

WHITE SPACE

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CHAPTER 1

EMERGING FROM THE WHITEOUT

Colonization, Assimilation, Historical Erasure, and Syilx Okanagan Resistance and Transforming Praxis in the Okanagan Valley

Bill Cohen and Natalie A. Chambers

Ads in magazines, tv and online social media commercials, and billboards in the sunny Okanagan Valley boast lavish spa resorts, condos, and gated communities adjacent to finely groomed golf courses and endless opportunities to enjoy the great outdoors, ski in the local mountains, play in Okanagan Lake, sunbathe on a sandy beach, or tour a local winery. The Okanagan Valley is one of the hotspots in BC for tourism, residential and business development. The Okanagan watershed and west into the Nicola Valley and east into the Arrow Lakes are also the homelands of the Swknaq̓inx who are part of a larger interconnected alliance of Syilx peoples whose language is Nsyilxcn (Okanagan Nation Alliance 2021). “Okanagan,” or Swknaq̓inx, as Syilx conceptual metaphor, is a place and people descriptor and connotes looking into the future responsibly. “Okanagan” is the anglicized version of Swknaq̓inx and in this chapter, Syilx Okanagan, and Syilx will be used to refer to the Indigenous Peoples in whose territory the Okanagan Valley is situated.

The Syilx are the Indigenous Peoples of a territorial ecology that covers approximately 72,000 square kilometres in south central British Columbia and north central Washington. The Syilx are here, and we have not forgotten who we are. Although strands connecting us to our ancestors’ accumulated wisdom have been diminished by colonization, settlement, and new formations of colonization, including neoliberal economics and

corporatization of our lands, the Okanagan-Syilx are alive and, in the present day, extended family members are proactively resisting erasure by taking control of our children's education and the knowledge to which they have access, and are contributing to curriculum development in public schools. We have not been assimilated. Acknowledgement of the Syilx as human, as a people, has recently become a common practice at post-secondary institutions and high schools with land acknowledgements before meetings and events. Several municipalities in the Okanagan have also made a practice of land acknowledgements before town council meetings. These developments are in response to Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action (2015a), a commitment by many to Indigenize curriculum, and be more inclusive and tolerant of difference and diversity.

In the present day, past patterns of imperialism, colonization and settlement, patriarchy, intolerance, systemic racism, and racialized othering continue to produce oppression and violence towards Indigenous Peoples and peoples of colour, women, non-binary individuals and other marginalized peoples. Recent events, marches, vigils, and movements such as Red Dress Campaigns, Orange Shirt Day in memory of Indian Residential School survivors, Unity Runs, Black Lives Matter protests and marches, Idle No More (Idle 2021), anti-Asian hate and anti-racism demonstrations, Pride Parades and Rainbow Crosswalks are raising awareness that Canada and other colonial nations are built on racist notions of white supremacy and have benefited from genocide, oppression, and slavery. These are also generations of findings from task forces, royal commissions, special reports, and inquiries, from Dr. Bryce's chilling reports of 1907 and 1922 *The Story of A National Crime Being An Appeal for Justice to the Indians of Canada* (Milloy 1999, 102) on the appalling conditions of the Indian Residential Schools, to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996), the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Final Report (2015a) and its 94 Calls to Action (2015b), *Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls* (National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. 2019), and *In Plain Sight: Addressing Indigenous-specific Racism and Discrimination in B.C. Health Care* (Turpel-Lafond 2020). In May 2021, the confirmation of bodies of 215 children at Kamloops Indian Residential School who lay in unmarked

graves (Casmir 2021) and the murder of three generations of a Muslim Canada family in Ontario in a premeditated attack (Al Jazeera 2021) make it harshly clear that othering, racism, and intolerance are very much part of Canada's past and present.

British, European, American, and Anglo-Canadian settlement in what is now known as the Okanagan began 160 years ago at the Mission near Kelowna. Schooling for settler children and for Syilx Okanagan children began in this era as well (Thomson 1985). In a relatively short time, the sustaining Food Chief based relationships between the Syilx Okanagan and the territorial ecology and homelands of the Syilx Okanagan were replaced by land theft, oppression, displacement to Indian reserves, and forced assimilation policies that attempted to permanently disconnect children from their extended families, cultural identities, reciprocal responsibilities and rights (Sam 2008).

Colonial legislation that mandated the forced removal of Syilx Okanagan children from their families and communities to Indian Residential Schools was just one part of a larger systemic attempt to erase Indigenous Peoples from their traditional homelands. In April 2021, the confirmation of the remains of 215 children at the former Kamloops Indian Residential School brought the degrading treatment of Indigenous children once again into Canadian consciousness. The "discovery" was no surprise to Indian residential school survivors or their families and communities, and indeed, to anyone paying attention. This is underscored by the comments of an editorial written in 1907 after the public release of Dr. Bryce's scathing medical report on the high mortality rates of children who went to the schools:

His report is printed, many people will scan the title on the cover, some will open it, a few will read it and so the thing will drift along another year. And so with the next year and the year after. So will be the course of events ... unless public opinion takes the question up and forces it to the front. Then Parliament will show a quick interest, pigeon holes will give up their dusty contents, medical officers will have a wealth of suggestions and the scandalous procession of Indian children to school and on to the cemetery may possibly be stopped. (Editor 1907 quoted in Malloy 1996, note 89, 331)

Within this context, the confirmation that Indigenous children lie in unmarked graves surrounding Indian residential schools across the nation is a tragic reminder of how widespread public apathy and colonial government's self-serving disinterest continue to fuel and reinforce destructive cycles of colonial and racialized violence. Indeed, many of the Truth and Reconciliation of Canada's 94 TRC Calls to Action (2015b) are concerned with educating settlers about historic and ongoing complicity in supporting racist colonial policies that serve to enrich the majority while silencing and erasing Indigenous Peoples on our own homelands. However, in *Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls*, goes farther stating

“An absolute paradigm shift is required to dismantle colonialism within Canadian society, and from all levels of government and public institutions. Ideologies and instruments of colonialism, racism, and misogyny, past and present, must be rejected ... The Canadian legal system fails to hold the state and state actors accountable for their failure to meet domestic and international human rights and Indigenous rights obligations” (National Inquiry 2019, 174).

These reports and events demand settlers face the truth that the colonization and whiteout of Turtle Island *is* genocide. So, what will we do about it?

LOOKING THROUGH THE WHITEOUT

The term “whiteout” has been used in whiteness studies to describe the hegemonic impacts of racism on social, cultural, and ecological relations and contexts (Doane 2003, 17). Racialized terms such as “white” and “whiteness” are useful to understand historic patterns of imperialism and colonization that are very racialized; these terms, however, also express aspects of racialized othering and homogenization. A more humanizing discourse acknowledging human diversity will ultimately be more transformative. The goal would be a shift from “white,” “whiteness,” “Indian,” “Aboriginal” etc. to Syilx, Secwepemc, Maori, Irish,

Greek. From the perspective of one Syilx Okanagan educator, it is as if a blanket of residential, agricultural and commercial development, and exploitative resource extraction distorted the natural ecosystems, limiting vision, making it hard to see and to keep good relations with the natural biodiversity of our territory. Animals, plants, habitats, landforms, cultural markers, and story symbols have been diminished. Within seven generations, thousands of years of sustaining cultural and ecological relationships expressed through Syilx Okanagan societal practices have been largely replaced with the English language, Anglo-Canadian white his-story and knowledge, and the institutionalized denial of Syilx existence, sovereignty, and legitimacy.

Syilx Okanagan people have been subjected to an aggressive “assimilation” policy that sought to erase our Syilx cultural knowledge, language, reciprocal relationships and responsibilities, and our rights and title to our territorial lands and resources. Colonial attitudes toward Indigenous Peoples have ranged from the superior and paternalistic doctrines of the Papal Bulls and terra nullius to the misguided and self-serving benevolence of missionaries, to denial, silence or ignorance among younger generations (Crosby 1991; Moreton-Robinson 2004). Within the context of the Indian Residential Schools system, this forced assimilation has only recently been described as cultural genocide (TRC 2015a); however, as Chrisjohn, Young, and Maraun bluntly puts it, “cultural genocide is genocide. Finally, in any intellectually honest appraisal, *Indian Residential Schools were genocide*” [emphasis in the original] (1997, 404).

Many post secondary settler students we encounter as professors struggle to comprehend that colonization, racism, and land theft are perpetuated in the sunny Okanagan in the present day through perpetuation of the British Columbia “land question” and unresolved Indigenous “land claims” that are embedded in colonial mythologies intended to obscure the underlying title held by Indigenous Peoples. As the late Secwépemc leader Arthur Manuel explained: “It is the loss of our land that has been the precise cause of our impoverishment. Indigenous lands account for only 0.36 per cent of British Columbian territory. The settler share is the remaining 99.64%” (Manuel and Derrickson 2017, 25). Given that, in 2008, the federal government issued an official apology to survivors of the Indian residential school system (Canada 2008) and the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation

Commission of Canada was released in 2015, it is astounding that in 2021 many settler students continue to know little or nothing of Indian residential school policies that forcibly removed Indigenous children from their families and communities across the country and institutionalized them for nine to twelve months of the year for the duration of their childhood.

Our experiences teaching undergraduate courses with Indigenous content at the UBC Okanagan and Okanagan College have led us to concur with Warry (2008, 14): “Put simply, upon entering university, students know little or nothing of Aboriginal issues and are ill-equipped to filter the many conflicting perspectives and arguments they hear about the challenges facing Aboriginal communities. When they learn more, most are baffled by the government’s inability or unwillingness to place Aboriginal issues higher on the political agenda ... This ignorance is widespread.” Most adult students appear to have little or no awareness about the Indian Act and that Indian residential school policies were one among many forms of legislation intended to eliminate Indigenous Peoples as distinct and diverse self-governing nations on traditional homelands. Yet, here we are; we all live here, and it is in all our collective children’s interests to learn how to live together sustainably. So, what can we look ahead to?

The inclusion of the perspective of a Syilx Okanagan transforming educator in a book whose central theme is white fantasies and neoliberalism brings intellectual and cultural positioning into play. Is white studies the latest intellectual pastime for a privileged, increasingly multicultural elite that has time to reflect upon and pose critical questions about societal patterns, ideology, and hegemony? Is white studies “a relatively meaningless debate on the construction of White identity” (Doane 2003, 17) that does not actually change or transform anything? Or does it have the potential to contribute to the struggle to collectively free ourselves from hegemony and make a more peaceful, and culturally diverse, world with new webs of relationships? In either case, this chapter represents twenty years of our own personal dialogue as partners, parents, scholars and educators, and our voices are those of a Syilx educator, artist and poet, and a white settler woman and educator. We believe it is critical that Okanagan-Syilx knowledge and perspective be included in a work about white settler fantasies in Syilx Okanagan homelands. Contemporary Okanagan-Syilx intervention strategies, informed by traditional knowledge, play critical

roles in resisting assimilation, and cultural and historical erasure, while transforming the historical and current conditions that foster “white” hegemony and knowledge reproduction in the Okanagan Valley region. Okanagan-Syilx knowledge can also contribute to creating new relationships informed by respect, diversity, and sustainability, transformative cross-cultural dialogues, and understandings that may lead to a more sustainable and diverse sense of belonging for all in the Okanagan Valley.

THE SWKNAQÍNX, THE SQILXW: THE PEOPLE OF THE STORIES

Swknaqínx, or Okanagan, a conceptual metaphor, suggests the ones who can see and hear far away into the future. The word for our people or ourselves is “Sqilxw, which in a literal translation means the ‘dream in a spiral.’ We recognize our individual lives as the continuance of human dreams” (Cardinal and Armstrong 1991, 111). Sqilxw as a conceptual metaphor for humans, is that we humans have the mind power to make happen or create into reality whatever we can dream or envision. Unlike salmon, roots, berries, and bears, we humans do not know how to live our lives in ways that contribute to the wellbeing and health of the future peoples and all of the water, earth, plant and animal communities and species and life forces we are part of. When our human lifeways become unbalanced with the health and ability to self-renew of the ecosystems in which we live, us humans have to learn and practice being responsible and restoring and renewing responsible relationships. This way of life is the Sqəlx^włcawt. Currently, Syilx language and, subsequently, Syilx worldview, knowledge, culture, and people are critically endangered because of homogenization, assimilation, and exclusion. Fortunately, Syilx Okanagan presence in knowledge and cultural production in UBC Okanagan through Indigenous Studies, the new Bachelor of Nsyilxcn Language Fluency Degree, pedagogical contributions in the Okanagan School of Education, and numerous land-based, Syilx knowledge informed projects are substantial opportunities for renewal and resonance. Our ancestors left us with knowledge, practices, tools, and an understanding of natural laws, thousands of years of accumulated wisdom to enable us to live sustainably, connected within

our territorial ecology. Indian residential schools not only disconnected many Indigenous children from respective knowledge and imagination systems, these destructive colonial institutions prevented everyone else from learning from and with Syilx peoples here, and Indigenous Peoples throughout the world. It is up to all of us to reconnect to those strands of knowledge and to create new systems that balance creativity and survival, new understandings and shared responsibilities that express and embody diversity and relational sustainability. The Okanagan-Syilx are the “people of the stories” and, through storytelling and relationship building – by renewing the extended family learning and teaching relationships – the Sqəlxwłcawt, human lifeways responsibly and dynamically balanced with the health of the territorial ecology, continue and visions are realized (Cohen 2001).

Within the Okanagan story system, the captíkʷł stories are connected to places, resources, and practices within the Okanagan territory. Over thousands of years the knowledge expressed through captíkʷł and the medium of the Okanagan language, Nsyilxcn, has nurtured collectively shared sets of values and ethical sensibilities. The land, the tmixʷúłaxʷ, knows us. Our knowledge comes from the tmixʷ, the diverse life-forces of the ecology, which are recorded and expressed in the captíkʷł story system that very much involves the spirits of the land and our ancestors talking to us. Our responsibilities as Syilx are to know the captíkʷł, the accumulated wisdom the natural communities have shared with us so we would survive. According to the captíkʷł, the tmixʷ knew that humans would be coming to the world and determined that they would provide the means for our survival and well-being. Metaphorically, and literally, humans were “torn from the earth” (Okanagan Tribal Council 1993–34, 3). The earth gave birth to us, and our earth mother planned for our well-being, and how she would care for us. Our responsibilities as Syilx Okanagan are to maintain those sustainable relationships, the kinship relationships between a mother and her children. We respect our earth mother because she cares for and provides for us. If we respect and maintain that relationship, then our survival in this land and, by extension, on this planet is more assured.

Mindpower and outcomes expressed in Okanagan-Syilx captíkʷł stories are associated relationally with experience and wisdom, and it is clearly understood that we humans have the mind power to move mountains,

rivers, trees, and so on. Senklip (Coyote) does this in many stories. If we express that power without responsibilities to the people-to-be in mind, then the captíkʷł suggests that we will be caught up in hegemonies of self-importance, and notions of dominance and superiority over others and natural communities, the consequences of moving away from natural laws. Power and wisdom are associated with the ability to put things back because we are part of a larger system of knowledge and creativity. The Syilx concept of kʷulncútn describes the Creator, or all of Creation, which is endlessly moving and changing, and recreating herself continuously. In other words, the earth will regenerate herself and continue with or without humans. Nsyilxcn does not have gender pronouns like English so the authors choose here to counter repressive patriarchal patterns and refer to the Creator or God as her.

Okanagan-Syilx traditional knowledge is expressed in our captíkʷł stories, our language, responsibilities and rights are expressed by living Syilx culturally informed lives. This does not mean “going back” in time or rejecting technology or ideas from diverse global cultures. Captíkʷł stories make it clear that our world, knowledge, and society are continuously evolving. Senklip (Coyote) is symbolic of mind power, creativity, and vision, and sometimes that gets us into trouble. A recurring theme in captíkʷł involves Senklip getting destroyed through foolishness, greed, ambition, ignorance, neoliberal economic policies, and so on. Xwylxʷ (Fox) always gathers up the bits (hair, bone, etc.), breathes into the assembly, steps over it three or four times, and Senklip comes back to life. Fox gathers old knowledge (including attitudes, practices, mistakes, successes, failures, unpleasant bits as well) and breathes new life into what has been gathered to create new knowledge and understanding for current application. Knowledge is understood as a continuously evolving creative, ecological, cultural, and intellectual process. We need, for example, Syilx responsibly positioned scientists and engineers appreciating rather than exploiting tmixʷ. We sometimes act like the destructive part of Senklip, but we are also Xwylxʷ. Our challenge is to collectively create new ways forward so where all tmixʷ flourish.

Within Syilx territory, there is much to learn from each other. This learning is very much connected to larger provincial, national, and international relationships. Everybody is a learner and everybody is a teacher. Syilx webs

are reconnections to strands of Syilx knowledge that have been disrupted by colonization, and they are continuations of Syilx knowledge that has informed our cultural survival through resistance to colonization, leading us into the more proactive current era, which has the potential to transform current destructive colonizing relationships. As Smith (2003, 4) writes, Indigenous education and pedagogy, “needs to be transformative because the ‘status quo’ for most indigenous contexts is not working well and needs to be improved.” This continuing knowledge is inclusive of Western and/or scientific knowledge, which complements evolving socially and ecologically sustainable Syilx cultural relationships. This is evidenced by, for example, the return of the salmon to the Okanagan River (Syilx 2021); the development of the Indigenous Studies Program and Syilx Okanagan Canada Research Chair at UBC Okanagan; UBC’s strategic plan that commits to “implementing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples” (UBC 2020); a partnership between Okanagan Indian Band and School District 22 to develop and implement a contemporary Syilx Okanagan Social Studies curriculum *mymaytwix^wmntm isqilxwtet* Stories of Our *Sqilxw* Ways (Cohen and Chambers 2016); and the large numbers of school district educators and other residents in the Okanagan Valley who are participating in training sessions with IndigenEYEZ that “uses land-based learning with the arts and best practices in community-building” (IndigenEYEZ 2021) with programs like KinSHIFT (KinSHIFT 2021). These projects have been led or informed by the En’owkin Centre, the Okanagan Nation Alliance, and Syilx Okanagan communities. Despite the ongoing whiteout, a way forward involves collaboration through education – a collaboration that transforms the exploitative ahistorical pattern of development that has characterized European settlement in the valley. We are all responsible for the webs our children will inherit.

SCHOOLING AS A PEOPLE-, KNOWLEDGE-, LANGUAGE-, CULTURE AND DIVERSITY-DESTROYING MONSTER

The recent history of this land that settler peoples have mapped and inscribed as the Okanagan Valley is an ongoing story of the immigration of displaced newcomers and their descendants as well as consistent attempts to replace and eliminate the Syilx Okanagan people, and reshape the *tmxwuáx^w* (land/territorial ecology). Immigrants came and continue to

come here for many reasons, some fleeing oppression in their ancestral homelands, others, including migrants from other parts of this country, seeking prosperity, new resources, maybe a sunny retirement in the land of lakes and grapes (Aguilar, Tomic, and Trumper 2005). Nevertheless, once here, many newcomers and their descendants who are born in the valley perpetuate the ideologies of colonialism as they make their homes on Syilx Okanagan people's lands. Few are aware of whose land they are on, the Syilx name of the peoples whom they displace, their language and complex epistemologies, and their intimate knowledge of the land and all life on the land.

In the Okanagan, hegemonic colonial beliefs that settlers have put the land to superior use and have the god-given or crown-given right to colonize and claim Syilx Okanagan territory has come to define past and present-day relationships with settlers who reside in the homeland of the Syilx Okanagan peoples. In 2004, through elementary school tours of "historic" Vernon, our children passively learned that local history began when settlers arrived in the mid-1800s. They were confused when we pointed out that the settlers were the newcomers and that their relatives and ancestors, the Syilx peoples, have lived in their homelands since time immemorial. In Grade 9, one of our children was asked to complete a Social Studies assignment in which the students were to pretend they were "captured by Plains Indians ... Describe the people and the camp ... Describe the sun dance." A follow up meeting with the Principal and Teacher resulted in outdated stereotypical resources being replaced with more informed resources.

At home in the Okanagan, tourists and some comment on the unusual-sounding names of places such as Okanagan Lake, Kelowna, Penticton, Keremeos, Kalamalka Lake. These place names are anglicized versions of Syilx place names. Many institutions also take their names from Swknaqínx – the University of British Columbia Okanagan and Okanagan College are examples. Kelowna is the largest city in the interior and it is where UBC Okanagan is located. Today Nsyilxcn place names mark the roads within the UBC Okanagan campus, for many the first connection with Syilx peoples' distinct language, Nsyilxcən. For the past twenty plus years that we have both taught post-secondary courses with Indigenous content, we inevitably have many settler students in our classes who admit to having lived their entire lives in the Okanagan Valley with no awareness of the

Syilx Okanagan people. The extent of historical exclusion and erasure in the education system and its effect on public consciousness is appalling. Following classes about Syilx and Indigenous Peoples, students often display genuine expressions of shock and grief. Many ask, “Is this true?” and “How is it that we did not learn this in elementary or secondary school?” Some express disbelief and denial, and defensiveness: “Nations have been colonized for thousands of years. It’s a natural part of progression.” Or, as some insist, “colonization is just a part of the history of the world ... Indigenous Peoples have to get over it and move on.” For many, the realization gradually sets in that they have grown up in Canada, in the Okanagan Valley, in ignorance, and that public education has been complicit in ensuring their ignorance as participants in the ongoing oppression of Indigenous Peoples. Yet here it is within post-secondary educational institutions that so many students learn of this complicity (Jefferess 2014, Berry 2018).

Education – schooling particularly – has been a very destructive, intolerant, homogenizing monster, and it is education that plays a critical role in creating opportunities for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students to become aware of the whiteout that surrounds and subsumes them: “It [Education] is one of the major sites in which different groups with distinct political, economic, and cultural visions attempt to define what the socially legitimate means and ends of a society are to be” (Apple 2000, 17). Public education is a contested site in which neoliberal and neocolonial agendas resist de-colonizing discourses, and it is a site of struggle to create space for Syilx and Indigenous knowledge and connect students to more responsible place-based applications of Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics.

TRANSFORMING THE MONSTER WHO STEALS CHILDREN

In the Syilx story system, horse and dog were people-destroying monsters that were transformed by Coyote’s powers so that they became useful, beneficial, and integral to ongoing *Sqəlx*^w*łcawt*. Schooling cannot be treated uncritically, and for schooling to be effective, beneficial, and compatible with Syilx knowledge and cultural aspirations, it must be transformed by knowledge and pedagogical “tools” from Coyote, Fox, the Food Chiefs, and others symbolic of knowledge relationships into an ongoing,

expression of living in dynamic balance with the Indigenous ecological diversity in which we live.

Western schooling has been used by colonial governments as a “people-destroying monster” (Cohen 1998, 34). Schooling, particularly with reference to the Indian residential schools, has been likened to *skalula*, “the monster who steals and devours children” (Sterling 1997, 183). After the Indian residential school era ended in the interior, from 1970, Syilx Okanagan children were integrated into public schools, but the exclusion of Syilx language, knowledge, and pedagogy continued in the public school curriculum. Since 1975, a culture-based educational movement in the United States and Canada has involved implementing more Indigenous local cultural activities as an “add-on” to the public-school model (Hermes 2005). Critics have noted that this piecemeal approach has not produced any fluent speakers of heritage languages or greater academic success for Indigenous students (243). In the Okanagan Valley, many schools have Aboriginal dance and culture programs. Some have Okanagan language programs, in which students can learn the Syilx language for up to one and half hours per week. These types of programs did not exist in the early 1980s. They are a result of both Indigenous activism and a more inclusive and pluralistic public school system. Public schools have improved Indigenous graduation rates with bridging, self-esteem, and assistance programs, so more Indigenous children can achieve prescribed and imposed learning outcomes. Syilx cultural aspirations for knowledge, however, remain at the margins, and children can go through elementary and high school in complete ignorance that we still exist (Bear 2010). Indigenous education programs should contribute to language and knowledge revitalization rather than continue, in effect, to promote assimilationist policies (Bear 2010). We are still here. In Syilx Okanagan Nation communities, leadership and community members are proactively taking responsibility, and developing schools with extended family relationships, *Sqəlx̣ẉłcawt* pedagogy and immersion programs. As Regan (2010, 23–24) observes, the journey must embody the destination:

Failure to link knowledge and critical reflection to action explains why many settlers never move beyond denial and guilt, and why many public education efforts are ineffective in bringing about deep social

and political change. At the same time, I am mindful that, because radical change is not ultimately in its best interest, the dominant majority is apt to reinforce benevolent imperialism and colonial attitudes, often unconsciously, in ways that are antithetical to decolonization. An unsettling pedagogy is therefore based on the premise that settlers cannot just theorize about decolonizing and liberatory struggle: we must experience it, beginning with ourselves as individuals, and then as morally and ethically responsible socio-political actors in Canadian society.

After all, whose knowledge and language should be taught to Indigenous students in their respective territories and schools? Public and mainstream schools must develop and implement Indigenous and unsettling pedagogical approaches and curriculum content that support non-Indigenous teachers and students from kindergarten to Grade 12 to examine their relationships to this place, the homeland of the Syilx, or with the Indigenous Peoples on whose lands they reside. Indigenous Studies departments, programs, and courses at universities and colleges provide models for resisting the whiteout in three important ways: (1) they are creating spaces for Indigenous knowledge in sites of dominant knowledge reproduction; (2) they are educating the mainstream public about the existence of Indigenous Peoples and the vast diversity of Indigenous languages and cultures; and (3) they are nurturing a new generation of Indigenous and mainstream transforming educators. In so doing, Indigenous scholars, leaders, and allied educators are creating intellectual and transformative spaces with strong ties to communities and territories in daycares, elementary and secondary schools, and universities. They are bringing Indigenous creativity and imagination into the knowledge reproduction aspects of schooling.

Transforming educators create Indigenous intellectual spaces for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students to feel connected to their communities and lands, and to nurture a critical mass of critically conscious Indigenous and Western or world scholars. Such approaches have the potential to create experiences of belonging for all based on truth and reconciliation rather than on lies and the historical omission of Indigenous Peoples' wisdom. As Māori educator Graham Smith (2003, 10–11) notes: “This movement to indigenous theorizing is not a rejection of ‘western theorizing’ or of

non-aboriginal knowledge forms [but is viewed] as the addition of an indigenous set of intellectual ‘tools’ into the total ‘tool-box’ of theories generally available in the academy.”

CONCLUSION

One hundred and sixty years ago, the building of the Mission in Okanagan territory signified the start of a period of intense whiteout embodied by the attempted systematic erasure of Syilx knowledge, language, cultural memory, title, and rights from the physical, spiritual, and cognitive ecology. However, the Okanagan-Syilx survived and are emerging from the whiteout, and Okanagan-Syilx knowledge is defining Syilx Okanagan educational institutions, including Syilx Okanagan elementary schools and the En’owkin Centre, an Okanagan post-secondary institution. This chapter was first drafted in 2012, and, since then, there have been many changes in the public school system concerning Indigenous Peoples, increasing interest in Syilx pedagogical approaches and curriculum content, as well as in new opportunities for teachers to learn about cultural safety, decolonization and indigenization. Syilx knowledge is, therefore, moving, albeit slowly, into the curricula of mainstream education institutions, such as public schools, UBC Okanagan, and Okanagan College.

A healthy cultural and linguistic diversity can only be achieved by transforming dialogue, respect for difference and diversity, and developed as a shared ethic by Indigenous peoples and non-Indigenous Canadian populations. Diversity and pluralism are necessary to a vibrant larger community, inclusive not only of Indigenous Peoples’ knowledge and languages in their respective homelands but also of everyone else who lives here, has come to know the Okanagan Valley as home, and is part of diverse cultural and ecological webs of relationships. Transformation in the public and mainstream school system, band schools, universities, and colleges have the potential to connect new generations to Indigenous Peoples’ territorial ecology-based knowledge systems and languages, and achieve Indigeneity, the dynamic balance resulting from pedagogy and praxis tied to place and peoples to be.

Currently, the influx of international students, tourists, new immigrants, and refugees into the Okanagan Valley present opportunities for us to

critically rethink who benefits from a continued whiteout. Several years ago, at a multicultural health fair in the North Okanagan, local settler, MLA Tom Christensen, in his opening address asked the entire crowd to stand. He then asked, “If you were not born in Canada, please sit down ... if your parents were not born in Canada ... if your grandparents were not born in ... your great-grandparents ... etc.” Within a few generations, the entire crowd was seated, with the exception of the Syilx Okanagan children, parents, and families who had been invited, as well as the other Indigenous guests. It was a transformative moment for the crowd to critically reflect on the whiteout in a public acknowledgment of the history, presence, and continuing reality of the Syilx Okanagan as First Peoples. Our children, in their traditional regalia, sang in Nsyilxcən, songs of welcome to the many newcomers, older generations, and more recent immigrants and refugees to their territory. It is a “new” experience for Okanagan-Syilx children to sing and speak their own Indigenous language, which they have acquired as a second language. Their presence is a reminder to all that the Okanagan-Syilx live here, that this is our homeland, and that our identity, language, culture, and rights continue through our children.

It is apparent we as a larger society, are learning, slowly, to be more tolerant and appreciative of cultural and ecological diversity, are intending to be more inclusive, pluralistic, and sustaining in terms of our cultural and economic relationships with the natural world, so we should understand how past patterns of racism, othering, colonialism and intolerance have been reproduced, and can take new forms. If we are to transform and/or decolonize educational institutions, in our teaching and learning with students, overcome and leave these monsters in the past, or transform these destructive monsters so they are helpful and beneficial to the children now and future generations, we need to identify and understand these monsters. It’s a critical time for Indigenous Peoples to contribute knowledge and imagination to the ways we humans live in relation to the water, earth, plant and animal communities that give us everything we need to live well and peacefully. Indigenous Peoples have place-based experiential cultural lifeways that have maintained ecological and economic health, food security, and distribution. In the Okanagan Valley those knowledge relationships, collaborative partnerships rather than unilateral and imposed, start with the Syilx Okanagan. We, Syilx, and the municipal, economic, educational

institutions, communities, settlers in our homelands, need to put our knowledge and imagination together to understand the past, collaborate in the present so we can all have a future.

POSTSCRIPT BY BILL COHEN

In discussions with Kamloops Indian Residential School survivors in my family and community about the 215 unmarked graves of children at the school, the event is very emotionally and spiritually jarring and triggering for survivors and our families. Even so, it is clear that we need to remember the 215 kids and all those subjected to the Indian Residential Schools and the larger genocidal project to eliminate Indigenous peoples, while continuing to look out for our children of the Syilx Okanagan, Nlaka'pamux, Secwepemc, and St'atimc nations, and Indigenous peoples in our respective homelands. The women in my home community organized COVID-19 safe ceremonies in Komasket Park at our Indian Residential School Memorial to remember, in our language, the children, families, and Elders, past and present, so we can have a future. A teacher, Paul Britton, from the school district, came with his child to grieve with us, stand with us, and to together create new teaching and learning relationships. Limlmt (respect and appreciation) for joining us.

The task as educators, I believe, is to be as informed as possible to educate those in our learning, teaching contexts and responsibilities so we are contributing to the wellbeing of the future. Reconciliation in the larger context is restoring a dynamic balance between human lifeways and the place-based territorial ecologies' ability to self-regenerate. The tmx^wúłax^w, the diverse earth, water, plant, and animal communities which give us everything we need to live well, has proven to work for millennia, so we need to work on our bringing back to life songs, lifeways, and gifts. To get to reconciliation, we must first face the true historic patterns of the colonialism, racialized othering, intolerance, and violence that has occurred and continues. We have all that to understand and transform so we can have respectful, humanizing, and sustaining relationships, and it is a good thing we are emerging from the patriarchal colonial whiteout with much stronger intellectual and creative monster transforming potential. We certainly need this way of pedagogy and praxis.

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