

MÉTISSAGE, PLACE, PRACTICE

Métissage derives from the Latin term *mixtus* meaning “mixed,” Cynthia Chambers and her co-authors note, referencing cloth composed of two different fibers; its “Greek homonym is *metis*, referencing: skill and craft, as well as wisdom and intelligence,” personified in Metis, the wife of Zeus, who was “gifted with powers of transformation,” an etymology and mythology from which Chambers and her co-authors emphasize the capacity of the concept - *métissage* - to “transform” through “mixing,” in Canada, a “racial category translated as ‘mixed-blood’ or ‘half-breed’ with the negative connotations of animals (and humans) breeding across species.”¹

Revalorizing that connotation, Chambers and her co-authors assert that *métissage* - “not only a theory but also a praxis” - is “political” and thereby “resists” the “fear of mixing, and the desire for a pure untainted space, language, or form of research.”² *Métissage* “engages the world as dialogic and heteroglossic,” emphasizing the “interreferentiality of texts.”³ “As a *research praxis*, *métissage* seeks cross-cultural, egalitarian relations of knowing and being,” as “it respects the historical interrelatedness of traditions, collective contexts, and individual circumstances while resisting 19th-century scholarly conventions of discrete disciplines with corresponding rhetorics for conducting and representing research.”⁴ Committed to “interdisciplinarity and the blurring of genres, texts, and identities,”⁵ *métissage* is, then, also a “discipline,” however internally heterogenous, a fact characteristic of the academic disciplines themselves.⁶

Métissage “weave[s] the repressed languages and traditions of local cultures and vernaculars (particularly incorporating autobiographical material and local oral traditions and stories) with the dominant (often colonial) languages and traditions of literacy.”⁷ Both individually and collectively, the authors have “used *métissage*,” working to “juxtapose their texts in such a way that highlights difference (racial, cultural, historical, sociopolitical, linguistic) without essentializing or erasing it, while simultaneously locating points of affinity or rhizomean connections among the texts.”⁸

Summarizing, Chambers and her co-authors claim that they have here “both (1) *illustrated métissage* as a research praxis and (2) *illuminated* issues and challenges *métissage* offers social science research,” mixing “binaries such as colonized with colonizer, local with global, East with West, North with South, particular with universal, feminine with masculine, vernacular with literate, and theory with practice,” thereby “braid[ing] strands of place and space, memory and history, ancestry and (mixed) race, language and literacy, familiar and strange with strands of tradition, ambiguity, becoming, (re)creation, and renewal into a *métissage*.”⁹ Insisting that this is no simple “aesthetic literary practice,” Chambers and her co-authors assert “that our collective praxis of *métissage* is a way of speaking and acting that is both political and redemptive. Our *métissage* offers a rapprochement between alternative and mainstream

social science discourses and seeks a genuine exchange among the writers, and between the writers and their various audiences.”¹⁰

Referencing the research just briefed,¹¹ Narcisse Blood (also known as Ki'naksaapo'p) and his co-authors “perform a curricular *métissage* focused on the personal and public significance of particular places and place-stories ... inspired by indigenous wisdom traditions that emphasize the personal and intimate connectivity that people feel to the land and stories linked to specific places.”¹² Blood and his co-authors are inspired by the Blackfoot concept *aoksisowaato'p*, which refers to the ethical significance of “visiting a place as an act of relational renewal that is life-giving and life-sustaining, both to the place and to ourselves.”¹³ Visits are followed by stories of *aoksisowaato'p* [that] can “sustain life.”¹⁴ The *métissage* Blood and his co-authors compose is “organized around one central place-story that comes from Blackfoot oral traditions,” a *métissage* for which “each researcher has created his or her own text” depicting “the particular relationship that he or she has with a specific place.”¹⁵ “From this process emerged a place-story,” Blood and his coauthors explain, “influenced by known place-stories also about that place. The researchers shared these stories with each other and then worked together to weave a shared script that includes the central place-story.”¹⁶

Available on an interactive website, with individual webpages and threads/quotes that are accessible only by clicking - page numbers are unavailable - Chambers, Hasebe-Ludt and Donald remind that “*Métissage*, from which the Canadian word Métis is derived, is a site for writing and surviving in the interval between different cultures and languages.”¹⁷ More specifically, it is a method of “merging and blurring genres, texts and identities,” what they characterize as “an active literary stance,” claiming it is both a “political strategy and pedagogical praxis.”¹⁸ Acknowledging that the term “Métis” represents an appropriation of an “original and negative meaning ‘half-breed,’” Chambers, Hasebe-Ludt, and Donald reappropriate the concept,¹⁹ revalorizing its earlier negative content - “mixed-blood” - to “become a creative strategy for the braiding of gender, race, language and place into autobiographical texts.”²⁰ As such, “*métissage* not only describes experience,” it interprets and critiques it, positioning “autobiographical texts” as “open apertures for understanding and questioning the multiple conditions and contexts which give rise to those experiences; and the particular languages, memories, stories and places in which these experiences are located and created.”²¹ Characterizing “curriculum studies like a battlefield occupied and divided by intellectual camps,” Chambers, Hasebe-Ludt, and Donald locate “narrative, and racial theory” as also “isolated camps committed to their causes,” resulting “impasse [that] offers very little hope for dialogue, peace and freedom.”²² Despite these circumstances, Chambers, Hasebe-Ludt, and Donald have hope in the young, suggesting that “many of the younger generation are already living in the space of *métissage*: they are bilingual, mixed race and part of an immigrant and postcolonial

diaspora.”²³ *Métissage* seems almost analogous, a “metaphor for fluidity, and a creative strategy for the braiding of gender, race, language and place into autobiographical texts.” As such, *métissage* takes its place alongside earlier autobiographical traditions: narrative inquiry,²⁴ life writing,²⁵ and the method of *currere*.²⁶ Because such texts – while “rooted in history and memory, but are also stories of be-coming” - Chambers, Hasebe-Ludt and Donald characterize them as “new creation stories ... sites of learning to live well in relation to each other and with the earth.”²⁷ Such texts also ‘generate knowledge about repressed cultural and individual memories, traditions and mother tongues,’ enabling Chambers, Hasebe-Ludt and Donald to “see literary *métissage* as a hopeful act,” encouraging (quoting Lionnet) “exchange” over “conflict.”²⁸ As a consequence, “we see literary *métissage* offering the possibility of *rapprochement* between mainstream and alternative curriculum discourses.”²⁹

COMMENTARY

Cynthia Chambers and colleagues provide an overview of *metissage* (see research brief #11); they argue that it is more than a “literary aesthetic” method, it is also a form of curriculum theorizing. The authors argue that in the interweaving of narrative threads, the layering of juxtaposed stories of place, history and experience, the practice of *metissage* illuminates the complexities of the phenomenon being studied. Much of the Blood et al. text is comprised of the stories each contributor tells, each of which testifies to specific relationships with local and familiar landscapes, including how these relationships shape understandings of identity, history and knowledge. Although these stories are not included here, from this brief you can sense the nature of the research. Of special significance is the Blackfoot concept of *aoksisowaato’p*. which inspires their *Métissage*, threaded as it is through their relationships to place. The third study, originally published on an interactive website, represents an effort to enact the theory Chambers, Hasebe-Ludt and Donald elaborate, (quoting Kiera Brant-Birioukov) “braiding narrative and experience together as a way to bring perspective, complexity and alternative discourse to curriculum studies.” Certainly it is an original conception, imprinted by Indigenous ideas, and powerful in its possibility.

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ENDNOTES

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- ¹ Chambers et al, 2008, 141-142.
- ² Chambers et al., 2008, 142. While aimed against white supremacy and anti-Indigenous racism, this conception (probably inadvertently) also declares itself against preservation of separate or pure ethnic, cultural and national traditions and formations, including those of the First Nations.
- ³ Chambers et al., 2008, 142.
- ⁴ Chambers et al, 2008, 142.
- ⁵ Chambers et al, 2008, 142.
- ⁶ See, for instance, Messer-Davidow, Shumway, and Sylvan 1993.
- ⁷ Chambers et al, 2008, 142. One example would be John Kaag's *American Philosophy: A Love Story*, wherein autobiography, historiography, and philosophy are all interwoven.
- ⁸ Chambers et al, 2008, 142. For "affinity" Chambers et al. cite Haraway; for the "rhizomean" they cite Deleuze and Guattari. For "juxtaposition," see Strong-Wilson 2020.
- ⁹ Chambers et al, 2008, 151-152.
- ¹⁰ Chambers et al, 2008, 152:
- ¹¹ Chambers et al. 2008.
- ¹² Blood et al., 2012, 48.
- ¹³ Blood et al., 2012, 48.
- ¹⁴ Blood et al., 2012, 48.
- ¹⁵ Blood et al, 2012, 49.
- ¹⁶ Blood et al, 2012, 49.
- ¹⁷ Chambers, Hasebe-Ludt, and Donald 2002.
- ¹⁸ Chambers, Hasebe-Ludt, and Donald 2002.
- ¹⁹ Cultural appropriation has been a contentious issue – Pinar 2019, 185, n. 32 – but evidently not here.
- ²⁰ Chambers, Hasebe-Ludt, and Donald 2002. For "braiding," see research brief 2.
- ²¹ Chambers, Hasebe-Ludt, and Donald 2002. Regarding autobiographical texts as apertures has its queer connotation; it is an evocative characterization, acknowledging past and present penetrations of each other, inseminating the psyche not exactly reproductively (except in a generative sense).
- ²² Chambers, Hasebe-Ludt, and Donald 2002.
- ²³ Chambers, Hasebe-Ludt, and Donald 2002.
- ²⁴ Connelly and Clandinin 2000.
- ²⁵ Chambers et al. 2012; Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers, Leggo 2009.

²⁶ Pinar 1975; Pinar and Grumet 2015 (1976); www.currexchange.com

²⁷ Chambers, Hasebe-Ludt and Donald, 2002. Subjective reconstruction is likewise a key concept in studies of *currere*: see, for example, Wang 2020.

²⁸ Chambers, Hasebe-Ludt and Donald 2002.

²⁹ Chambers, Hasebe-Ludt and Donald 2002.