 1974:79). As ethnographers of language, ethnolinguists make extensive use of ethnographic or field research methods in carrying out their work. The primary research technique of ethnography is participant observation. (The terms “participant observation”, “ethnography” and “field research” are often used synonymously.) The primary goal of participant observation is to study people through direct interaction and participation with them in their natural social and cultural settings, in order to gain an understanding of their worlds, and to be able to describe these worlds from an insider’s perspective (Duranti 1997:89; Neuman 1997:346); this as opposed to observing people from a distance and/or in artificial, simulated environments.

Researchers engaging in participant observation usually gain access as ‘outsiders’ into culturally-unfamiliar communities in which, ideally, they spend a considerable amount of time learning about, and becoming involved, i.e. participating, in everyday community life. This participation typically requires researchers to develop social roles for themselves within the groups concerned, by forming personal relationships with individual group members and partaking in various community activities (Marshall & Rossman 1989; Johnstone 2000). In this way, researchers achieve some degree of immersion in the sociocultural environments of the communities (Marshall & Rossman 1989; Duranti 1997), and it is from this position that they make their observations regarding the social and/or cultural phenomenon that they are investigating. It is argued that, by participating in mundane, day-to-day community life, researchers begin to hear, see, and experience, reality as the local people themselves do (Marshall & Rossman 1989:79), so that the data collected in any specific cultural setting

reflects, at least to some extent, a native perspective; this is often referred to nowadays as the ‘emic’ view (Geertz 1983:56; Duranti 1997:85; Stocking 1983 cited in Johnstone 2000:81).

3.1.1 Participant observation and the ‘problem’ of local knowledge

The credibility of participant observation methodology, as it relates to ethnographic studies of tribal cultures, has been challenged in recent years as issues surrounding the decolonization of indigenous peoples in many parts of the world have become focal points of discussion and debate in both western and non-western scholarly circles (e.g. Cajete 1994; Deloria 1997; Cooper 1998; Fixico 2003; Bastien 2004; Doxater 2004; Simpson 2004; Wilson 2004). In particular, the approach has been criticised for maintaining a bias towards imperialistic attitudes in terms of the nature of the relationship between western researchers and the indigenous peoples whose cultures are being studied (Johnstone 2000:82). One of the primary assumptions underlying such attitudes is the notion that western knowledge is “real” knowledge, and therefore the standard against which all other knowledge must be evaluated, whilst indigenous, or local, knowledge represents primitive, irrational, subjective, and non-literate, orientations to the natural world (Cajete 1994:194; Deloria 1997; Cooper 1998:186; Doxater 2004:618,19; Simpson 2004:373,74; Wilson 2004:359). This has led to the faulty surmise that western scholars engaged in the study of non-western, or tribal, communities possess a better understanding, and can therefore provide more authoritative accounts, of the traditional cultures of these communities, than the community members themselves (Deloria 1997:34).

The underlying problem is that the epistemologies of western science and tribal traditions differ in terms of how data is gathered and interpreted; for example, tribal knowledge systematically mixes a wide range of facts and experiences, including individual experiences, dreams, visions, prophecies, collective community wisdom, as well as information received from birds, animals, and plants, that western science would separate by artificial categories or simply discard altogether on the basis that it is primitive, subjective, illusory, or delusive (Deloria et.al. 1999:66-67). Tribal wisdom has thus not only been considered irrelevant to western science, but it has also been ignored by many western researchers seeking to explain phenomena occurring within the context of the native cultural systems themselves (Cajete 1994; Cooper 1998; Deloria 1997; Deloria et. al. 1999; Doxater 2004; Simpson 2004; Wilson 2004). This means that data collected in tribal communities have been extracted and

abstracted from their indigenous cultural contexts, and then placed within interpretative frameworks that are constructed on the basis of western epistemologies.

The view that non-western epistemologies are irrelevant to the modern world and are inferior to western knowledge systems (Wilson 2004:359) presents somewhat of a dilemma for the participant observer approach. The issue is this: if indigenous ways of thinking are deemed to be subjective, nonsensical, and based on superstition, then the data obtained through researchers' sharing in the real experiences of their subjects—experiences that are rooted in and shaped by local bodies of knowledge—must be interpreted independently of cultural context, so that the analysis can make sense to a non-native audience and, more importantly, conform to the standards of western social science scholarship. In this regard, Bastien (2004:158) has commented that “the experiences of tribal people continue to be interpreted by Eurocentred thinkers who...are interpreting tribal experiences from their own Eurocentred perspective...distancing and isolating them as “culturally other”. In addition, they advance the notion that the Eurocentred analysis of tribal people has universal application, thus legitimizing the overall interpretation of deficiency.” Thus, ironically, whilst the aim of participant observation is to gain an insider's view of whatever cultural phenomenon is being investigated, it would appear that the value of the local knowledge that is essential to providing this perspective has typically been undermined, or even ignored, once the data has been extracted (or abstracted) from its natural setting. This means that the results of such studies might reflect more about the researcher's opinion about the phenomenon in question than what the latter really means to the community within which it occurs (Holland 2006:111).

The criticisms that have been levelled against western-centered ethnography, in general, and participant observation field methodology, in particular, became a reality to me through my personal, face-to-face interactions with people in the Kainai community. For instance, the first time I met with Frank Weasel Head, in March of 2005, he said to me: “Come back and live with us; spend time with us, learn about us, about our ways, about who we are.” I will also never forget Kainai elder Adam Delaney's words to me after an interview I had with him in September, 2006: “One thing I would ask of you, that you try and use this [knowledge] in the right way.” I have come to realise that it would not have been necessary for Frank and Adam to make such comments if western scholars had not in the past, for the sake of conforming to the prescribed standards of Western academia, produced descriptions of

Niitsitapi cultural ways that have either ignored, or misinterpreted, what the Niitsitapi people have to say about themselves from their own unique cultural perspective.

3.2 Towards an alternative approach: using local knowledge as an interpretative framework

From the outset of this research project, my goal has been to provide an account of the nature, functions, and role/s of Niitsitapi personal names and naming practices in Niitsitapi culture which as far as possible, reflects an exclusively Niitsitapi point of view (§1.1). In order to accomplish this, I have taken a methodological approach which reflects the integration of certain basic principles of both participant observation and ethnoscience (§2.3.1; §2.3.2). This has involved the combination of typical ethnographic field work techniques, such as interviewing (§3.5.1), with an interpretative, or explanatory, framework that is built around Niitsitapi, as opposed to western, theories of knowledge and philosophies of thought. Thus, in contrast to much previous work in ethnography, in terms of which the relevance and value of traditional wisdom in scholarly research has been undermined or disregarded (§2.3.2; §3.1.1), my study emphasises the importance of utilising indigenous knowledge as a methodological tool for explaining various kinds of cultural phenomena within the context of their own unique cultural environments.

Although, as mentioned in §2.3.2, this methodological approach is a road less travelled in onomastics research, it is not totally unheard of. Scholars who advocate the use of indigenous knowledge to inform name study include Waugh (1998), Basso (1996) and Holland (2006). Although Holland (2006) does not explicitly refer to the use of local knowledge per se as a methodological approach in names research, he does advocate “greater collaboration and engagement between researchers and the people who use the [names]”, and suggests that “an awareness of conceptual chains...can increase our sensitivity to...characteristics which [names] may possess” (Holland 2006:111-112). Waugh (1998) emphasises the importance of applying local knowledge in onomastics research with reference to her study of Scottish place names, whilst Basso (1996) provides a practical illustration of how to seek out, interpret, and apply, local knowledge with respect to names research conducted within a Native American cultural context. (See §2.3.2 for further review of these sources.)

The method of applying indigenous knowledge as an interpretative technique in ethnographic research in general has been widely discussed and supported by scholars such as Deloria (1969, 1997), Cajete (1994), Basso (1996), Fixico (2003), Brown and Peers (2006), McGregor (2004) and Wilson (2004), who address certain contemporary issues surrounding the carrying out of social science research within indigenous (particularly Native American) communities. Deloria (1969), for instance, draws attention to some of the problems pertaining to established western ethnographic field research methods, and indigenous people's scepticism of the latter (§3.1.1), whilst Cajete (1996), Deloria (1997), Fixico (2003), McGregor (2004), and Wilson (2004), highlight the problem of how traditional tribal knowledge has typically been undermined by western academia and argue for the validation and assertion of such knowledge in scholarly research pertaining to indigenous communities (§2.3.2). Basso (1996) and Brown and Peers (2006) show how the application of local knowledge in studies of Native American cultures can provide valuable insight for researchers, and, most importantly, make such studies more meaningful to the local people themselves.

Whilst the literature does address certain general aspects of incorporating indigenous knowledge into the methodologies of ethnographic and onomastics research, there is very little written reference material that deals specifically with traditional Niitsitapi knowledge systems, and/or how these can be applied as an interpretative basis in studies such as the current one. As a result, I have had to rely heavily on my own intuition, as well as on my local advisors, for guidance as to where and how to learn about Niitsitapi ways of thinking, and the ways in which the latter provide a basis for understanding the meaning and functions of personal names within Niitsitapi culture.

3.3 Researcher's participation as 'learner': a lesson in Niitsitapi epistemology

An important aspect of the methodology was my adoption of a novice stance in terms of my social position as an "outside" researcher within the community. The concept of what I shall refer to here as "researcher as learner" is a very familiar one in the Niitsitapi culture; in fact, it goes right to the heart of Niitsitapi epistemic philosophy. A brief explanation of the latter is warranted here, in order to put my approach into (a cultural) perspective. The following exposition is based on information shared with me by *Akáyo'kaki*, Ryan Heavy Head, in a personal interview given on 04 October, 2006:

According to Niitsitapi beliefs, people are not producers of knowledge, and do not possess knowledge inherently. Instead, knowledge is gifted to humans from other (non-human) life forms, such as animals and plants, which have instinctive and highly complex knowledge that has enabled them to inhabit and survive on the earth for a much longer period of time than human beings. As Ryan explained to me, “people, who have been here for a lesser amount of time, are thought of as needing these gifts [of knowledge]. They don’t ‘know’ yet, because they haven’t been here.” In this view, everything that humans know comes from exchanges with non-humans. Nevertheless, human beings can, in turn, take the knowledge that is gifted to them and pass it down through the generations by trying to reproduce the context in which that knowledge was originally given.

Although people can invent knowledge themselves, this is frowned upon in Niitsitapi culture because it is considered ‘risky’. According to Heavy Head (2006 personal interview), “being imaginative and inventive about knowledge production is a really dangerous approach, because we do not know what the outcome will be; it could be disastrous, or successful.” It is thus considered wiser for those seeking knowledge to turn to more reliable sources, that is, to the people that are likely to possess the required knowledge already. In the Niitsitapi world, there are sets of knowledge which, having been passed down between successive generations for thousands of years, have enabled the Blackfoot people to flourish in their natural physical and sociocultural environments. It is thus considered foolish for someone to try and figure out answers to their questions for themselves, when trusted knowledge is available if one asks for it.

In approaching the issue of scholarly research (particularly, with respect to this study, social science research) within the context of Niitsitapi epistemology, then, it is important to recognise that the researcher is not expected to produce brand new knowledge through seeking his or her own answers to things; these answers should come instead from exchanges with people who already have knowledge about the topic being investigated. The researcher must therefore approach those people who are most likely to have the answers to the questions that are being asked. Usually, it is *kaaahsinnooniksi* ‘elders’ who are consulted, because they are the trusted guardians of Niitsitapi cultural wisdom. As explained in §1.5.3, elders are frequently, but not necessarily, the older people; those who have been around

longer than the other person, and who through their own experiences in the Blackfoot world have already gained the sought-after knowledge, and thus earned the right to pass it on to someone else. On more than one occasion, when I approached people in the community for help with my study, they would refer me to an elder; preferring not to talk to me concerning things about which they had limited or no knowledge.

This concept of seeking knowledge from those who know lies at the heart of Niitsitapi epistemology, and is especially important for the “outside” researcher, who is not part of the Niitsitapi culture. Such a person is likened to a new being, an infant, so to speak, in the Niitsitapi world, someone who is completely lacking in knowledge about the latter; he or she thus has to go through a great deal of learning whilst preparing for and carrying out the research. Thus, in consulting with the elders, or other community members, about Niitsitapi personal names, I was not only doing what might be considered “ethical” for an outside researcher, but, more importantly, I was participating in a process, or form, of knowledge transfer that is a defining feature of traditional Niitsitapi culture.

As indicated earlier, this learning experience formed an important part of my participant field research methodology, in that whether I was conducting personal interviews with elders and other community members, taking part with other students in a Niitsi’powahsin (Blackfoot language) class, or engaging in informal conversations with my colleagues at Red Crow Community College (RCCC), I did so with the attitude of a learner, or one who is ‘seeking to know’. Not only was this aspect of the research personally rewarding in the sense that it presented me with a unique cultural learning opportunity, but it has also, hopefully, contributed towards the overall credibility of the study, especially when considered from a local perspective.

3.4 Location and duration of field work

3.4.1 Field work location

Field work for this project was conducted on the Kainai (Blood) Indian Reserve, which is located in the south-western corner of Alberta, Canada, along the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains. The Reserve, which encompasses an area of approximately 642 square miles, was established in 1883, and it lies in the heart of traditional Niitsitapi territory (§1.2; Figure 1.1).

It is the largest Reserve in Canada (Brown & Peers 2006:19). The administrative headquarters of the Reserve are located in the town of Standoff. Based on 2006 Census data, Statistics Canada (2008) estimates the (aboriginal) Reserve population at approximately 4195.

During my field visits, I worked out of Red Crow Community College (RCCC) on the Kainai Reserve. RCCC is a post-secondary institution founded in 1986 under the direction of the Blood Tribe Education Committee. In 1995, RCCC became the first tribally-controlled college in Canada. It offers diploma and degree programs in partnership with the University of Calgary and the University of Lethbridge, as well as courses such as Kainai Studies, which includes the study of Niitsi'powahsin, and Traditional Land Use Study (Red Crow College 2006). Its main campus (shown in Figure 3.1) is housed in the former St. Mary's Residential School building; a place where Niitsitapi children were deprived of their linguistic and cultural identities during an era of forced assimilation of the native tribes in Canada (§1.2).

The Director of Kainai Studies at RCCC, *Akáyo'kaki*, Ryan Heavy Head, very generously accommodated me in an office at the College during my field visits. Although working at RCCC meant a daily commute of approximately 140km to and from my place of residence in Lethbridge, the overriding advantage of the situation was that I was placed right in the centre of the community, and thus had access to a wealth of resources, including the invaluable assistance of Niitsitapi scholars, students, and other community members, as well as use of the RCCC library and digital archives. Furthermore, Ryan Heavy Head's appointment as co-supervisor for the dissertation greatly facilitated my ability to work within the Kainai community, and provided me with much needed support and guidance during my visits to the Reserve.

Figure 3.1: Red Crow Community College (RCCC) main campus, Kainai Reserve, Alberta, Canada.



3.4.2 Duration of field work

The field work portion of the research project was carried out over the course of three years, in different phases. As mentioned in §1.4, I made an initial exploratory visit to the Reserve in March 2005, which effectively constituted the planning phase of the research. The bulk of the data collection, which essentially involved learning about Niitsitapi names and naming practices, took place during two separate time periods: the first being the three week period of 22 October 2005 to 12 November 2005, and the second being the four week period of 10 September 2006 to 10 October 2006. The reason for conducting this particular phase of the field work in such a ‘spread out’ manner can be contributed primarily to my personal circumstances; in particular, the physical distance involved in travelling between the Reserve and Chicago (approximately 3052 miles round-trip), as well as my having to work around family commitments, and the availability of financial resources. With regards to financing,

this phase of the field work was partly paid for through my own personal funds, and partly by a grant awarded by the American Philosophical Society's Lewis and Clark Fund for Exploration and Field Research.

I also made several follow-up visits to the Reserve during the writing phase of the dissertation. My ability to do this was greatly facilitated by our family's relocation, in July 2007, from Chicago to Lewistown, Montana, which brought me much closer to Alberta. The main purpose of these shorter trips, which were each usually about a week in duration, was to validate my interpretations of the knowledge that had been shared with me around Niitsitapi names and naming, with my advisors in the Kainai community. In this way, I tried to ensure that I maintained a Niitsitapi perspective in providing explanations as to what I had learned from my research. I also found, however, that with every subsequent visit, my learning experience within Niitsitapi culture continued, and even deepened; providing with fresh insight into various aspects of the work that I had been doing, and thus greatly enriching the study. Furthermore, the ongoing visits enabled me to keep in personal touch with my co-supervisor, *Akáyo'kaki*, Ryan Heavy Head, whose collaboration and guidance was essential to the project from start to finish. Of particular significance was the visit I made to the Reserve in late April, 2008. The reason for this trip was partly to review with Ryan the written work that I had completed up until that point in time, and partly to attend, at Ryan's invitation, a Beaver Bundle opening ceremony. It was during that ceremony, held on April 26, 2008, in the mountains near Waterton, that I received my Blackfoot name, *linisskimmaakii*, 'Buffalo Stone Woman', from elder Narcisse Blood. The importance of this experience, as it relates to the study, and to me personally, is explained in §3.7.2 and §5.8.

3.5 Collecting information

3.5.1 Personal interviews

Information for the research was collected mainly through personal interviews with members of the Kainai Reserve community, most of whom were elders. In total, that is, with respect to both field visits (§3.4.2), twenty-three interviews were conducted with nineteen different participants (four people were interviewed twice). Of the twenty-three interviews, six took place at private homes on the Reserve, one at a private home in Lethbridge, one at the University of Lethbridge, and the rest at the RCCC campus on the Kainai Reserve. Apart

from one non-native participant, all of the interviewees were Niitsitapi. Participants represented a good cross-section of the local (Reserve) community in terms of educational level and vocation; for example, college students, instructors, social workers, a building custodian, researchers, and retirees, were among those who were interviewed; many of the interviewees (twelve in all) were elders. Participants were selected on the basis of recommendation, in most cases by my colleagues at RCCC who, for their own research purposes, frequently interview community members, especially the elders. On a few occasions, however, interviewees themselves referred me to other people whom they thought could be of assistance.

Interviews were partially structured and largely informal. I usually commenced by telling participants a little about myself, and providing them with a short description of the nature and purpose of the names study, as well as the kind of information I was looking for. I would also ask participants' permission for their interviews to be recorded by means of a digital voice recorder. All but two interviewees agreed to this. Of those who consented, three specifically requested that their interviews be reserved for my own personal reference, that is, they are not to be made accessible to the public. Recordings that were made were subsequently downloaded onto a personal computer for storage, with backups made to CDs. In keeping with traditional protocol, participants were given gifts such as cash, pipe tobacco, cigarettes, small articles of clothing, or a combination of such items, in exchange for the information they had provided.

On the whole, people were very receptive to the idea of talking about their names, and participated enthusiastically in the interviews. Most participants were comfortable with speaking freely, at their own pace, without much prompting on my part beyond the initial introduction (described in the preceding paragraph). Interviewees would usually begin by giving their Niitsitapi names and English translations, and then go on to provide various other details about the names, which may have included, for instance, explanations as to the origin and meaning of names, descriptions of the circumstances in which names had been given, reasons underlying the choice of names, anecdotes about persons from whom names had been received and/or who had carried the names previously; and so on. Some participants, usually elders, also voluntarily shared information around some of the collective (cultural) aspects of giving and receiving names, such as naming ceremonies, spiritual beliefs surrounding

naming, and the social expectations and responsibilities associated with names, to mention just a few.

During the second series of interviews conducted in September/October 2006, I decided to ask selected participants, mostly the elders, specific questions that were aimed at following up on, or probing deeper into, certain issues that had captured my interest after I had performed an initial review of the information collected from the first round of interviews in October/November 2005. The following represent some sample questions:

- Why do so many people carry names that belonged to their ancestors?
- Who has the right to give names to others?
- What is involved in the transfer of a name from one person to another?
- Are names always given in a public ceremony?
- Why are Niitsitapi names given to outsiders?
- How do you feel about the mistranslation of Niitsitapi names into English?
- Is your Niitsitapi name important to you, and if so, in what way/s?
- Do you see the practice of traditional naming as being relevant to the preservation of Niitsitapi cultural identity and ways of living in current times?

The responses that I received to such questions definitely provided me with a clearer understanding of these issues when compared to my preliminary findings.

In addition to asking questions pertaining directly to naming phenomena, I also tried to find out about other elements of Niitsitapi culture that appeared to have strong connections with the former. Here I relied heavily on the help given by Niitsitapi scholars who have worked closely with their elders in conducting their own sociocultural research. Marvin Calf Robe, for instance, has made extensive inquiry into the Niitsitapi concept of *pommakssin*, which translates into English roughly as ‘exchange’ or ‘transfer’. *Pommakssin* is a very important element in the wider traditional culture, especially in terms of Niitsitapi epistemology, and, as I found out through interviewing various people, it also plays a central role in the giving and receiving of Niitsitapi personal names. Marvin agreed to have an interview with me in which he talked exclusively about *pommakssin*, thus providing me with insights into this crucial

cultural concept that have proved very valuable for this study. (See §4.1 for a detailed discussion around *pommakssin* and its connection to Niitsitapi personal names and naming.)

3.5.2 Involvement in social activities

Although personal interviews comprised the primary method of gathering information, my participation in various social activities—some more formal than others—also yielded many opportunities for gaining knowledge. Such opportunities often arose in incidental or unexpected ways; on many an occasion, for instance, a casual conversation with, or comments made by, my colleagues at RCCC, served either to contribute new information, or to deepen my understanding of certain aspects of the knowledge that other people had already shared with me. Since it was hardly ever practical to record such social encounters, I would usually try to make notes about what was said, either during, or as soon as possible after, their occurrence.

One of the most valuable experiences that I had in terms of attending a social event happened during the second round of the field work, when I had the privilege of taking part in a day of festivity that was held in celebration of the twentieth anniversary of RCCC. On this particular occasion, I witnessed two naming ceremonies in which two different RCCC staff members received Niitsitapi personal names from one of their elders. The value of this first-hand experience cannot be overstated, especially since it ‘brought to life’ many aspects of naming ceremonies that people had talked about in their interviews with me (see §4.1 for a full description of this event). Later, I went through my own naming ceremony, which added another, and even richer dimension, to the knowledge that I had already gained (§3.4.2).

Another participative opportunity that I took advantage of during the second field trip was attending a weekly class at RCCC entitled “Blackfoot Ways 120”, developed and taught by *Ai’ai’stahkommi*, Duane Mistaken Chief. Duane has extensive experience in researching Niitsi’powahsin (the Blackfoot language) as well as the Niitsitapi culture. In “Blackfoot Ways 120” he illustrates how the language embodies and expresses defining elements of the culture, and explains how the (mis)translation of Niitsi’powahsin into English frequently results in the corruption and/or weakening of the real, or intended, meaning of certain linguistic expressions. Each week, Duane gives students one particular word in Niitsi’powahsin which they must go and discuss with about five different elders. At the

following week's class, students report back with what they found out from the elders concerning the word they had been given, and Duane then adds his own insight to their feedback in order to clarify the students' understanding of the various components involved. Although I was able to attend only two sessions of "Blackfoot Ways 120" during my visit, participating in the class together with other students served to enrich the overall immersion experience that I gained from working daily at RCCC. Furthermore, I found that many of the cultural concepts that emerged during classroom discussions were similar to, or the same as, those that I had come across in my discussions with other people in connection with names and naming; this insight ultimately proved vital in terms of providing answers to some of my research questions.

Some examples of other social activities in which I took part included visiting the sacred site of the Sundial Medicine Wheel with Ryan Heavy Head and elder *Kinaksaapo'p*, Narcisse Blood; attending a birthday party given for *Mi'ksskimm*, Frank Weasel Head; joining in an evening of playing bingo; as well as paying casual visits to Ryan Heavy Head and his wife Adrienne at their home in Lethbridge. Although conversations that took place within such informal situations may not have remotely touched on the topic of names, each experience contributed to the intensification of my exposure to, and immersion in, the local culture. This, in turn, provided me with valuable pieces of insight and knowledge that would ultimately all fit together in terms of "the bigger picture" that is presented in this study.

3.5.3 Use of library materials and museum archives

The RCCC library, the public library in Lethbridge, and the Galt Museum (Lethbridge) archives provided additional sources of information for the project. Many of the materials, including books, newspaper articles, and museum publications, that I consulted through these establishments were very valuable in that they dealt either primarily or exclusively with issues pertaining to the Kainai Nation, and were not obtainable elsewhere.

3.6 Interpretative/explanatory methods

As outlined in §2.3.2, this study emphasises an interpretative, or explanatory, versus descriptive, approach with respect to the writing up of the research, or data analysis. In the beginning stages of this process, I carefully reviewed all of the information which I had

gathered in the field; this involved listening to each recorded interview several times, compiling notes summarising the most salient points communicated in each interview, reading and re-reading notes that were made in the field, and then converting as much of this data as possible to electronic format for ease of reference. After performing this initial review of the data, I set about bringing together all the separate pieces of information obtained from the different sources, in the field as well as in the literature, looking for similarities and differences across the range of data collected. In addition to extracting information pertaining directly to names and naming practices per se, I also combed through the data in search of possible connections between the latter and other elements in Niitsitapi socioculture, in order to explore the issue of which particular sociocultural concepts and/or philosophies of knowledge might provide a foundational basis for Niitsitapi naming phenomena (c.f. Basso 1996:40-41), as well as to gather clues as to the nature of the role played by the latter in Niitsitapi culture (§1.1).

Since the primary intent underlying the overall methodological approach taken in this study was to provide an explanation of personal names and naming from a Niitsitapi perspective, validating my interpretations of the data with local advisors was a crucial aspect of the work (§3.4.2). This was all the more critical in view of the fact that, for the most part, the writing up of the research took place away from the field. Fortunately, I was able to maintain regular communication between visits, using electronic mail and voice-over IP internet calling, with my closest advisors in the Kainai community. Furthermore, as mentioned in §3.4.2, I was also able to make several visits to the Reserve during the writing phase of the research, which allowed me to review and authenticate my work, in person, with my mentors, and also to continue with my immersion and learning experiences within the Niitsitapi culture.

3.7 Evaluating the methodology

3.7.1 Weaknesses

The greatest weakness in the methodology was undoubtedly the limited amount of time that I was able to spend on the Kainai Reserve conducting the empirical research. Although a great deal was accomplished in terms of data collection during the total of seven weeks that I spent in the field, it is my opinion that much more could have been achieved had I been able to carry out the field work over a longer period of time. I take this view based on certain

practical issues that arose during both visits to the field. It was often very difficult, for example, to contact people and make arrangements for me to interview them, because they were out of town, busy with work or other social commitments, or experiencing ill health. Sometimes, repeated attempts to get in touch with certain individuals before leaving the field were unsuccessful; had I been able to remain there for longer, however, my chances of eventually meeting with them would probably have improved.

Perhaps a greater disadvantage, however, was the fact that that I did not have enough time to build relationships with the elders during my brief visits to the community. In §3.3, I explained the importance in Niitsitapi culture of consulting with the elders with respect to seeking knowledge, and how this applies in a research context. A very important aspect of working with the elders in the local setting is that the student, or learner (that is, the researcher), makes an effort to develop reciprocal relationships with those elders whom he or she approaches for instruction, advice, and/or information. Niitsitapi scholar, Betty Bastien (2004:55-56), writes that “[k]nowledge arises in a context of alliances and reciprocal relationships...[t]o seek knowledge means to establish and maintain relationships—the essence of the normative order of Niitsitapi.” In terms of these relationships, students may, for instance, perform chores, or purchase gifts of tobacco, clothing, and/or food, for elders, in exchange for shared knowledge. In retrospect, I think that had I been able to carry out each stage of the field work over a longer period of time, I would probably have had greater opportunity to build these kinds of relationships with some of the elders in the Kainai Reserve community. This might perhaps have been a more appropriate approach, given cultural expectations as to how knowledge transfer should be handled.

My lack of proficiency in Niitsi’powahsin also represented somewhat of a limitation in the methodology, particularly with respect to the empirical work. Although all of the elders with whom I conducted interviews could speak English to some degree, there were a number of others whom I did not approach to participate in the study because I was told beforehand that they spoke only Niitsi’powahsin. On one occasion I was able to meet with a non-English speaking lady of over ninety years of age, thanks to a family member who offered to interpret, but this was an exceptional case. Had I worked with an interpreter on a regular basis throughout my visits, I could probably have interviewed at least three or four more elders in the community. Financial limitations, however, prevented me from adopting this strategy.

3.7.2 Advantages of the methodology

The decision to incorporate traditional Niitsitapi knowledge into an analytical framework which facilitates the interpretation of data from a Niitsitapi perspective, enabled me to expand the focus of the research in terms of the issues, or questions, which the latter initially set out to address (§1.1). For example, in the very early stages of the project, that is, before the first round of field work had been carried out, I had made the tentative assumption—based at that point on what I had read in the literature, as well as on informal conversations that I had held with certain collaborators in the field—that Niitsitapi personal names function as mnemonic gestalts, through which certain aspects of traditional Niitsitapi culture are remembered and passed down between successive generations. However, as the work progressed, and particularly after having listened very carefully to what participants in the study had shared with me during the first field trip undertaken in October/November of 2005, I began to realise that, although the names do indeed appear to possess mnemonic features, they also seem to constitute an important, dynamic element in the everyday practice of traditional Niitsitapi ways of living, with close connections to many other aspects of the culture; they are not, in other words, only about “memory”. Thus, had I not paid close attention to what local sources were telling me, and continued to concentrate only on verifying my initial assumption, I might well have missed the opportunity to explore those aspects of Niitsitapi naming phenomena that have ultimately contributed to the provision of a more comprehensive account of the role of names and naming practices in Niitsitapi culture, than a narrower focus would have allowed.

Another advantageous aspect of the methodology has been the close collaboration between me and people (particularly my mentors) in the Kainai community. One vital aspect of this collaborative effort has been the co-supervision of the project at the local level, which has enabled me to maintain a focus on expressing the Niitsitapi perspective concerning personal names and naming practices; in a way that conforms to local expectations as to how such expression should be made. In addition, this collaboration has allowed me to consistently verify my explanations of the subject matter with my advisors in the field (§3.6). Having my analysis reviewed by members of the Kainai Reserve community has, hopefully, provided a safeguard against the possibility of my having misinterpreted the information that the Niitsitapi people have entrusted to me, as well as ensured authenticity in the account of Niitsitapi names and naming practices that is presented in this dissertation.

A further strength in the research, particularly when considered from a Niitsitapi viewpoint, is that I have been given a Blackfoot name (see Appendix 2), and thus the benefit of the embodied experience of those things which I have been pursuing knowledge about, whilst carrying out my study (§4.2). Embodiment, expressed in Niitsi'powahsin as *aistomatoop* 'it is done to our bodies/beings', is a central concept in Niitsitapi epistemology. The underlying idea is that a person cannot really 'know' about something unless it has become a part of them, in other words, unless they have experienced for themselves what that particular thing is all about. In terms of this philosophy, then, since I have gone through the process of receiving a Niitsitapi name, I have earned the right to speak about the things that are involved in that process; and this infuses my research with a great deal of integrity, from a local as well as scholarly, perspective.

3.8 Summary

In my opinion, the integration of western approaches in ethnographic research with indigenous philosophies of knowledge can provide us not only with an ethical means of finding the information that we are after, but also with the opportunity to ascertain whether or not our preconceived ideas as to what we think the data might be telling us, line up with what the people—those whose cultures we are entering and exploring—have to say in their own words about their own worlds. Based on the discussion offered in this chapter, it is my contention that the methodology adopted in the current study, which stresses the relevance and value of traditional knowledge, and the importance of close collaboration between the researcher and people in the local communities where the work is being conducted, can provide the insider's view that an ethnographic account of the topic at hand should aspire to; one which reveals what Iverson 1993, (quoted in McNickle 1973: xviii [reprint]) refers to as "a more fully informed perspective that Indian communities deserve." In terms of this dissertation, my acknowledgement and application of local wisdom, that is, Niitsitapi practices, protocols, beliefs, and values (contained within the Niitsitapi oral literature), as the foundational guide for the research method, has helped me to provide an authentic account, based on a Niitsitapi perspective, of personal names and naming within Niitsitapi culture.

It is also important to highlight the fact that the affirmation of the validity of indigenous knowledge in the academic world (§2.3.2) coincides with the increasing assertion by many indigenous peoples of their human, social, and political, rights, and the recognition of these

rights by the international community (McGregor 2004:389). In this sense, I contend that the methodological approach discussed here affords a means of positioning onomastics research within a post-colonial paradigm that accepts non-western epistemologies as valid in their own right, without their having to adhere to a separate cultural body for legitimacy (Duran and Duran 1995, quoted in Bastien 2004:156).

CHAPTER 4: Names tell us stories: learning about Niitsitapi personal names

4.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I present an in-depth discussion of what I have learned, during the course of my research, about Niitsitapi personal names and naming practices. In essence, this section of the dissertation represents my attempt to come to grips with, and then set out in writing, the knowledge and insight that people in the Kainai community have shared with me about their names. For the most part, this knowledge has been communicated to me at a very personal level, in one-on-one conversations, and often through the telling of stories that speak about how people really experience their names within the reality of their world. It is, therefore, the type of knowledge that contains and expresses a strong human element. Furthermore, as I have already indicated in §2.4.2, what I am setting out in this chapter is knowledge which constitutes part of an extensive existing Niitsitapi oral literature, and ongoing conversations in the Kainai community, around the topic of names. I want to re-emphasise that, whilst the published scholarly onomastics literature was helpful in establishing a theoretical framework for the study, this body of local knowledge informed and guided the project to a much greater extent, particularly with respect to the actual field work, and also in terms of my decision-making about the direction of the research. What I am presenting here is, therefore, a discussion of how I have explored and engaged with Niitsitapi knowledge systems and thought patterns in pursuit of answers to my research questions, and what has been learned through this effort.

It will become very obvious to the reader that much of the discourse in this chapter centres on the stories that Niitsitapi people have shared with me concerning their names. The importance of story in human communication is highlighted by Cajete (1994:137), who points out that people often use stories to put information and experience into context to make things meaningful. Certainly, it is primarily through people's stories that I have learned about Niitsitapi personal names and naming practices, and come to recognise and understand some of the cultural ideas and concepts that appear to shape the Niitsitapi approach to name-giving and receiving. Furthermore, the stories bring life and energy into a discussion which could easily, as I have realised through trial and error, come to be written in a 'removed', or

abstract, way; and such abstraction would cause the reader to miss the heart, and reality, of the things that I am trying to communicate about what I have learned concerning Niitsitapi names, over the course of my research.

In order to avoid unnecessary separation of thoughts and ideas, and thus, effectively, to limit abstraction, I have structured this chapter in only three sections: the introduction, the main body of the discussion, and a conclusion. The next, and main, section has been written in essay form. This not only reinforces the theme of ‘story’, but it also allows for the presentation of content in a way which, in my opinion, will assist the reader in following the progression of thoughts and ideas more easily than if the latter were to be broken up, or disconnected, by frequent section breaks. In addition, I am hoping that this format will enable the reader to experience something of the fluid and intuitive manner in which this study has been carried out.

4.1 Names tell us stories: learning about Niitsitapi personal names

In §1.4, I explained how this research project was initially inspired by a casual conversation with *Mi’ksskimm*, Frank Weasel Head, at his home on the Kainai Reserve in March 2005. What had particularly caught my attention during that visit with Frank were the stories that he related about some of the names carried by people on the Reserve. Frank told me that, in the traditional Niitsitapi way of life, the people who are giving and receiving names are very much aware of the stories surrounding the names, and these stories are passed along when names are transferred from one person to another. In this way, Frank would later explain (9 November 2005, personal interview), names contain history; and this “is not only the history of the person carrying the name, but it extends back to whoever else has carried the name previously, and that may be over many centuries, sometimes even thousands of years”. In essence, Frank was pointing to the way in which Niitsitapi personal names are attached to *akáitapiitsinikssiistsi* ‘stories of the past people/ancestors’, through which, within the context of Niitsitapi oral tradition, cultural history, values, and practices are taught (§1.3). On several occasions, I have heard Frank express his concern that, as traditional Niitsitapi personal names fall into disuse due to the influence of western cultural practices, and the English language in particular, the cultural knowledge that is contained within the names is being lost.

The discussion with Frank in March 2005 provided me with a starting point for my study when I returned to the Reserve six months later to carry out my first round of fieldwork. At that early stage of the research, my main goal was to find out more about the connection between *akáitapiitsinikssiistsi* and Niitsitapi personal names; to explore some of the ways in which, and possible reasons why, the names contain and communicate the “history” that Frank had spoken about. I anticipated that a good starting point would be to ask people in the Kainai community to tell me about their names, and to share the stories behind the names, if these were known. One of my first interviews was with *Kiitokíílaapii*, Marvin Calf Robe (October 27 2005). I should mention here that I was very fortunate to have had this interview with Marvin during the initial stages of my research. Not only is Marvin an excellent storyteller, but the stories that he shared in this conversation with me made me aware of certain other aspects of personal names and naming in Niitsitapi culture, which, as I began to explore them, would eventually expand the scope of the study to a significant extent. What follows below is the transcript of the story that Marvin related to me about the name he presently carries:

My Blackfoot name is *Kiitokíílaapii*, which translates into English as ‘Prairie Chicken Old Man’. This is an old, old name; no-one knows how old, but it probably dates back to the dog days, the time before the horse, because around this name there’s a story about a great battle with the Crow Indians, and one of my ancestors was in this battle. As the story goes, there was a group of Crows camped, and a group of Bloods had seen the camp and came to wage war on them. The Bloods walked in to the camp but the Crow warriors were hiding inside the lodges, waiting for them to come closer. As the Bloods came in, all of these Crows came out and they got into a fight, but the Crows outnumbered the small party of Bloods. This ancestor of mine and another younger fellow had run away from the Crows; they jumped into a patch of willows. Anyway, there was a prairie chicken in the thicket. My ancestor began to communicate with this prairie chicken; not by speaking, but with his mind, perhaps. The prairie chicken took pity on them and said: “Don’t worry; I’ll get you guys to safety. My whole family is in here; when we fly out of here you run with us and they won’t see you.” So this is what had happened; as the Crows were coming in closer, these prairie chickens fluttered out, and my ancestor and the young boy ran with the prairie chickens, right past the

enemy. They got away and went to get more warriors, and then they came back and killed all the Crows. So this experience is where the name *Kiitokíiaapii* comes from. Throughout the years, in my family, men of about twenty-five to forty years of age would carry this name before making the transition into a more spiritual way of life; it's a warrior name.

This story provides us with a good illustration of the way in which details of Niitsitapi ethnohistory and culture become embedded within Niitsitapi personal names, through their connections with *akáitapiitsinikssiistsi*. As is evident from Marvin's account, the name *Kiitokíiaapii* captures several elements of Niitsitapi cultural knowledge, including, for instance, information about a particular era in Niitsitapi history and a specific event that occurred during that period of time; as well as details about the personal experiences and deeds of individual people. The name also highlights traditional Niitsitapi spiritual beliefs; specifically, the belief in a metaphysical realm, in which context it is held that humans, birds and animals can supernaturally communicate with one another, and that birds and animals have gifts and powers which they share with and use to help others, including humans (The Blackfoot Gallery 2001:8; Blackwater 02 October 2007, personal communication). Furthermore, the name captures and conveys a sense of family history and continuity, insofar as it has been passed down within Marvin's family over a number of generations.

The history that is embedded within names such as *Kiitokíiaapii* appears to play a powerful role in providing people with a sense of identity. Many participants in my interviews spoke about this feature of Niitsitapi personal names. *Niipomaakii*, Georgette Fox (September 15 2006, personal interview), for instance, shared these sentiments regarding the carrying of ancestors' names within families:

It [giving people the names of their ancestors] gives a person some idea of their roots, their family tree, so I think it is important that way. For sure when my grandchildren grow up I'll explain to them why I gave them the names that I did.

Similarly, *Mamio'kakiikin*, Adam Delaney (29 September 2006, personal interview), spoke to the importance of names, and their stories, in teaching Niitsitapi people about their ancestors:

Elders tell stories about people; these stories are passed down, so the names are important in the telling of the stories; people remember these names, and understand where they come from; they also understand what the people were like who have carried the names.

These statements imply that knowing the history of one's name, or, "understanding where one comes from", gives a person a sense of identity and belonging, in the family as well as in the community. Furthermore, Adam's comment indicates that this sense of identity is established not only through their names per se, but also (and perhaps even more so) through the stories that are carried within the names. Knowing the stories, or histories, behind Niitsitapi personal names, then, appears to be somewhat crucial.

One social context in which this is very important is where two or more people apparently carry the same name. A number of interviewees addressed this point, and emphasised that, although it may seem as if a particular name is being carried simultaneously by different people, the stories behind each specific instance of the name will usually be unique (*Matsipi'kssílaakii*, Joyce First Rider, 28 October 2005; *Náápiakii*, Carolla Calf Robe, 20 September 2006; personal interviews). One of the best illustrations of such a situation was related to me by *Ai'ai'stahkommi*, Duane Mistaken Chief (03 October 2007, personal interview):

My uncle who just recently passed away, Steve Mistaken Chief, fought in the Second World War. While he was in Italy he was stationed on an island just off the mainland, so when he returned home he named a young man *Ómahksini*, which means 'Big Island'. Now there's an area on the Reserve that's also known as *Ómahksini* 'Big Island', and that's where one of the first mission schools started, an Anglican mission school, it's at the Old Agency out on the Reserve. It's a large island, so we call it *Ómahksini*. We had this language and cultural immersion course there, and at the conclusion of that course, on the last day, one of the young men wanted a Blackfoot name, because he didn't have one. So it was arranged that he was going to get a name as part of the celebration. Knowing that this place was where our language and our culture began to be disconnected from us, this was a celebration in that we had gone back to this place to teach our Blackfoot

language and culture, to kind of reclaim the place. So this young man was named *Ómahksini* to celebrate that event and that it happened in this place, *Ómahksini*. After that, Pete Standing Alone told me that my uncle had said that he had named a young man *Ómahksini* to commemorate his World War II stay on that island. My uncle had also mentioned that there's another person on the Reserve that has the same name, *Ómahksini*, but that the story behind that person's name is different from the story behind the one he gave to the young man. So that other person tried to challenge my uncle and asked him, 'why are you naming this other person *Ómahksini*'?' But my uncle explained to him that, 'even though it sounds like the same name, and seems like the same name, the events related to it are all different'. And then with Pete's naming of this other young man, *Ómahksini*, now there's three different people that have the same name, but the stories are all different. So that's why there shouldn't be these arguments, 'You have the same name as me', because most times it's a totally different story. [Author's note: The story behind the third instance of the name was not given.]

Accounts such as Duane's have helped me to understand and appreciate the apparently inseparable connection between Niitsitapi personal names and their stories. I have learned that these stories become so much a part of the names that many people on the Reserve hold the view that the names themselves *are* history, rather than simply 'containers' of history (*Akáyo'kaki* Ryan Heavy Head, personal communication; Brown and Peers 2006:11) *Mamio'kakiikin*, Adam Delaney (29 September 2006, personal interview) implied as much when he spoke to me about the importance of names in educating Niitsitapi people about their past history and traditional cultural ways:

Carrying [Niitsitapi] names is the same thing as carrying your traditions, who you belong to. Giving names to others, it's a way of helping people. We're trying to teach our people who we are. Naming keeps our traditions, ceremonies, language, and people, alive.

Also implicit in Adam's remark, however, is the notion that history is carried forward through, and not only contained within, Niitsitapi personal names. I remember discussing this idea with Ryan Heavy Head in his office at RCCC one afternoon in October 2005. In

contemplating with Ryan what I had been learning from my interviews with various people on the Reserve, I mentioned that, although there was indeed a strong historical aspect to the names, I was getting the impression that they were about more than “just history”; in the sense that, in addition to capturing history by calling into remembrance people and events from the past, the names also seem to play a role in ‘renewing’ these things, through their continued use in the present day. Many people, for instance, had spoken to me about how important it was for them to “keep names going”, especially (although not exclusively) with reference to names that are passed down within families. *Otahkoika*, David Yellowfeet (September 16 2006, personal interview), for example, shared the following with me:

The name *Otahkoika*, meaning ‘Yellow Feet’, comes from my grandfather...it was his Indian name. Before my mother had passed away, she said that one of her father’s wishes was to keep the name going...because we’re about the only people on the Reserve that have that name. So that was one of the reasons why it was important for me to take that name...and maybe I’ll pass it on to my son...to keep it going.

As I have come to understand, however, “keeping names going” involves far more than the names themselves; since it is not only the names, but also the things that are attached to them, that are kept alive and active as they are passed down from one person to the next. In the traditional Niitsitapi way, when someone receives a name, that person will be told the stories behind that particular name, so that he or she becomes aware of the ideas and beliefs surrounding the name, as well as the responsibilities he or she will have in living up to it. In this way, the name, and the things it calls into remembrance, are renewed, reinforced, and can continue to exist (*Kiitokíiaapii*, Marvin Calf Robe, 27 October 2005, personal interview; LeRoy Little Bear, personal communication; *Spitaikowan*, Bernard Tall Man, 18 September 2006, personal interview). This aspect of naming is well illustrated by the following stories, related by *Kiitokíiaapii*, Marvin Calf Robe (27 October 2005, personal interview), and *Áwákaasomaahkaa*, Quenton Heavy Head (November 8 2005, personal interview), respectively:

The name *Kiitokíiaapii* is a warrior name. My grandfather, Ed Calf Robe, had carried this name. He was a well-accomplished song maker and dancer; he was a weather dancer; he went into the Horns and Crazy Dogs Societies; and

he travelled quite a bit through his pow-wows and singing. So I look at that and I think, 'I've got to do some things around that name!' So where I've brought the name, *Kiitokíiaapii*: I've had the opportunity to lead and coordinate a dance troupe; I've travelled with that troupe to Switzerland, Germany, France, and Spain, so I've brought that name over the ocean. In 1999, the year after I got the name, I went to dance at a big pow-wow in Hartford, Connecticut, in the World Championship competition. All the top Chicken Dancers from numerous different tribes were there, and we competed through several rounds. I ended up taking the World Championship that year. Beating the other tribes in the dance competition is like a contemporary form of coup; it's like I went out on a war or horse raid and brought back a trophy.

The name *Áwákaasomaahkaa*, meaning 'Running Antelope', was given to me in 1984 by my grandfather, who was then 100 years old. I was going to join the Horns Society and I wanted to get a good name, so I went to my grandfather to ask him for one. He gave me my great-grandmother's uncle's name, *Áwákaasomaahkaa*. This person, when he had the name was a councillor, and he owned horses, cows; he was quite well off. Today, it's 2005, and I've joined the Horns Society three times; I've started up a society that was dormant for over 50 years, and I'm working to start another society that's been dormant; I've also been semi-initiated into the Thunderpipes Society. From that name I've done quite a bit, but I still think I have more to do. [Author's note: The Horns, Crazy Dogs, and Thunderpipes Societies that are referred to in the foregoing extracts, are Niitsitapi spiritual, or ceremonial, societies, of which the Horns Society is the most sacred. The activities of these and other Niitsitapi societies are not usually made known to outsiders. Oakley & Black Plume (2004:6-9) provide a brief but informative description of the history and functions of several of these societies.]

My interviews with various members of the Kainai community yielded many accounts such as these. What struck me most was how seriously people take the responsibility of living up to, respecting, and honouring, their names, in the ways illustrated by the preceding examples. Even people who carry 'new' names hold the same attitude. *Niipomaakii*, Georgette Fox (15 September 2006, personal interview), for instance, explained to me that her name,

Niipomaakii, is not a family or ancestral name, but it is “a new name, with a new history”. Georgette told me that she has to be careful to carry her name well, so that she can pass it on to someone else, perhaps a grandchild or great-grandchild, who may one day want the name. So, in her own words, “I try to live a good life, I try to honour my name, so that there will be good associations with the name.” As I thought about how much the Niitsitapi people respect their names, I began to realise that this reflects the general attitude of respect towards the ancestors, the elders, and the ancient ways, that appears to characterise traditional Niitsitapi society as a whole. I also started to see how the emphasis that is placed on concepts such as ‘keeping names going’, ‘carrying names well’, and ‘living up to names’, underscores the importance of teaching people the value of respect, and ensuring that this cultural ethos is passed on to future generations.

In the midst of exploring these ideas with my local advisors, I was introduced to the idea of *pommakssin* ‘transfer’ or ‘exchange’, which, as I have learned, is a fundamental concept in Niitsitapi culture that has to do with the passing down of traditional knowledge, wisdom, and values, and which is very much involved in the customary way of giving and receiving personal names in Niitsitapi society (*Kiitokílaapii*, Marvin Calf Robe, 27 October 2005, *Náápiiakii*, Carolla Calf Robe, 2 October 2006, personal interviews; *Akáyo’kaki*, Ryan Heavy Head, personal communication). As I have come to understand, *pommakssin* refers to the formal transfer of certain properties, which can include things such as ceremonial bundles, headdresses, tepee designs, knowledge, and, in the context of this study, personal names. *Pommakssin* contains a strong sacred element. By definition, *pommakssin* always entails an exchange. This stems from the traditional Niitsitapi philosophy that one does not have the right to use something unless one has given something else, sacrificially, in exchange for it. In Niitsi’powahsin, this concept of sacrificial giving would be referred to as *saponihtaan* ‘paying, or putting into, something’. (I shall provide further explanation concerning the functions of *saponihtaan*, in relation to names transfer, later on in this chapter.) Transfers usually take place in a ceremonial setting where participants will pray, sing songs, perform dances, smoke pipes, and/or engage in other ritual practices. Conducting transfers within the context of ceremony also ensures that such transfers are done in the proper way.

Essentially, the transfer of names within the context of *pommakssin* involves passing everything associated with those names, such as experiences, deeds, or personal

accomplishments, to the people receiving the names. As I have mentioned earlier in this chapter, the new name bearers will be told the stories behind the names, so that they are aware of what the names are all about; that is, what history, beliefs, expectations, and responsibilities, are being transferred to them along with the names. Names can be chosen by the recipients themselves, their family members, or by the name givers. It is generally expected that people receiving a name will (sometimes with the help of other family members and/or friends) give something sacrificially (that is, engage in *saponihtaan*), in exchange for the name. Payment is made to whoever is transferring the name to the person concerned, and can be in the form of money, clothing, tobacco, blankets, horses, food items, and so on. The name giver may be someone such as a grandparent or great-grandparent, or an elder who is not related to the recipient, but who has some social standing in the community. Marvin Calf Robe, for instance, received his present name, *Kiitokílaapii*, from his uncle, and in exchange for that name, Marvin gave his uncle generous gifts of cash, clothing, and tobacco. As another example, *Akáyo 'kaki*, Ryan Heavy Head, paid one of the elders to transfer the name *Otahkoika* to David Yellowfeet, who at that time was a student of Ryan's (*Kiitokílaapii*, Marvin Calf Robe, 27 October 2005, personal interview; *Akáyo 'kaki*, Ryan Heavy Head, personal communication).

I was very fortunate to have witnessed two name transfer ceremonies when I attended the twentieth anniversary celebration of RCCC, on September 30, 2006. I would like to take some time describing my experience of these ceremonies here, since this will place the foregoing discussion on names and *pommakssin* into a real life context. (In April, 2008 I went through my own naming ceremony. This event is described in Appendix 2.) As is customary in all Niitsitapi sacred ceremonies, the naming ceremonies that I observed were conducted in Niitsi'powahsin. However, with the help of Ryan Heavy Head, who later interpreted the parts of proceedings that I could not understand by simply watching, I was able to grasp most of what was taking place. The ceremonies were held during the outdoor pow-wow, and involved two RCCC staff members who were receiving names, together with *Makoiyipoka*, Bruce Wolf Child, one of the elders from the Kainai Reserve, who had apparently been asked by the recipients' families to perform the name transfers. Each ceremony commenced with Bruce giving a speech to the audience, in which, as Ryan explained to me, Bruce told four stories about his own accomplishments, and how, on the basis of these accomplishments, he had the right to transfer the names to the people concerned. This, incidentally, is common practice in Niitsitapi naming ceremonies. *Aatso 'to 'aawa*, Andy Blackwater (personal communication)

later explained to me that, “when you are going to give someone a name, you have to validate yourself as having the right to do that, based on your own merits.” Once Bruce had finished relating his own stories, he proceeded to tell the stories behind the names that were being transferred (unfortunately, I do not have the details of those stories). Following that, he prayed for the recipients. As I listened to my recording again in preparation to write about these ceremonies, I could identify the words *kainaisoka'pii* ‘all good things’, and *opáitapiiysin* ‘life’; in essence, then, Bruce was praying that the names he was transferring would bring their new bearers the blessings of all good things so that they could lead happy and successful lives. After Bruce had prayed for each person, he gently pushed them towards the centre of the tent, indicating that he was sending them out into a new phase of their lives with their new names. He then sang his praise song over the two individuals. Finally, the recipients’ family members greeted Bruce and presented him with a variety of gifts, including, from what I could see, blankets, clothing, and food items. When this had been done, the name transfers were considered “official”.

The transfer of names through *pommakssin* brings people into networks of personal relationships that often transcend familial boundaries. As we have seen from the discussion so far, names may be passed down within families, or they may be transferred from outside the family; whatever the case, the transfer of names usually involves several people who are, or become, connected to one another, through this process. The way in which Ryan Heavy Head received his name, *Akáyo'kaki*, is a good case in point. In appreciation of Ryan’s assistance with bundle repatriations over a number of years, elder *Mi'ksskimm*, Frank Weasel Head, paid another elder, *Mamio'kakiikin*, Adam Delaney, money to give Ryan a name. In exchange, Adam gave Ryan the name *Akáyo'kaki*, which speaks of one of Adam’s best deeds. Although Ryan is not related to either Frank or Adam in the sense of blood ties, the transfer of the name *Akáyo'kaki* from Adam to Ryan, with Frank’s help, has effectively bonded Ryan in kinship relationships with these two people. Ryan (28 October 2005, personal interview) explained this to me in the following way:

When Frank was paying Adam for the name, Frank was already taking me as a relative; so Frank is kind of like my grandpa. Also, since then, because Adam gave me that name, he’s always treated me like a relative, like a child. He’s always happy to see me, always happy to help me any time I ask him for help.

It is crucial to understand that the Niitsitapi practice of paying for names does not reduce the latter to ‘commodities’ that are simply bought and sold at will. On the contrary, people respect and take pride in their names, because of the sacrifices that have been made in exchange for them. This aspect of *pommakssin* is related to the Niitsitapi concept of *saponihtaan* ‘paying or putting into something’, which I introduced earlier in this chapter. *Saponihtaan* has several social functions. Firstly, *saponihtaan* ensures that, when a person makes personal sacrifices in order to go through a certain transfer, they have full rights to use whatever has been transferred to them, and no one else can question these rights because a proper exchange has been made. Going beyond this notion of valid claims to rights, is the idea that the more a person engages in *saponihtaan* (in other words, the more they ‘put into’ their transfer), the more they appreciate what they receive in exchange for what they have given. There is an acute perception in Niitsitapi society that someone who does not pay for a transfer is less likely to value, or respect, what they get from it. Most significantly, however, *saponihtaan*, and thus *pommakssin* itself, can be applied as a means of creating a condition, or context, where something beneficial will come, not only to the person making the sacrifice, but also to the community as a whole (*Akáyo’kaki*, Ryan Heavy Head, personal communication.) It was noted earlier that, within the context of personal naming, people engage in *saponihtaan* as part of the process of *pommakssin*. By paying for the right to carry names, they acknowledge the value of the names and how much the names mean to them (*Mi’ksskimm*, Frank Weasel Head, 9 November 2005; *Sipisohkitopi* Emil Wings, 20 September 2006; *Náápiákii*, Carolla Calf Robe, 20 September 2006, personal interviews). In addition, the new name bearers become accountable, in terms of how they carry the names forward, to other people who have taken part in, or witnessed, the transfer process.

It is also believed that, by making personal sacrifices, people set the foundation for truly embodying their names (*Kiitokílaapii*, Marvin Calf Robe, 02 October 2006, personal interview). The notion of ‘embodying’ names speaks to the way in which people endeavour to ‘live up to’, or ‘live out’, their names in accordance with the prescribed ideas, or values, which are embedded within them. The Niitsi’powahsin word for ‘embodiment’ is *aistomatoop* ‘it is done to our bodies/beings’; which derives from the root *iisto* ‘self/body’. It has been explained to me that, in Niitsi’powahsin, there is almost no distinction between ‘self’ and ‘body’, hence words such as *niisto* ‘myself’ and *noistom* ‘my body’ (*Akáyo’kaki*, Ryan Heavy Head, personal communication). On this basis, embodying a name involves more than simply ‘living up to’ it; rather, embodiment entails “becoming” that name by truly

identifying with it, and by allowing the name and all that it stands for; that is, all of the things that have been transferred along with the name, to become an intimate part of every aspect of one's being. Thus, when people carry certain names, they may adopt certain attitudes or behaviours that portray what the name is all about. *Kiitokílaapii*, Marvin Calf Robe (02 October 2006, personal interview), for instance, shared the following with me, from his own personal experience:

Kiitokílaapii is a warrior name. With that name, I've carried a certain attitude; I've embodied that name. I tend to be assertive, sometimes a little aggressive, because there's a certain way I have to present myself. Now I'm going into other things, so I have to look at maybe changing my name; because some of those attitudes don't necessarily make sense now.

This concept of *aistomatoop*, as it pertains to naming, is also reflected in the language, through the way in which people introduce themselves to others. For example, if my co-supervisor, Ryan Heavy Head, were to introduce himself by his Niitsitapi name, *Akáyo 'kaki*, he could say, "*Nitaanikko Akáyo 'kaki*", meaning 'I am called *Akáyo 'kaki*'; which is a common form of introduction. Alternatively, he might say, "*Niistóaanok(a) Akáyo 'kaki*", meaning, in essence, 'This is who I am, *Akáyo 'kaki*'. The presence of the root *iisto* in the latter expression indicates a reference to the whole person, that is, spirit, mind, and body; so someone who introduces themselves in this way is communicating their complete identification, at a physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual level, with their name. Elder *Aatso 'to 'aawa*, Andy Blackwater (personal communication), for instance, told me that, when he has to speak in a public setting, he introduces himself as "*Niistóaanoko Aatso 'to 'aawa*", meaning, 'I am *Aatso 'to 'aawa*', not "*Nitaanikko Aatso 'to 'aawa*", that is, 'I am called *Aatso 'to 'aawa*'; because, in Andy's own words, "I have become that name." The embodiment of Niitsitapi personal names appears to be an intensely personal, and somewhat spiritual, process, through which name bearers gain a strong sense of identity.

As I came to grips with the concept of *pommakssin* and its application within the context of Niitsitapi personal naming, I began to see how all of the things involved in *pommakssin*—transfer, exchange, sacrificial giving, rights, expectations, responsibilities, relationships, and embodiment—appear to facilitate the perpetuation, or renewal, of not only the names themselves, but also of the history, beliefs, and values, that have become part of the names

over time. However, I also became more and more aware of the remarkable impact that the transfer of names has on the lives of the individuals who take on the names, and I found myself wanting to delve yet deeper into the Niitsitapi culture to find out more about why this is so. Why, for instance, go through this whole process of transfer, and in so doing, make great personal sacrifices, just to take on a name? Why too, would a person have the desire to live out, and even beyond that, “become” that name? I began to wonder whether *pommakssin* itself could be connected to other cultural concepts, or philosophies of thought, which might shed some light on these issues.

The answers to my questions came, as they often did during the course of this research, in somewhat of a roundabout way, through a casual conversation that I had one day with Ryan Heavy Head and Marvin Calf Robe around the ceremonial aspects of naming. We had been talking about how, in the traditional Niitsitapi way, the giving and receiving of names, whether this concerns a child receiving a name from a grandparent in a private family setting, or an older person who is being transferred a name at a public gathering, almost always incorporates a ceremonial element. As I have already described in this chapter, naming ceremonies usually involve a combination of elements such as prayer, story telling, singing, dancing, face painting, and gift giving. Ryan and Marvin explained to me that, in Niitsitapi culture, any type of ceremony is performed with two main purposes in mind: *sstowa’pssi* ‘growth’, and *kamota’pii* ‘protection’. Fundamentally, they reasoned, naming, which is a form of ceremony in and of itself, must be underpinned by these two concepts. Going back through my recordings and field notes after this conversation, I began to realise that many of the things that people had told me made a lot more sense in light of this notion, and I started to recognise some of the ways in which *sstowa’pssi* and *kamota’pii* appear to work through Niitsitapi personal names. I also began to see a very close connection between these two concepts.

Although the Niitsi’powahsin expression, *sstowa’pssi*, is usually translated into English as ‘growth’, it also refers to the notion of development, and the gaining of tools, knowledge and resources. *Sstowa’pssi* is tied into the Niitsitapi concept of *opáitapiiysin* ‘life’; so together, these two expressions articulate the notion of gaining all the tools, knowledge, and resources to live a fulfilling life (*Akáyo’kaki*, Ryan Heavy Head, personal communication). I have found that, in most of my interviews, people have made comments which, in one way or another, reflect the idea that personal names are given out with the intention that the person

receiving the name will experience some measure of personal growth whilst they hold that name (e.g. *Kiitokíiaapii*, Marvin Calf Robe, 27 October 2005, 02 October 2006, personal interview; LeRoy Little Bear, personal communication; *Mi'ksskimm*, Frank Weasel Head, 09 November 2005; *Niipomaakii*, Georgette Fox, 09 September 2006; *Siksskiaakii*, Beverly Hungry Wolf, 27 September 2006; personal interviews).

As I have already discussed and illustrated in this chapter, Niitsitapi personal names are frequently transferred with stories of personal experiences, deeds and/or accomplishments. Essentially, these things are transformed into expectations towards the new name bearer to grow, by matching or even exceeding, the achievements and/or moral conduct of the previous holder of the name. In this way, names continue to be 'built up' with stories of new accomplishments that can one day be transferred along with the name to someone else. The examples of *Kiitokíiaapii*, Marvin Calf Robe, and *Áwákaasomaahkaa*, Quenton Heavy Head, provided earlier, show how these two names have inspired personal growth and development in the lives of their present bearers, and how the names are being built up through the things that Marvin and Quenton are doing whilst they are carrying the names. In the future, Marvin and Quenton may take on new names and transfer the names that they presently hold to others. Should this happen, the recipients will be made aware of everything that has been accomplished with the names, not only by Marvin and Quenton, but by all the people who carried the names previously. In this way, the new name bearers will know what expectations and responsibilities are entailed in carrying the names forward, and these transferred expectations and responsibilities will, in turn, serve as a guide for *sstowa'psii* in their lives.

It is important to recognise, however, that whilst *sstowa'psii* is indeed intended for the personal growth of the individuals who carry the names, so that they can lead fulfilling lives, the underlying expectation is that these people will use these benefits to make a positive contribution to their community. As *Kiitokíiaapii*, Marvin Calf Robe commented to me, "If you're just doing it for yourself, who else benefits from it?" This remark reflects the traditional Niitsitapi philosophy that the personal growth and development of individual people is always aimed towards the welfare of the community as a whole. Although each person has their own individual identity as a unique human being, they are simultaneously part of a wider social construct in which they are expected to play an active and contributory role. In this context, then, 'doing things around the names' is not for the sole benefit of the individual, but is also intended for the good of others in their community (*Akáyo'kaki*, Ryan

Heavy Head, 28 October 2005; *Kiitokíiaapii*, Marvin Calf Robe, 02 October 2006; personal interviews).

Seeing the relationship between Niitsitapi personal names and *sstowa'pssi* has helped me to understand the concept, mentioned to me by several people (e.g. *Kiitokíiaapii*, Marvin Calf Robe, 27 October 2005; *Áwákaasomaahkaa*, Quenton Heavy Head, November 8 2005; personal interviews), of “going after” or “pursuing” names. In most cases, people will take on new names based on counsel and encouragement from family members, friends, and/or community leaders, but in certain instances, individuals themselves perceive that the time is appropriate for a name change, and they will then actively pursue obtaining a new name. The example of *Áwákaasomaahkaa*, Quenton Heavy Head, is a case in point, in that Quenton himself decided to take on a new name as part of his preparations to join the Horns Society. Quenton, in other words, had reached a point in his life where he had gone through some personal changes (growth) which qualified him to gain entry into the Horns Society (which is the top sacred society on the Kainai Reserve). In recognition of these things, and the new phase of life and *sstowa'pssi* that he would be entering into by joining the Horns Society, Quenton wanted to go by, or be identified in terms of, a new name. In this regard, *Aatso'to'aawa*, Andy Blackwater (personal communication), has explained to me that “a new name signifies a new person; a new individual, with a new beginning.” (The Niitsitapi practice of taking on new names as one goes through different stages of one’s life, especially and most commonly, in the case of men, was mentioned by many participants in my interviews, e.g. *Náápiiakii*, Carolla Calf Robe, 20 September 2006; *Niipomaakii*, Georgette Fox, September 15 2006; *Siksskiaakii*, Beverley Hungry Wolf, 27 September 2006; personal interviews. As mentioned in §2.7.1, this practice is already well documented in the literature, e.g. McClintock 1992; Oakley & Black Plume 2004; Brown & Peers 2006.)

It is also interesting to note that, although in certain instances names may not be given out, or transferred, with *sstowa'pssi* explicitly in mind, they may be ‘turned around’ to become names that carry this quality, and then be passed on to others as ‘good’ names. *Ai'ai'stahkommi*, Duane Mistaken Chief (personal communication), describes one such case in point:

Sometimes seemingly derogatory names like my father's name
Paahkapsaahkomapi ‘Bad Boy/Boy Of The Not Good/Misfortunate Boy’ are

treated as a *ksiiimotsiiysin* ‘derision among contemporaries’, but the man that originally was labeled with that name decided to prove his contemporaries wrong and accomplished great things. Then, instead of discarding the name, he kept it, because he had proven himself otherwise. So the name was somewhat of a reminder of that time when he wasn't a very good man and then later became a great man.

Another example comes from *Kiitokílaapii*, Marvin Calf Robe (personal communication):

My daughter's name is *Paksskii*, ‘Broad Face’. This name belonged to my Mom's aunt...it was a ‘teasing’ name, a childhood name, but it was used in a negative, hurtful way. Nevertheless, my aunt kept that name until she died. My Mom gave the name to my daughter, who has accomplished great things with the name; it has become a really good name.

In a separate interview with Marvin's mother, *Náápiiakii*, Carolla Calf Robe, on 20 September 2006, Carolla explained to me that her aunt, *Paksskii*, ‘Slender Face’ had in fact been given another name as an adult, but for some unknown reason, no one ever called her by that name, and thus she went by her childhood name, *Paksskii*, all her life. Carolla told me that her aunt was a very kind, happy, and friendly, person who was much loved by her family and others in the community. To honour the memory of her aunt, Carolla gave the name *Paksskii* to her granddaughter. Thus, because Carolla's aunt carried her name well, despite its original negative implications, *Paksskii* has now become a respected name with positive associations.

Given the connection between *sstowa'pssi*, *opáitapiiysin*, and Niitsitapi personal names, that I have attempted to explain here, it does appear, as Ryan and Marvin suggested to me, that the transfer of names through *pommakssin* is motivated by the desire to see *sstowa'pssi* manifested in the lives of the name bearers. The embodiment of names, which was discussed earlier in the context of *pommakssin*, appears to be a manifestation of *sstowa'pssi*, since embodiment will inevitably require some measure of personal transformation on the part of the person receiving the name. Ultimately, as I have already emphasised, the underlying intent is for Niitsitapi society as a whole to benefit from the results of *sstowa'pssi* in individuals' lives.

Giving out personal names with *sstowa'pssi* in mind is also sometimes referred to in the sense of 'setting a path' for the life of the person receiving the name. *Aatso'to'aawa*, Andy Blackwater (personal communication), for instance, describes how:

As members of [a sacred] society, we have the right to make up a name for a younger person. You have the responsibility of explaining what the name is all about. You are setting a path for the child to follow by giving them that name...the best path for his or her survival.

The notion of setting a path for a person in life, usually with reference to a child, is expressed in Niitsi'powahsin as *aayaksikowata* (*Ai'ai'stahkommi*, Duane Mistaken Chief, personal communication). Regrettably, I have not had enough time to explore this concept further during the course of this project. Nevertheless, Andy's comment that names are used to set "the best path for [a person's] *survival*" (my italics) suggests that there is a protective element involved in name giving. Certainly, the way I see it, *sstowa'pssi* can only take place if the people concerned are protected from those things that may negatively affect them and thus inhibit, or even prevent, *sstowa'pssi* in their lives. As stated earlier, the concept of protection is expressed in Niitsi'powahsin as *kamota'pii*. However, the English word 'protection' is really just a 'quick and easy' gloss for *kamota'pii*, which speaks more of 'an escaping from something'; in the sense that, in *opáitapiiysin* 'life', there is always imminent danger, but one will escape from it and find safety (*Akáyo'kaki*, Ryan Heavy Head, 01 October 2007, personal communication). From a Niitsitapi perspective, *kamota'pii* comes through those things, such as names, that have been transferred to the individual/s concerned. The best way for me to illustrate the intent to provide, as well as evidence for, *kamota'pii* through naming, is to allow the reader to engage with the following two stories:

My childhood name was *Sipiskomaapi*, meaning 'Night Boy'. In my first couple of years of life I was kind of a sickly child, in and out of hospital. At one point I got really sick and the doctor in Cardston told my parents, "You guys better prepare for the worst, because I don't think Marvin is going to make it through the night." Anyway, my grandfather, Joe Crow Spreads His Wings, had come in to the hospital room and he saw my Mom and Dad; they had given up hope, they were crying. My grandfather was quite upset, and he said, "What is wrong with you guys? Look, he's lying right there, he's not

dead, he's still alive, but you guys are acting like he's dead; you guys should be praying so your son has life." So he sang his song and prayed over me, and said, "Marvin is going to do great things in life, he's going to have a long life"; and he gave me the name *Sipiskomaapi*. Now, where this name comes from...my grandfather, sometime back in the 1930s or 1940s, got beaten up really badly, and he was rushed to the hospital. When my great grandfather, James Crow Spreads His Wings, got to the hospital, they told him that my grandfather wasn't going to make it. Anyway, while my grandfather was lying on the operating table, he saw this old man, who had walked through the walls, a spirit, and he could hear this spirit singing. The spirit came in and said to Joe, "You've still got a long life ahead of you, when your hair is as white as mine, that's when you're going to pass on; you're going to have lots of grandchildren, great grandchildren. I'm going to give you seven names, and you will give these out at times when people have given up hope on someone; this is how you are going to help your family out." Well, my grandfather recovered, and grew to be an old man. He passed on these seven names, and like he said this name, *Sipiskomaapi*, would carry me into adulthood, and it did. (*Kiitokíiaapii*, Marvin Calf Robe, 27 October 2005, personal interview. Marvin's mother, *Náápiaakii*, Carolla Calf Robe, related this same story to me when I interviewed her on 20 September, 2006.)

My Blackfoot name is *Matsipi'kssílaakii*, which means 'Beautiful Bird Woman'. When I was a little girl, apparently I used to faint a lot, or have seizures. One day, I was at home with my parents, and this happened to me. I guess I really scared my parents, because for a while I wasn't breathing, I was just out of it. So my Dad went on horseback up the hill to my grandfather's place. My grandfather was a doctor, in our own way, a medicine man, and his dad had also been a medicine man. Anyway, my Dad asked my grandfather to come to our tent. My grandfather took my dad's horse and came to our place. He asked my Mom for some hot water, and he filled up this tank, or reservoir, with the hot water, and put me in it, and I started coming around. Afterwards, my grandfather doctored me; he painted my face, prayed for me, gave me a feather, and he pushed me out of our tent with my name, *Matsipi'kssílaakii*. He told me that this name would help me to grow strong, to live to an old age,

and that I would help many people during my life. (*Matsipi'kssíiaakii*, Joyce First Rider, 28 October 2005, personal interview)

In an unrecorded conversation, Joyce explained to me how the name *Matsipi'kssíiaakii* originated from a spiritual experience that her grandfather himself had gone through, which also had to do with healing. She also told me that even though her grandfather gave her this name, no one has ever called her by it, and she has gone by another nickname throughout her life. According to Joyce, this makes her very sad, because one of the root words in her name, *maatsi*, indicates something beautiful and precious, or, something to be treasured. However, Joyce also mentioned that, whilst she is the only person who really remembers the name, the things that her grandfather prayed for when he gave it to her have come to pass, in that the name brought her safely into adulthood, and she has become a social worker.

These two stories provide us with some idea as to how Niitsitapi personal names are given out with *kamota'pii* in mind. From what we see here, the names *Sipiskomaapi* and *Matsipi'kssíiaakii* were transferred to Marvin and Joyce (respectively) as a means of protection, or a way of escape from further harm, so that they could reach adulthood safely and go on to accomplish good things in their lives. In other words, through the transfer of these names, the paths for both Marvin's and Joyce's survival in life were set (cf. *Aatso'to'aawa*, Andy Blackwater, personal communication). Through these stories, we also see something of the intricate interconnectedness between all of the cultural concepts that I have dealt with in this chapter: *akáitapiitsinikssiistsi* 'stories of the past people/ancestors', *pommakssin* 'transfer'; *aayaksikowata* 'setting a path'; *opáitapiiysin* 'life'; *kainaisoka'pii* 'all good things'; *sstowa'pssi* 'growth'; and *kamota'pii* 'protection'.

As I have thought about how all of these things relate to one another and work together through Niitsitapi personal naming, I have begun to notice an underlying pattern that reflects not only the attitude of respect that I discussed earlier, but also the value that traditional Niitsitapi society appears to place on considering people's needs, and of wanting what is best for them. I have already explained, for instance, how personal names are given out as blessings for *kainaisoka'pii* 'all good things' in the lives of the people who are receiving the names. Certainly, *sstowa'pssi* and *kamota'pii* reflect something of the essence of *kainaisoka'pii*, in the sense that both 'growth' and 'protection' are obviously 'good things'. However, underlying the apparent desire to see *kainaisoka'pii* come to pass in individuals'

lives is yet another Niitsitapi concept, *kimmapiypitsin* ‘the practice of being kind to others’. *Ai’ai’stahkommi*, Duane Mistaken Chief (personal communication) has explained to me how the Niitsitapi word, *kimmapiypitsin*, is made up of several elements which reflect important cultural attitudes and values: *[i]kimm*, for instance, speaks of ‘kindness’, and within this, *imma* has to do with ‘feeling’, so together, this expresses something like ‘feeling kindness’; *api* refers to the body, or something that has been embodied (according to *Akáyo’kaki* Ryan Heavy Head, personal communication, this could also refer to sight or seeing, from *aapi*) ; and *pitsin[ni]* means ‘to be of that nature, or habit’. *Kimmapiypitsin*, therefore, expresses the notion of a habitual practice of showing kindness to, or looking with compassion upon, others. This is something that is to be embodied, or lived out, as a way of life, as opposed to being something that is just practiced randomly. In my view, the Niitsitapi practice of transferring personal names, with the intent to see *kainaisoka’pii*, including *sstowa’pssi* and *kamota’pii*, fulfilled in the lives of the name bearers, is a strong manifestation of *kimmapiypitsin*.

The stories of *Sipiskomaapi* and *Matsipi’kssíiaakii* also provide us with a glimpse of some profoundly spiritual aspects of Niitsitapi personal names and naming. I believe, very strongly, that for me to simply gloss over the spiritual dimensions of Niitsitapi personal names in this discussion would be to the detriment of the entire project, because, as I have come to understand during the course of this study, Niitsitapi spirituality is one of the core elements underlying the giving and receiving of personal names within the culture. In the traditional Niitsitapi world, spiritual beliefs permeate every single aspect of day-to-day life (The Blackfoot Gallery Committee 2001:8; LeRoy Little Bear, 02 November 2005, personal communication; *Mi’ksskimm*, Frank Weasel Head, 09 November 2005; *Náápiaakii*, Carolla Calf Robe, 20 September 2006; *Siksskiaakii*, Beverley Hungry Wolf, 27 September 2006; personal interviews). I have learned, from my own experience that, since these beliefs are captured and expressed through the language, Niitsi’powahsin (§2.2.1; §5.1), and given that Niitsitapi personal names are part of the language, one cannot research the names without encountering their spiritual dimensions. I must stress, however, that I still have only limited knowledge about Niitsitapi spirituality as a subject. The latter, is, by nature, a sacred topic, and, as such, there are many aspects of it that would never be divulged to outsiders such as myself. In dealing with the spiritual aspects of Niitsitapi personal names and naming, then, I can only speak about the things I have learned through what people in the Kainai community have felt at liberty to share with me on the subject.

Underlying the Niitsitapi belief that spirituality is very much part of, and not separate from, people's experiences in everyday life, is the philosophy that everything in the universe is alive, that is, possesses energy and a spirit, and that all things are related to one another (LeRoy Little Bear, 2 November 2005, personal communication). Out of this comes an acute awareness of the existence of a metaphysical (spiritual) world alongside the physical (natural) world, and the belief that beings from either realm are able to communicate with one another, and have powers and gifts which they share in order to help one another. (The reader may recall that the name, *Kiitokílaapii*, which was discussed earlier in this chapter, conveys this spiritual concept through the story of how Marvin's ancestor communicated with the prairie chicken, and how the prairie chicken enabled the two warriors to escape to safety.) The following excerpt from *The Blackfoot Gallery* (2001:13) is helpful in further illustrating these spiritual concepts:

Through the ages, the *naatoyitapiiksi*, or Spirit Beings, took pity on our ancestors and came to help them. *Naatoyitapiiksi* changed themselves into human form and taught our ancestors the ceremonies and songs that we could use to call on them for help. *Naatoyitapiiksi* also gave our ancestors physical objects that are now kept together in sacred bundles. These bundles are our connection to *naatoyitapiiksi*, and we use them in our ceremonies. *Naatoyitapiiksi* continue to live among us and help us in our lives. We must always be mindful of this and respect their presence. In this way our understanding of the world is very different from that of non-Native people.

Many Niitsitapi personal names (perhaps as much as seventy-five percent, according to *Ni'takaiksamaikowan*, Pete Standing Alone, 28 June 2007, recorded/archived interview) come from Niitsitapi spiritual ways; from things such as bundles, ceremonies, sacred societies, dreams, visions, prophecy, visitations from *naatoyitapiiksi*; communication with animals; and other spiritual experiences, such as healings; as we have seen in the instances of names such as *Kiitokílaapii*, *Sipiskomaapi*, and *Matsipi'kssílaakii* (*Kiitokílaapii*, Marvin Calf Robe, 27 October 2005; *Matsipi'kssílaakii*, Joyce First Rider, October 28 2005; *Niipomaakii*, Georgette Fox, 15 September 2006; *Spitaikowan*, Bernard Tall Man, 18 September 2006; *Náápiakii*, Carolla Calf Robe, 20 September 2006; *Siksskiaakii*, Beverley Hungry Wolf, 27 September 2006; personal interviews). *Mi'ksskimm*, Frank Weasel Head, (09 November

2005, personal interview) spoke to me about the spiritual origins and nature of names, and illustrated with the following story about two of his names:

Even before I was born I was given a Blackfoot name. I was born prematurely one month early because of an accident; my Mom got rear-ended in a team and buggy by a car. While my Mom was in the hospital, my Dad got there and told my grandmother, “Don’t worry, he’s going to be a boy, and this is the name he is going to carry, I’m going to give him my baby name, so he’s going to be alright.” And that’s the name I carried until 1961. When I first got my medicine pipe bundle in 1961, my Mom gave me a new name. Then I gave that away spiritually to one of my grand-nephews who was very sick. They didn’t expect him to live, so I did the same thing; I said “Don’t worry”, and I gave him my name, now he’s 29 years old. So there’s that history, and there’s that spiritual part to the names. Sometimes names are given spiritually so that the person [receiving the name] will get better, and live a long life, so these are the spiritual things. How did my Dad know that I was going to be a boy? I don’t know, I never did ask him about it. That’s why I always say, our spirituality is connected to everything else in our way of life, so names have spirituality, they have meaning in this way.

Frank’s story also highlights the view, held by many people in the Kainai community, that names themselves are sacred entities which possess spiritual power and are thus able to connect humans (mortals) to the spirit world. From what I understand, this notion is grounded in the belief that language, particularly spoken language, contains the power to bring things to life; to speak things into being (Bastien 2004; *Ai’ai’stahkommi*, Duane Mistaken Chief, personal communication). Bastien (2004:140) explains this concept as follows:

Speaking is connecting to all of creation, and through language one touches, relates, connects, and participates with the powerful force of the universe. The mysterious force of *[i]htsipaitapiyo’pa* [‘source of life’] moves through language. It touches, connects, and lives through words as it makes life move.

Since, as noted earlier, I have had only limited exposure to the spiritual aspects of Niitsitapi culture, I am not qualified to speak on my own authority about the cultural philosophies and

beliefs underlying this approach to language, so I refer the interested reader to Bastien (2004:127-140) for her detailed thoughts on this issue. However, it is enough for our purposes here to grasp the basic idea that, in the Niitsitapi world, language (referring specifically to Niitsi'powahsin) is alive, powerful, and connected to the spiritual realm; and that Niitsitapi personal names, as part of the language, Niitsi'powahsin, must necessarily have the same kind of life, power, and spiritual connections.

Many people in the Kainai community, especially those who live a traditional lifestyle, outwardly acknowledge the spiritual power of names. At a public naming ceremony which I witnessed at Red Crow Community College on 30 September 2007, *Kinaksaapo'p*, Narcisse Blood, told the audience that, “*whenever a person's name is spoken, it is a prayer for direction, purpose, and good things for that person*” (my italics for emphasis). In my interviews, I have heard many people say that names are given out as a prayer and a blessing to those who are receiving the names, so that they will experience *kainaisoka'pii* ‘all good things’ (e.g. *Spitaikowan*, Bernard Tall Man, 18 September 2006; *Náápiaakii*, Carolla Calf Robe, 20 September 2006; *Sipisohkitopi*, Emil Wings, 20 September 2006; *Siksskiaakii*, Beverley Hungry Wolf, 27 September 2006; *Mamio'kakiikin*, Adam Delaney, 29 September 2006; personal interviews). Equating names with prayer, as is implied in Narcisse's comment, underscores the sacred nature of names in the Niitsitapi world, and shows how names, as spoken language, are seen as connections to the spiritual realm.

Since Niitsitapi personal names, as part of the spoken language, Niitsi'powahsin, connect people in the physical world to the spiritual world, the use of Niitsitapi personal names is very important in ceremonial contexts; thus anyone who joins a religious society or participates in any kind of sacred ceremony must have a Niitsitapi name. As it has been explained to me, Niitsi'powahsin is the only language used in traditional ceremonies (at least the ones that are conducted in the proper way), because, from a Niitsitapi perspective, Niitsi'powahsin is not only the language that carries people's breath to the ancestors (Bastien 2004:122), but it is also the language of the ancestors themselves. To pray to the ancestors in any language other than Niitsi'powahsin would be foolish because the ancestors would not be able to understand what is being said; and in the same way, the ancestors would not be able to recognise anyone who did not have a Niitsitapi name. This would be a very negative thing for the person concerned, because, in being unable to identify themselves to the ancestors, they would be disqualified from receiving anything that the ancestors may be transferring to

people within the context of the particular ceremony being performed. Niitsitapi personal names, then, provide their bearers with spiritual identity (*Akáyo 'kaki*, Ryan Head, personal communication; *Otahkokaanaisskiinaa*, Edna Bare Shinbone, October 26 2005; *Siksskiaakii*, Beverley Hungry Wolf, 27 September 2006; *Mamio 'kakiikin*, Adam Delaney, 29 September 2006; personal interviews).

Another interesting implication of the sacred nature of Niitsitapi personal names has to do with the mistranslation of these names into English. During my interviews, a number of people mentioned how the mistranslation of names from Niitsi'powahsin into English distorts the real meanings of the names (e.g. *Mamio 'kakiikin*, Adam Delaney, 14 September 2006, 29 September 2006; *Sipisohkitopi*, Emil Wings, 20 September 2006; personal interviews). I discussed this issue with *Ai 'ai 'stahkommi*, Duane Mistaken Chief one day, and he explained it to me from the perspective that names, as spiritual entities, capture the life and power of the things that are associated with them:

A mistranslated name represents a non-event. If the translation is not a true reflection of the real meaning of that name, then it represents nothing; it is *ksissta 'pii* 'meaningless'. So, mistranslated names will often disappear.

An example of a mistranslated name that has disappeared from use appears in an article on Niitsitapi names, entitled "Blood names rich in tribal history", which was published by the Lethbridge Herald (September 8, 1981). I quote: "The surname Stone (*Ohkotoka*)...was interpreted as Tough Bread. The name has since died out." However, I have also heard people mention that mistranslated names, or, even more interestingly, names that have been translated from other languages, including English, into Niitsi'powahsin, can be 'built up' and subsequently transferred to others as 'good' names (*Akáyo 'kaki*, Ryan Heavy Head, *Piiaikihstsiipiimi*, Louis Soop; personal communication); in the same way as in cases where names that are originally given out with negative, or hurtful, intentions, can be turned around to become honourable names.

The spiritual approach to life in traditional Niitsitapi society appears to be a key element underlying the language, Niitsi'powahsin, and, within this context, the giving and receiving of Niitsitapi personal names, which are spoken forms of the language. *Ai 'ai 'stahkommi*, Duane Mistaken Chief (personal communication), has explained to me how:

Every time the names are spoken, the power of the events that are associated with them is recreated and that power and energy is then directed towards those who carry the names. Thus, in naming someone, the name is used to set the path for that person, to give guidance and direction.

Duane also told me how names keep the spirits of the ancestors alive, and make their wisdom available to the name bearers. In this regard, *Náápiiakii*, Carolla Calf Robe (20 September 2006, personal interview), has told me how, “[w]hen I pray, I call upon the one who had my name before, and I ask her to help me in life, to guide me, and to help me carry her name in a respectable way.” Implicit in these statements is the following notion: that the energy and power of *akáitapiitsinikssiistsi* ‘stories of the past people/ancestors’, are transferred with names through *pommakssin*, and that this transfer brings about *sstowa’pssi*, and provides *kamota’pii*, in the lives of the people receiving the names; so that these individuals will be able to follow the paths (c.f. *aayaksikowata*) which lead to *kainaisoka’pii* ‘all good things’, and, in turn, live up to their responsibilities of helping others. This, in turn, would suggest that Niitsitapi spirituality, as an inseparable element of traditional everyday life in Niitsitapi society, underlies and connects all of the various cultural concepts associated with naming, that have been dealt with in this chapter. In closing, I would like to take this notion one step further, and hint at the possibility that Niitsitapi naming is, at its very core, a spiritual practice.

4.2 Summary

In this chapter, I have, to the best of my ability, presented what I have learned about Niitsitapi personal names and naming practices through my research. The progression of thought and ideas throughout the chapter is, as I stated in the introduction, a reflection of my journey in carrying out this project; insofar as I started out with the basic goal of learning about the stories, or histories, surrounding Niitsitapi personal names; which led to my investigation of other cultural concepts associated with naming; which in turn brought me to a much deeper level of knowledge and understanding than I began with, or even anticipated to reach. The overall result of this largely intuitive and fluid approach to the research is that I have been able to present what I consider to be a fairly comprehensive overview, not only of the uses and functions of Niitsitapi personal names within the context of the culture in which they are embedded, but also of some of the cultural concepts, or philosophies of thought, that appear

to underlie the entire approach to the giving and receiving of names in traditional Niitsitapi society.

In the first part of the chapter, I discussed how Niitsitapi personal names are passed down, or transferred, together with *akáitapiitsinikssiistsi* ‘stories of the past people/ancestors’, and how this gives the people who carry the names a sense of identity, in terms of knowing their own history, and understanding where they come from. I also explained how the values and beliefs that come to be embedded within the names are transformed into expectations towards the name bearers to live up to their names, and to carry them in accordance with those things that they stand for. This helps to establish personal as well as social identity; the latter having to do with how the name bearers present themselves to the community at large. I then moved on to discuss how Niitsitapi personal names are often given out, or transferred, within the context of *pommakssin* ‘transfer/exchange’, a process which involves concepts such as *saponihtaan* ‘paying or putting into something’ (the notion of giving things sacrificially in exchange for names), as well as *aistomatoop* ‘it is done to our bodies/beings’ (the concept of embodying, or ‘becoming’ one’s name). The ceremonial aspects of *pommakssin* were illustrated with reference to two names transfer ceremonies that I witnessed during one of my visits to the Kainai Reserve. *Pommakssin* is tied into the notions of *sstowa’pssi* ‘growth’, and *kamota’pii* ‘protection’; within the context of naming, personal names are usually given out in order to bring these things to pass in the lives of those people who are receiving the names. I also discussed how the Niitsitapi concept of *kimmapiiy pitsin* ‘the practice of being kind to others’ appears to be a key element underlying the transfer of names, insofar as personal names are usually given out for the purpose of ensuring that *kainaisoka’pii* ‘all good things’, including *sstowa’pssi* and *kamota’pii*, become manifest in the lives of the name bearers. It was emphasised that these things are not only intended for the benefit of the individuals themselves, but also for the welfare of the community as a whole. This underscores the importance of the social aspect of naming in Niitsitapi culture. In the latter part of my discussion, I addressed some of the spiritual dimensions of Niitsitapi personal naming that I have become aware of during the course of my study, and suggested the possibility that Niitsitapi spiritual beliefs, as an inseparable part of everyday life in traditional Niitsitapi society, underpin and connect every aspect of name giving and receiving in traditional Niitsitapi culture.

At this point, I would like to share with the reader how I have personally experienced the reality of some of the concepts that I have explored, in the course of carrying out this project. First and foremost, I have had the privilege of receiving a Niitsitapi personal name, *linisskimmáákii*, ‘Buffalo Stone Woman’ (§3.7.2). A full description of my naming ceremony is given in Appendix 2. In carrying this name, I now have some measure of social identity in the Kainai community. For example, I can now introduce myself by my Niitsitapi name, and tell people the story of how I received the name; which gives me a sense of ‘belonging’ in the community, and perhaps ‘softens’ local perceptions of me being an outsider. Furthermore, and far more importantly, by going through the process of receiving this name, and learning the story behind it, I have had the opportunity to actually live out some of the Niitsitapi cultural concepts and practices that I have written about in this chapter (§4.1). The name, for instance, was transferred to me in the traditional Niitsitapi way; in ceremony, by an elder, and with witnesses. *Pommakssin* ‘transfer/exchange’ and *saponihtaan* ‘sacrificial giving’ were essential elements of this transfer, insofar as I purchased and gave gifts to Narcisse (and later to Ryan and Adrienne) in exchange for the name.

I have also experienced these concepts in some other ways. For instance, in order to pursue and obtain the kind of knowledge which I needed to write this dissertation, I have engaged in *pommakssin*, insofar as I have taken part in certain exchanges with the people who have shared this knowledge with me. At a physical, or material, level, these exchanges have entailed giving gifts such as tobacco, clothing, and cash, to participants in my interviews. At a more personal, and emotional, level, I have pursued, and am still pursuing, relationships with certain people in the Kainai community, in exchange for the knowledge that has been transferred to me. All of my exchanges have come through *saponihtaan*, or personal sacrifice, whether this has been financial sacrifice; sacrifice in the sense of frequent travel away from home and separation from family; or self-sacrifice in the sense of putting time, energy, and much emotion into relationships, and into the project itself. Through this, however, I have experienced *sstowa’pssi*; in terms of having learned first-hand what it takes to carry out a research project of this nature, and in negotiating all of the challenges, including personal challenges, which go with the territory. It will probably only be some time in the future when I will be able to see the full extent to which *sstowa’pssi* has been manifest through my life as a result of this endeavour, but I am sure that it will contribute towards *kainaisoka’pii* in my journey through *opáitapiiysin*.

As I explained at the outset of this chapter, everything that I have written about here is based on what people in the Kainai community have shared with me around their names, based on their own personal experiences and perceptions. Basically, all that I have really done here is articulate, in writing, those portions of the vast existing Niitsitapi oral literature on names, which I have encountered and attempted to come to grips with, during the course of my study. As such, I would like to draw this section of the dissertation to a close not with my own comments, but with some of the thoughts that have been expressed to me in the conversations that I have had with many different Niitsitapi people around their names, over the past three years. The following quotations, in my view, capture the essence of the entire discussion that I have presented in this chapter, and provide it with a fitting conclusion:

If I really want to be who I am, if I go to a meeting and introduce myself, I will say, “My name is *Mamio ’kakiikin*”, because actually that’s my name. (*Mamio ’kakiikin*, Adam Delaney, 14 September 2006, personal interview)

My obligation [with respect to my name] is to know the history of the name, to ensure that the legacy of the name lives on...responsibility has been given to me through my name...names are extremely important...it gives you a sense of belonging...if you know the story behind the name, it adds to the strength of that name. (*Aatso ’to ’aawa*, Andy Blackwater, personal communication)

The fact that some of our Blackfoot names cannot be translated into English is not that important from a traditional viewpoint, because the name in the Blackfoot language is sufficient in itself to keep our language, traditions, and culture, alive. (*Mamio ’kakiikin*, Adam Delaney, 29 September 2006, personal interview)

CHAPTER 5: Conclusion

5.0 Overview

In the previous chapter, I presented what I have learned *about* Niitsitapi personal names during the course of carrying out this research project. This chapter is concerned with summarising what has been learned *from* the study, and exploring the significance of its results with respect to onomastics and social science research in general, as well as for the Niitsitapi people in particular. In §5.1, the research results are summarised and then discussed in relation to those aspects of onomastics theory that were dealt with in §2.1. The contribution of this dissertation to the field of onomastics, particularly with respect to Native American names research, is outlined in §5.2. The ways in which the current study stands to be of benefit to the Niitsitapi people themselves, in both practical and academic terms, is discussed in §5.3. The manner in which this dissertation might encourage cross-cultural dialogue in social science research is explained in §5.4. This is followed by a summary of the sociopolitical aspects of the current research (§5.5). In §5.6, I share some of my thoughts concerning how the insights that have been gained from acknowledging and accounting for the spiritual elements of Niitsitapi personal names and naming practices, might be relevant and applicable to names research in other cultures. The limitations of this dissertation, and some recommendations for further research, are discussed in §5.7. A short conclusion is given in §5.8.

5.1 The sociocultural significance of Niitsitapi personal names

In §1.1, I stated that this dissertation is aimed at providing an ethnographically-based account of the sociocultural significance of Niitsitapi personal names. With this goal in mind, I have pursued answers to the following questions in particular:

- What are the roles and functions, of personal names in traditional Niitsitapi culture?
- How are Niitsitapi personal naming practices related to other aspects of traditional Niitsitapi ways of living?

- Which cultural concepts, or local philosophies of knowledge, exert the greatest influence in terms of how personal names acquire meaning, and are used, in Niitsitapi society?

By addressing these issues, this dissertation engages with some important theoretical concerns in onomastics (see Chapter 2). In this section, I shall present a summary of the current research findings, and then elaborate on the results by showing how they relate to these theoretical perspectives.

The discussion in the preceding chapter shows, very clearly, that Niitsitapi personal names are an integral, and indeed, inseparable, part of traditional Niitsitapi socioculture. In addition to serving as markers of individual identity (§2.2), Niitsitapi personal names also perform a number of important sociocultural functions. Most significantly, the names appear to play a major role in capturing and conveying different elements of Niitsitapi cultural knowledge. This knowledge is contained within *akáítapiitsinikssiistsi* ‘stories of the past people/ancestors’, which become attached to the names, and are carried along with them, when they are given out or transferred from one person to another. The examples of the stories behind certain names, such as the name *Kiitokííaapii*, ‘Prairie Chicken Old Man’, which were provided in §4.1, illustrate how a single personal name can convey several aspects of Niitsitapi cultural knowledge, including for instance, information about Niitsitapi ethnohistory, important events, spiritual beliefs, cultural norms and values, familial history, as well as personal accomplishments and experiences.

It is also evident that the traditional Niitsitapi approach to the giving and receiving of personal names appears to be firmly underpinned by certain cultural concepts and philosophies of thought. For instance, the transfer of names from one person to another involves participation in the traditional practice of *pommakssin* ‘transfer/exchange’, which has to do with the formal transfer of certain properties, such as names. *Pommakssin* itself usually involves *saponihtaan* ‘paying, or putting into, something’, which refers to the concept of sacrificial giving in appreciation for what one has received through a particular transfer. The traditional Niitsitapi practice of paying for names was discussed with reference to these two important cultural philosophies. Additionally, it is through personal naming that other Niitsitapi concepts such as *sstowa’pssi* ‘growth’, *kamota’pii* ‘protection’, *kimmapiiy pitsin* ‘the practice of being kind to others’, and *kainaisoka’pii* ‘all good things’ become actively

manifest in the lives of those people who are involved in the naming process. By virtue of all of the beliefs and values that are ingrained within them, Niitsitapi personal names appear to play a crucial role in establishing the personal, social, and cultural, identities of individual people. The examples of names such as *Kiitokílaapii*, ‘Prairie Chicken Old Man’, and *Áwákaasomaahkaa*, ‘Running Antelope’, given in §4.1, reflect this function. Furthermore, the names themselves are seen as powerful, living entities that provide guidance, motivation, protection, as well as success and fulfilment, in the lives of their bearers. The stories behind the names *Sipiskomaapi*, ‘Night Boy’, and *Matsipi’kssílaakii*, ‘Beautiful Bird Woman’, specifically, illustrate the latter perception (§4.1).

The foregoing observations show that, whilst they do have a nominative function, Niitsitapi personal names are also richly embedded with cultural meaning. This finding contradicts the argument that names make sense only in terms of their direct reference to people or objects in the world (Mill 1872, quoted in Nuessel 1992:1; Markey 1982:131), but, rather, supports the position that names have connotative/associative meaning, or descriptive backing (Searle 1969; Nicholaisen 1978; Grant 2006). My research indicates that the descriptive backing of Niitsitapi personal names comprises a complex network of (oftentimes somewhat obscure) non-linguistic associations that are deeply rooted in a wide range of elements — personal, social, cultural, psychological, historical, physical, geographical, ecological, and spiritual — which make up the reality of the Niitsitapi world. It is from within this context, that is, the actual, indigenous, setting within which Niitsitapi personal names are used, that they derive their meaning (cf. Miller 1927; Strawson 1950; Searle 1969; Keenan 1971; Neethling 2005).

Not only do Niitsitapi personal names possess cultural meaning, but they are also effective conveyers of this content. In other words, the very cultural elements which make up the descriptive backing of the names are projected back into Niitsitapi communities through the use of the names. Niitsitapi personal names thus perform a crucial role in communicating sociocultural norms and values in Niitsitapi society. The discussion in §2.2.1 shows that similar observations have been made in research concerning the personal naming practices of other tribal societies (Sapir 1924; Miller 1927; Morice 1933; Wieschhoff 1941; Beidelman 1974; Underhill 1979; Moore 1984; Salomon & Grosboll 1986; Watson 1986; Basso 1996; de Klerk & Bosch 1996; Moyo 1996; Musere & Byakutaga 1998; Onúkawa 1998; Gengenbach 2000; Rymes 2000; Schottman 2000; Skhosana 2005 and Neethling 2008). The evidence provided by this overall body of research (including this dissertation) shows that, in

terms of their ability to reflect and communicate many different aspects of sociocultural knowledge, personal names are a unique, and important, sociocultural phenomenon. As such, research into the personal names used by any particular group of people is likely to yield valuable insight into the social and/or cultural values, beliefs, and behaviours, of the group concerned (cf. Miller 1927).

The current study also demonstrates how the cultural knowledge which is contained within, and conveyed through Niitsitapi personal names, is manifest most strongly in the stories surrounding the names, rather than in their lexical structure. The example of the name *Ómahksini* ‘Big Island’, provided in §4.2, was used to illustrate this point. As I have already explained in §2.4.2, story forms the basis of Native American oral tradition, since it is the primary means through which traditional cultural knowledge is shared and transferred between successive generations (Mander 1991; Fixico 1993; Cajete 1994; Basso 1996; Deloria 1997; Bastien 2004; Greymorning 2004). The discussion throughout §4.2 shows that it is mainly through the narratives which are embedded within Niitsitapi personal names that this knowledge is retained, passed along, drawn upon, and practically applied, through the giving and receiving of names, since these stories are transferred from one person to another along with the names to which they are attached. On this basis, it is my contention that Niitsitapi personal names function as vehicles of oral knowledge transfer, and thus constitute a unique linguistic component of Niitsitapi oral tradition (§1.3). This also means that Niitsitapi personal names do not function in the capacity of ‘linguistic isolates’, or ‘adjuncts’ (c.f. Markey 1982:138,181), but instead appear to form an integral part of the spoken language, Niitsi’powahsin, through which Niitsitapi ways of knowing are carried and expressed (Bastien 2004:131). Consider, in support of this notion, the comment made by *Mamio’kakiikin*, Adam Delaney (29 September 2006, personal interview), that ‘the name in the Blackfoot language is sufficient in itself to keep our language, traditions, and culture, alive’ (see full quotation in §4.2).

Adam’s statement (cited above) also draws attention to the position (discussed in §2.2.2), that names are primary texts of personal and cultural identity (Joseph 2004). In this respect, the current research demonstrates that, by virtue of the cultural knowledge which is embedded and conveyed through them, Niitsitapi personal names provide a powerful means of establishing, maintaining, and communicating perceptions of individual as well as social and cultural (ethnic) identity. Studies pertaining to the personal naming practices of other cultural

groups show similar findings (e.g. Beidelman 1974; Drury & McCarthy 1980; Alford 1988; Onukawa 1998; Schottman 2000; Joseph 2004; Barnes & Pfukwa 2007; Lieberman & Kenny 2007). The fact that Niitsitapi personal names display strong associations with a wide range of sociocultural elements, and that these elements, or concepts, are communicated through the use of the names, indicates that notions of social and cultural identity are extremely significant in Niitsitapi society. In §4.2, for instance, I explained how important it is for Niitsitapi people to know the stories behind their names, because knowing the stories means being aware of the history behind the names, and thus gives people a sense of knowing where they come from. This, in turn, helps people to shape their perceptions of who they are as individuals, as well as in terms of belonging to the larger sociocultural group (§2.2.2). Based on the foregoing, I would like to suggest that the continued use of Niitsitapi tribal names in contemporary Niitsitapi society could serve to maintain and reinforce not only the use of Niitsi'powahsin, but also certain aspects of traditional Niitsitapi culture and cultural identity. Conversely, a falling away from traditional personal naming practices would most likely exacerbate the language loss and erosion of cultural identity that is already being experienced in Niitsitapi communities.

The overall objectives of the current research (stated at the beginning of this section) indicate that this dissertation is concerned primarily with the study of names in cultural context, meaning that it has a strong ethnolinguistic orientation (§2.3.1). The research that I have presented here emphasises a central tenet of ethnolinguistic theory, which is, that language is a mode of action (Duranti 1997:216), and that speaking is a system of cultural behaviour (Hymes 1974:89). In line with this view, it is argued that every culture has its own beliefs about how language functions, what those functions achieve, and in which particular sociocultural contexts they are most fully optimised (Basso 1996:99). It thus follows that, in order to understand how and why language is used in any particular sociocultural environment, and how various sociocultural elements may influence speech events and patterns in a given community, language must be studied in situational context; specifically, its native (indigenous) cultural context (c.f. Malinowski 1923, quoted in Duranti 1997:216; Hymes 1974). By highlighting the sociocultural significance of Niitsitapi personal names, that is, the ways in which these names reflect and communicate various aspects of traditional Niitsitapi cultural knowledge, this dissertation emphasises the necessity for, and indeed the benefit of, taking cultural context into account when engaging in onomastics research (§2.3).

The discussion in §2.2.1 illustrates how diverse cultural groups have different interpretations regarding the communicative functions of names, as well as the extent to which names contain and convey meaning, and what the nature of that meaning might be. These varying approaches are based on the values, beliefs, and ways of thinking, that are inherent in any given culture. It is my contention that research which aims to provide an accurate account of the uses, functions, and meanings of names in any given cultural context, requires an interpretative, or explanatory, approach, versus a simply descriptive one; and, furthermore, that any such “model of explanation” (c.f. Hymes 1974:65) should reflect an ‘insider’s’ perspective that is drawn from within the culture concerned. In order to satisfy this requirement with respect to my own research in Niitsitapi personal names and naming practices, I have drawn on the approach taken by Basso (1996) in his research on Apache place names (§2.3.2), and engaged heavily with the traditional Niitsitapi cultural knowledge system, which is represented primarily by the Niitsitapi oral literature (§2.4.2), as a means of making sense of the data which I have collected. In this way, I have attempted to provide an explanation of various aspects of Niitsitapi personal naming phenomena which reflects a uniquely Niitsitapi perspective on the topic. This approach represents a key principle of ethnoscience (indigenous science), in that it stresses the advantage, and indeed, necessity, of utilising indigenous (local) knowledge as a valid and legitimate means of providing culturally-relevant analyses in social science research (§2.3.2). In methodological terms, then, this dissertation incorporates a blend of ethnolinguistic and ethnoscientific approaches as a means of establishing and accounting for cultural context, and it is on the basis of this contextual backing that the focal issues pertaining to the current research into Niitsitapi personal names and naming practices (stated earlier in this section) have been addressed.

5.2 Contribution to onomastics research

This dissertation fills the gap in the existing academic literature concerning Niitsitapi personal names and naming practices. As was noted in §2.4.1, the research that I have presented here is the first scholarly undertaking to focus exclusively on providing an explanatory account of the function, meaning, and sociocultural significance of Niitsitapi personal names. It should be emphasised, however, that this dissertation articulates in writing what is already contained in the Niitsitapi oral literature regarding this topic. This vast body of local knowledge has provided the Niitsitapi-oriented conceptual framework in terms of which I have interpreted and explained the data (§2.4.2; §5.1). Thus, insofar as this

dissertation is written from a Niitsitapi perspective (albeit by a western scholar), it effectively represents the first authentic Niitsitapi contribution to the field of onomastics.

With respect to research in Native American anthroponyms in general, the results of the current study support the findings of scholars such as Dorsey 1890, Sapir 1924, Morice 1933 and Bissonnette 1999, who have noted that Native American personal names reflect many different aspects of the cultures within which they are embedded. For example, the same kinds of associations between Niitsitapi personal names and cultural elements such as spiritual beliefs, kinship relations, warfare, and ethnohistory (§4.2; §5.1), have been observed in regard to the personal names of the Winnebago, Iowa, Oto, Missouri, Kwapa, Osage, Kansa, Omaha, Ponka, Siouan (Dorsey 1890), Sarcee (Sapir 1924), Cheyenne (Moore 1984), Yococh and Miwok (Bissonnette 1999) tribes. As was illustrated in §2.2.1, similar trends are also seen in African and Chinese cultures (Watson 1986; Musere & Byakutaga 1998).

Perhaps the greatest contribution of this dissertation to research in Native American personal names, however, lies in its methodological approach. As was pointed out in §2.4, anthropological and ethnographic studies of various Native American cultures have rarely made personal names a focal area of research. Of the studies that have concentrated on Native American anthroponyms, most are primarily descriptive in nature, and have typically focused on providing categorised lists of names and their literal meanings (translated into English), and/or describing how the names originate (e.g. Dorsey 1890; Sapir 1924; Morice 1933). In contrast, the current study comprises one of the most detailed explanatory accounts of the personal naming traditions of any Native American, and specifically Plains Indian, tribe, to have been produced in recent years. It also appears to be the first study of its kind to explicitly advocate and apply the use of indigenous (local) knowledge, primarily in the form of indigenous oral literature, as the basis for explaining the significance of personal names within a Native American culture (§1.1; §2.3.2; §2.4.2; §3.2; §5.1). The discussion throughout §4.2 shows that, by engaging with the Niitsitapi oral literature, particularly through listening to the stories that people shared with me surrounding their names (§3.5.1), I have been able to provide an account of Niitsitapi personal names and naming practices that consists of more than lists of names with their English translations, and surface descriptions of my observations. Instead, I have been able to identify some of the most important cultural issues that are involved in Niitsitapi personal naming, and used this information to explain not only how, but also why, Niitsitapi personal names are used, and function, in certain ways,

within the culture. This, in turn, has provided a depth of insight into Niitsitapi cultural ways that could not possibly be achieved by simply describing Niitsitapi personal naming phenomena. Given the mainly categorical and descriptive content of the existing published literature in Native American anthroponymic research, the results that have been produced by the current study represent a significant contribution to this area of onomastics.

Furthermore, judging by the favourable responses to papers that I have presented for two consecutive years at the annual meetings of the American Name Society (ANS), in which I have explained my research methodology and illustrated the results that have been gained through its application (Lombard 2007; 2008), it would appear that this approach holds some appeal for contemporary scholars who are interested in cultural/ethnic studies of names in general. For instance, one anonymous reviewer of the abstract that I submitted to ANS for the 2007 annual conference made the following comment: “I like the ethnographic approach taken in this paper. It seems that it could produce deep insight into the language and culture of the Niitsitapi, as reflected in personal names. In that sense, this approach lays the groundwork for a rich science of onomastics.” Certainly, the discussion in §4.1 illustrates the considerable depth of insight into Niitsitapi personal names and naming practices, oral tradition, as well as other aspects of the culture, that has been gained from adopting this approach. This, in turn, raises the question that, if we can learn so much about Niitsitapi culture through studying the personal names and naming practices in this particular cultural context, then what can we learn about other cultures by carrying out similar names studies within those cultures? By highlighting the value of studying names in cultural context, and the crucial importance of utilising indigenous knowledge as the basis for establishing such context, the current study might indeed encourage more research of this nature in onomastics.

5.3 How the research serves local interests

From a local (Niitsitapi) perspective, it appears that this dissertation stands to make an important contribution to community educational programs. When I interviewed Kainai elder, *Mi'ksskimm*, Frank Weasel Head, on 9 November, 2005, I asked him to share his thoughts about how this project might be of benefit to his people. The following was Frank's response:

A study like this, for children, I want them to understand why a name is given, how a name is chosen, because a lot of them don't know. A lot of young

children, a lot of teenagers, they carry Blackfoot names, but they don't know why...they don't know the history. Through this study, hopefully, we can put some sense of pride in them. To me, that's part of what we've been talking about; this healing, finding one's own identity, [of realizing]: "Hey, this is where I come from, this is what that name means, this is what these persons did, they were proud; now I've got to do something with this name."

Frank's comments imply that this dissertation could be used to remind Niitsitapi people (particularly young people), about the importance of tribal names and traditional naming practices within their culture, especially with respect to the role played by personal names and naming in teaching about Niitsitapi ethnohistory and cultural ways, and in fostering awareness of Niitsitapi sociocultural identity (§4.1). Furthermore, since Niitsitapi personal names are expressed through the language, Niitsi'powahsin, the current study could serve to motivate people to learn the language, in the sense that knowing one's tribal name, and its real meaning, requires some basic knowledge as to how that name is structured and pronounced, in Niitsi'powahsin. Overall, it seems that the current research stands to play a role in ongoing efforts that are presently underway in Niitsitapi communities, to preserve and revitalise the Niitsitapi culture and language. In this regard, Akáyo'kaki, Ryan Heavy Head (personal communication) recently mentioned to me that he is hoping to incorporate certain aspects of this dissertation into the Kainai Studies curriculum at Red Crow Community College.

In addition to having the potential for practical application as an educational tool, this study also addresses certain local academic concerns relating to research in personal names. As mentioned in §1.1 and §2.4.1, this dissertation comprises the first-ever comprehensive scholarly study to focus exclusively on Niitsitapi personal names and naming practices as the topic of investigation, and to provide an in-depth, Niitsitapi-oriented, and written, explanation as to the sociocultural significance of Niitsitapi personal names. On this basis, the research that is presented here not only satisfies the locally-expressed need for a names study to be carried out on the Kainai Reserve (§1.4), but it also makes a substantial, and somewhat ground-breaking, contribution to the written Niitsitapi literature on the subject of tribal personal names.

5.4 Fostering cross-cultural dialogue in social science research

Throughout this dissertation, I have emphasised the use of traditional Niitsitapi cultural concepts and philosophies of thought — which are captured by, and expressed through, the language, Niitsi'powahsin — as the only legitimate source for explaining the functions and meaningfulness of tribal names within Niitsitapi society. This stance asserts traditional Niitsitapi knowledge systems as being absolutely sufficient for providing explanations of various Niitsitapi cultural phenomena, including personal names (§3.2). In this way, the current research forms part of the ongoing discourse in the field of ethnoscience, which asserts indigenous knowledge as equally valid to western knowledge as an epistemological basis for understanding the natural world, and which advocates the use of indigenous knowledge systems for providing unique cultural interpretations of phenomena in the natural world (Cajete 1994: 196; see §2.3.2; §5.1). The study also represents a departure from much previous work in the established academic disciplines of ethnography/ethnolinguistics, in terms of which there has been a tendency to undermine the relevance and value of indigenous knowledge systems, and to avoid incorporating them into interpretative, or explanatory, methodological frameworks (§3.2).

It is important to note, however, that, in order to carry out the current study, I have had to engage with both the written, western theory-based, scholarly literature pertaining to the fields of onomastics, ethnography, and ethnolinguistics (§2.1; §2.3.1; §2.3.2; §2.3.3), as well as with the Niitsitapi oral literature concerning names and naming within Niitsitapi culture (§2.4.2; §4.1). In the sense that this dissertation brings together these two different bodies of literature, and their underlying knowledge systems, through its discussion around Niitsitapi personal names, it could be framed as a dialogue, or exchange, between western and Niitsitapi onomastics, as well as between western and Niitsitapi epistemologies, or theories of knowledge. My co-supervisor, *Akáyo 'kaki*, Ryan Heavy Head (personal communication) has made the following comment regarding this aspect of the dissertation:

This is new ground, since this kind of writing has not been done that much, but you came into the study wanting to do something different. You are fostering dialogue between indigenous and western knowledge systems. There has not been such dialogue before in Native North America with western theory. This is

a first contribution to that dialogue. Even looking at the supervision of the thesis from the two different sides, that is dialogue in and of itself.

By bringing western and Niitsitapi knowledge together in such a manner, this dissertation encourages a sharing of ideas around differing cultural perceptions of, and attitudes towards, names. This, in turn, could serve to provide a broader perspective on the nature and functions of names, and indeed, language itself, in global society.

5.5 Sociopolitical aspects of the study

From a sociopolitical angle, the dialogue which has been initiated by this study through knowledge exchange (§5.4), creates a fresh opportunity for the development of positive relationships between western social scientists and the Niitsitapi people. Despite the fact that the Niitsitapi people have, in the words of Pam Heavy Head (personal communication), “been studied to death” by western researchers, there has not been, at least up until now, a great deal of constructive dialogue that would be conducive to relationship-building between the two ‘sides’. The consistent failure of western scholars to give credence to Niitsitapi ways of knowing in their interpretations of Niitsitapi cultural phenomena has given rise to the (well-founded) perception, on the part of many Niitsitapi people, that their views are being misrepresented, and their interests undermined, by the western academic community (§3.1.1). However, as pointed out by *Akáyo’kaki*, Ryan Heavy Head (personal communication), the idea of cultivating good intercultural relations is in keeping with traditional Niitsitapi philosophies of thought:

This [inviting relationships] is probably the most important aspect of the study, beyond what is going to be learned in terms of knowledge. In Blackfoot philosophy, one is never forced to become the other. We all have different gifts that have enabled us to live well. Sharing these gifts when possible, and recognising that diversity is allowed and even celebrated, and that it has its own functions, is central [to this way of thinking]. We must be open to have dialogue and to create a new context in broader scholarship, so that we can have theoretical exchanges that benefit one another.

From the outset of this study, I have recognised the importance of establishing good personal relations with people in the Kainai community, and I have worked very hard at pursuing and maintaining a friendly rapport between myself and my colleagues and informants on the Kainai Reserve. Ryan's comments show how these efforts have been recognised and welcomed by the local community. His remarks also indicate how even seemingly small and insignificant attempts at forging amicable cross-cultural relationships in the research field can have tremendous sociopolitical benefits, both locally, as well as at the wider academic level.

A further sociopolitical aspect of this study has to do with its incorporation of certain principles and methods that belong to the field of ethnohistory (§2.3.2; §3.2). As pointed out in §2.3.3, ethnohistory, which is primarily concerned with indigenous knowledge recovery and affirmation, is directly related to the wider sociopolitical issue of decolonisation. Insofar as this research project displays a strong orientation, both methodologically and philosophically, towards an ethnohistorical approach, it positions itself in support of the work that is being undertaken in Niitsitapi communities to recover and assert traditional Niitsitapi tribal knowledge within the context of postcolonial North American society. In this way, the study also makes a broader sociopolitical statement in favour of the deconstruction of western-based interpretations and analyses of tribal cultures.

5.6 Accounting for the spiritual dimensions of Niitsitapi personal names: some wider implications

In §4.1, the spiritual elements of Niitsitapi personal names were explained and illustrated in some detail. It was noted that, within the context of traditional Niitsitapi culture, spiritual beliefs permeate every aspect of everyday life, including philosophical and practical approaches to personal names and naming practices. My approach, in dealing with this aspect of Niitsitapi personal names, has been to furnish an account that is based on what the Niitsitapi people themselves have shared with me about their own personal experiences regarding the spiritual dimensions of their names; as opposed to merely describing my observations, and giving my own interpretations, of the same.

This dissertation indicates that much cultural insight can be gained by acknowledging and exploring the spiritual dimensions of names and naming practices. Since spiritual beliefs inevitably form part of any given cultural system, it would be somewhat surprising if they did

not exhibit some connections to other cultural phenomena, such as, with respect to this study, names, and thus even language itself. The discussion in §4.1 shows, very clearly, for instance, that Niitsitapi spiritual beliefs exert a strong influence over social attitudes towards the giving and receiving of personal names, and, in addition, that other cultural concepts which are connected personal naming also appear to have a spiritual basis. This, on the whole, reflects the intensely spiritual approach to life that is characteristic of traditional Niitsitapi culture.

By drawing attention to the spiritual components of Niitsitapi personal names and naming, this dissertation could provide a basis for making some interesting comparisons regarding the extent and nature of spiritual influences in the personal naming practices of other cultures (e.g. Morice 1933; Wieschhoff 1941; Beidelman 1974; Underhill 1979; Moore 1984; Watson Moyo 1996; Schottman 2000; Skhosana 2005). This in turn, could provide valuable insight into other spiritual belief systems and theories of knowledge. The potential for the current study to function in this way became evident at the 2008 annual conference of the American Name Society (ANS), at which I presented a paper that included some discussion and illustration around the spiritual dimensions of Niitsitapi personal names (Lombard 2008). After my presentation, one of the audience members, a gentleman from Nigeria, stood up and expressed his appreciation that I had addressed this issue, and then very excitedly shared with the audience how certain of the spiritual features of Niitsitapi personal names that I had spoken about, are also found in his own tribal culture. Given that the connection between naming and human spirituality is clearly not unique to Niitsitapi culture, I am convinced that additional research into this aspect of naming practices in other, including so-called ‘secular’ western, cultures, may yield some interesting, and even surprising, results.

In bringing this section to a close, I would like to leave the reader with some food for thought concerning this issue of spirituality in naming. In §4.1, I provided a number of illustrations which show the apparent power of Niitsitapi personal names to guide, direct, and even protect, the lives of the name bearers. Whilst some may discount this as mere folklore or superstition, I can assure the reader that, from the point of view of the Niitsitapi people — based on their experiences of life lived in the real world — names actually do fulfil these functions. The question though, is how do we account for such things? Bastien (2004:132,140) gives the following explanation, from a Niitsitapi perspective:

Niitsi'powahsinni, speaking our indigenous language, is a spiritual process...
The mysterious force of *Ihtsipaitapiyo'pa* [the source of all life] moves through
language. It touches, connects, and lives through words as it makes life move.
(My parentheses)

This statement reinforces the notion, put forward in §4.1, that the language, *Niitsi'powahsin*, and thus *Niitsitapi* tribal names, connect mortal beings to the spiritual realm. Taking this idea one step further, may I be bold enough to suggest that, since language and the spirit/soul are generally considered to be defining elements of what it means to be human, this kind of connection might be a universal phenomenon? If so, is it possible that scholars in the human sciences, particularly those involved in language research, have either missed, or overlooked, the apparent relationship between language and the spiritual aspect of human existence? Could further investigation into this dimension of language shed more light not only on the nature of language itself, but on the human condition as a whole? Will some of the things that emerge from such inquiry defy rational, scientific explanation? I leave these questions open for the reader to think about.

5.7 Limitations of the study and recommendations for further research

As indicated in §5.2 and §5.3, this research project has broken some new ground not only in the study of *Niitsitapi* personal names, but also in the field of onomastics as a whole, particularly in terms of methodological approach. However, given the limited scope of a Master's dissertation, it has not been possible to deal comprehensively with all of the complex nuances of *Niitsitapi* names and naming practices that appear to exist. Whilst I cannot anticipate each and every possible opportunity for further research which may arise from the current study, I can put forward some suggestions, based on my own evaluation of the project's limitations, as well as conversations that I have had with my friends and colleagues in the *Kainai* community.

One aspect of *Niitsitapi* personal names which may warrant more intensive scrutiny is their ethnohistorical significance. Although I have explained and illustrated the ways in which *Niitsitapi* personal names index and communicate information pertaining to the *Niitsitapi* ethnohistorical record (§4.1; §5.1), this feature of the names has not been the focal point of the research. However, the reader may recall my comment, in §4.1, that there is a concern

amongst some of the Kainai elders that the history which is carried within names is being lost, along with the gradual disappearance from use of many traditional Niitsitapi personal names. It may, therefore, be a worthwhile endeavour to gather and record an extensive collection of Niitsitapi ‘names stories’, and then use these stories to reconstruct an account of Niitsitapi ethnohistory which would reflect a unique, and exclusively local, point of view.

The role of Niitsitapi personal names in establishing, maintaining, and conveying, notions of personal as well as social and cultural identity, also deserves further investigation. Whilst I have explored some of the ways in which the names index identity by virtue of the cultural knowledge that is embedded within them (§4.1; §5.1), it would be interesting to establish whether, and if so, how, conceptions of Niitsitapi identity through personal naming have been affected by contact with other languages and cultures. Issues such as the mistranslation of names, and the adoption of western personal naming practices by the Niitsitapi people, which I have very briefly dealt with in this dissertation (§1.2; §4.1), could be elaborated upon in such a study. Furthermore, from my many conversations with Niitsitapi people over the course of my research, I have gained the impression that, from a Niitsitapi perspective, one’s social identity is of paramount importance; it is almost as if one’s personal identity is based on the former. Additional research into the relationship between personal and social identity in the Niitsitapi world, as reflected through personal naming, is definitely warranted.

Another potential avenue of further research into Niitsitapi personal names might be to undertake a closer examination of the linguistic meanings of the names. One thing that I have learned from my friend, *Ai’ai’stahkommi*, Duane Mistaken Chief, is that Niitsi’powahsin is, in terms of its structure as an agglutinating language, extremely rich in cultural content. In other words, the language itself carries Niitsitapi ways of knowing (Bastien 1994:131), and thus teaches a great deal about Niitsitapi cultural beliefs, values, and philosophies of thought. I am convinced that a more intensive study of the semantic structure of Niitsitapi personal names would reveal some additional underlying cultural concepts and traditional ways of thinking, which have been not been dealt with in this dissertation. At a broader level, such a project would, as is the case with the current research, place an emphasis on the importance of studying names within cultural context, and on looking within, not outside of, the culture concerned, for explanations regarding naming and other linguistic phenomena.

As indicated in §5.2, this dissertation also provides a basis for comparative research into the personal names and naming practices of other cultures. Given that the current research focuses on the sociocultural significance of Niitsitapi personal names, it may be used reflexively by scholars from other cultural groups to answer the question that, if personal names contain and convey so much sociocultural meaning in Niitsitapi society, then to what extent, and in what ways, do the personal names of the other cultures concerned perform the same functions? It may be also be interesting to investigate whether the cultural concepts which appear to underlie the traditional Niitsitapi approach to personal naming, correspond to those of other Native American tribes, such as the Cheyenne (Moore 1984). The same kind of comparisons could be made with respect to other tribal, as well as non-tribal, cultures, in different parts of the world. In §5.6, I indicated that a particular point of interest in such comparative studies might be the degree to which, and in what ways, the spiritual beliefs and practices of various cultural groups influence and shape approaches to naming within those cultures.

5.8 Summary

In this chapter, the results of the current research in Niitsitapi personal names and naming practices were presented. These results have provided answers to the research questions that were set out in §1.1 and again in §5.1. Specifically, they show that Niitsitapi personal names are an integral part of Niitsitapi socioculture and that they perform a number of important functions in this regard. Most significantly, the names appear to play a major role in capturing and conveying different elements of Niitsitapi cultural knowledge, including information about cultural beliefs, norms, and values. For the most part, this knowledge is contained within *akáitapiitsinikssiistsi* ‘stories of the past people/ancestors’, which become attached to the names, and are carried along with them, when they are given out or transferred from one person to another. As such, Niitsitapi personal names function as vehicles of Niitsitapi oral knowledge transfer, and may thus be considered a unique form of Niitsitapi oral tradition. Furthermore, the Niitsitapi approach to the giving and receiving of personal names appears to be grounded in traditional Niitsitapi cultural ways and philosophies of thought. Concepts such as *pommakssin* ‘transfer/exchange’, *saponihtaan* ‘paying, or putting into, something (sacrificially)’, *sstowa’pssi* ‘growth’, *kamota’pii* ‘protection’, *kimmapiitypitsin* ‘the practice of being kind to others’, and *kainaisoka’pii* ‘all good things’, specifically, are emphasised and reinforced through traditional Niitsitapi personal naming

practices. On the basis of all these associations, Niitsitapi personal names seem to play a powerful role in establishing and maintaining conceptualisations of Niitsitapi identity, at an individual, as well as at a social and cultural, level (§5.1).

Since this dissertation is the first scholarly study to provide a detailed explanation of sociocultural significance of Niitsitapi personal names and naming practices, it makes a somewhat ground-breaking contribution to the existing written literature on the topic. As such, it fills the existing gap in the Niitsitapi written literature, as well as in the scholarly literature concerning Native American personal names research (§2.4; §2.4.1). Furthermore, given that this dissertation articulates a local (indigenous) perspective on personal naming within Niitsitapi culture, it effectively constitutes the first written Niitsitapi contribution to the field of onomastics (§5.2). Insofar as the current study draws attention to the ways in which Niitsitapi personal names index, and are connected to, diverse aspects of traditional Niitsitapi sociocultural knowledge, it appears to have the potential to be used for educational purposes in Niitsitapi communities. In this regard, it could be especially relevant to the current promotion of language and cultural preservation and revitalisation projects, within these communities (§5.3).

This dissertation also illustrates, and highlights the benefits of, a blended methodological approach which stresses the use of ethnoscience (indigenous knowledge), and specifically indigenous oral literature, as a means of establishing cultural context in ethnolinguistic names research (§5.2). Since this approach reflects the sharing of ideas from diverse, and oftentimes opposing, epistemological standpoints (§5.4), it draws attention to, and will hopefully encourage, cross-cultural dialogue, not only in onomastics, but also in social science research as a whole. This is also important from a sociopolitical perspective, since dialogue can foster relationships between people from different cultures, and lead to greater understanding of contrasting cultural perceptions of the world. In addition, the recognition of indigenous knowledge as a valid basis for explaining various phenomena in the natural world ties into the wider sociopolitical issue of decolonisation (§5.5).

The current study has also drawn attention to the spiritual elements of Niitsitapi personal names and naming practices. It appears that the traditional Niitsitapi approach to name giving and receiving is strongly underpinned by an inherent spiritual view of the world. I have suggested that, since names and spiritual beliefs form part of any cultural system, further

research may reveal some interesting connections between naming and spirituality in other cultures (§5.6).

The limitations of this dissertation highlight opportunities for more research into certain aspects of Niitsitapi personal names and naming practices. Further investigation of issues such as the ethnohistorical content of Niitsitapi personal names and their narratives, the semantic structure of Niitsitapi personal names, and the ways in which the names function as markers and communicators of individual, social, and cultural, identity in Niitsitapi culture, appears to be warranted. In addition, through its focus on explaining the sociocultural importance of Niitsitapi personal names, and by drawing attention to the cultural concepts which appear to underlie personal name-giving and receiving in Niitsitapi culture, the current study may encourage more explanatory research into the meaning, functions, and conceptual underpinnings, of personal names and naming practices in other cultural groups (§5.7).

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APPENDIX 1: Glossary of terms

Niitsitapi Personal Names

Aahtsotoaa – Shot On Both Sides

Aawohkitopi – Rode The Enemy's Horse

Ai'ai'stahkommi – Shot Close/Shot At Close Range

Akáyo'kaki – Many Shieldings

Áwákaasomaahkaa – Running Antelope

Inisskimmaakii – Buffalo Stone Woman

Iitsstsinimaakii – Captures Down Woman

Kiitokííapíi – Prairie Chicken Old Man

Kinaksaapo'p – Downy Plume

Makoiyipoka – Wolf Child

Mamio'kakiikin – No English translation

Matsipi'kssílaakii – Beautiful Bird Woman

Mi'ksskimm – Iron

Náápiiakii – White Woman/Old Woman (old dialect)

Niipomaakii – Chickadee (Woman)

Ni'takaiksamaikowan – Many Tumours Man

Noosi – Niitsi'powahsin version of 'Rosie'

Ohkotoka – Stone

Ohkotoksiisahkomaapi – Rocky Boy

Otahkoika – Yellow Feet

Otahkokaanaisskiinaa – Yellow Mouse

Paahkapsaahkomapi – Bad Boy/Boy Of The Not Good/Misfortunate Boy

Paahsiinaam/ Paahsiinaama'ahkawa – Takes The Wrong Weapon

Paksskii – Broad Face

Piitaikihstsiipiimi – Spotted Eagle

Ponokaiksiksinam – White Elk

Siksskiaakii – Black-Faced Woman

Sipiskomaapi – Night Boy

Sipisohkitopi – Night Good Rider

Spitaikowan – Tall Man

Tsiinaakii – Gros Ventre Woman

Niitsitapi terms

Aamsskaapipikani – Southern Piegan

Aapatohsipiikani – Northern Piegan

Aayaksikowata – Setting a path (for a person's life)

Aistomato'o'p – Embodiment; literally, 'it is done to our bodies/beings'

Aka'itapiitsinikssiistsi – Stories of the past people/ancestors

Ihtsipaitapiyo'pa – Source of life, life force

Kaaahsinnoon/ kaaahsinnooniksi – Our grandparent/s

Kainai – The Blood Tribe; literally, Many Leaders

Kainaisoka'pii – All good things

Kamota'pii – Protection

Kimmapiiy pitsin – The practice/habit of being kind to, or looking with compassion on, others

Kitawahsinnoon – Our land (used inclusively, when speaking amongst fellow Niitsitapi)

Kitsiitsinihka'siminnoonistsi – Our real names

Ksiiimotsiysin – Derision among contemporaries

Ksissta'pii – Meaningless

Mokakssini – Wisdom

Naatoyitapiiksi – Spirit beings

Niisto – Myself

Niitsi'powahsin – The Real Language

Niitsitapi – The Real People

Nistóaanok(a) – Form of introduction, 'This is who I am'

Nitaanikko – Form of introduction, 'I am called [name]'

Nitawahsin-nanni – Our land (used exclusively, when speaking to outsiders)

Noistom – My body

Ómahksini – Big Island

Opáitapiiysin – Life

Pommakssin – Transfer/exchange

Saponihtaan – Paying, or putting into, something; giving sacrificially in appreciation

Siksika – Blackfoot

Sstowa'pssi – Growth (personal)

APPENDIX 2: A description of my own Niitsitapi naming ceremony

The most profound experience that I have had in my journey through the current research was going through the traditional process of receiving a Niitsitapi name. As I briefly mentioned in §3.4.2, my Niitsitapi name, *Iinisskimmaakii*, ‘Buffalo Stone Woman’, was transferred to me at a Beaver Bundle opening ceremony which was held in the mountains near Waterton Lakes National Park, in Alberta, on April 26, 2008. I had been invited to the ceremony by *Akáyo’kaki*, Ryan Heavy Head, who, together with his wife, Adrienne, is the caretaker of one of the few Beaver Bundles that are today still in use on the Kainai Reserve. When I arrived in Lethbridge a few days before the ceremony, Ryan told me that he thought the time was right for me to get a Niitsitapi name, and that he had asked one of the elders, *Kinaksaapo’p*, Narcisse Blood, to give me a name at the upcoming ceremony. Whilst I do not feel at liberty to give any details here about the Beaver Bundle opening ceremony itself, I shall briefly describe my naming ceremony, which took place at a particular point during the main ceremony. Since all of the proceedings were conducted exclusively in Niitsi’powahsin, I could not, at the time, understand every word that was being spoken; it was only afterwards that Ryan and Narcisse explained what had been said, and what it all meant.

At the outset of the naming ceremony, Ryan informed the people who were gathered inside the tipi that Narcisse would be giving me a name. I was then asked to go and stand next to Narcisse, facing the small altar and the Beaver Bundle, which at that point had already been opened. Narcisse introduced himself and then related four stories, with each story telling of something significant that he had accomplished in his life. According to Niitsitapi philosophy, it is by virtue of these accomplishments that Narcisse has the right to transfer names to other people. After he had finished with the stories, Narcisse explained to the small audience what name he was giving me; then he prayed over me, and gently pushed me out towards the centre of the tipi with my new name. Following that, one of the other elders sang a praise song. I then presented Narcisse with gifts of cash, clothing, and blankets. Ryan also paid Narcisse some money for giving me the name.

After the main ceremony, Narcisse told me that one of his accomplishments that he had spoken about concerned the repatriation of a medicine bundle from a certain museum in the

United States. Inside this bundle was an *iinisskimm* ‘buffalo calling stone’. According to Narcisse, the name *Iinisskimmaakii*, ‘Buffalo Stone Woman’, comes from this deed. The following extract illustrates the significance of the *iinisskimm* in traditional Niitsitapi culture (The Blackfoot Gallery Committee 2001: 14):

Although our people began to live as *makoiyi* [‘the wolves’] had shown them, life was still very hard and the people were often hungry. One day *Iini* ‘buffalo’ took pity on our people. A lady named Weasel Woman was collecting water from a river near her camp when she heard something calling to her from the bushes. When she looked closer, she found a stone that spoke to her. The stone explained how it could be used in a ceremony that would call the buffalo towards a *piiskan* ‘buffalo jump’. Weasel Woman took the *iinisskimm*, the buffalo calling stone, back to camp. She told the spiritual leaders about the ceremony to call the buffalo. The people followed her instructions and soon they had plenty of meat and many hides for new tipi covers. There are numerous *iinisskimm* on the prairies. Many people still keep them as sacred bundles. We call on *iinisskimm* to have successful lives.

That, then, is the story behind my Niitsitapi name, *Iinisskimmaakii*. It is not yet clear to me what ‘living up to’ my Niitsitapi name will entail, or in what ways I might yet experience *sstowa’pssi* ‘growth’ through carrying this name; but as I have learned through this study, these things will probably become evident in my life over time, as I learn how to embody the name and all of the things that it stands for.

Figure A.1: The tipi where I received my Niitsitapi name on April 26, 2008. The spectacular Rocky Mountains appear in the background.



Figure A.2: The author with *Kiitokiiapii*, Marvin Calf Robe, on April 26, 2008

