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PORTFOLIO

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Academics as Allies and Accomplices: Practices for Decolonized Solidarity

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Introduction

In Canada, the colonization of Indigenous people began in the 1400s with European explorers and traders imposing laws and making policies that have separated Indigenous people from “their traditional culture, languages, spirituality, economies, systems of governance and other important parts of their identity” (Schiffer 2016, para 2). Today, colonization “remains embedded in the legal, political and economic context of Canada” (Clogg 2020) and, in particular, through the seizing of land, control of resources, and the child welfare system (Wilson 2018). Colonialism also imposes social control by means of force and laws which suppress Indigenous worldviews. Also, during the last decades, there is a growing awareness that *both* non-Indigenous and Indigenous people are disadvantaged by the continued “marginalization of Indigenous knowledge, particularly its use in research” (Jones, Cunsolo, and Harper 2018, 1). I am a non-Indigenous college administrator, author, and researcher working on the territory of Indigenous people. I have benefitted from the privilege of the colonizer and lost opportunities to learn from Indigenous people when I was unaware of Indigenous ways. I am decolonizing my mind so as to learn from Indigenous knowledge and ways of being. Indigenous knowledge can help non-Indigenous people solve some of the wicked problems we all face today.

In this portfolio I tell a little of my journey towards allyship and of my efforts to move beyond allyship towards practicing decolonizing solidarity and being an accomplice. The portfolio is full of advice from Indigenous authors, Elders, and academics about practices that can lead to the decolonization of and allyship in academia both as indented quotes from my personal communication and as quotes from published indigenous works embedded in the text. My own experiences are included in italics and indented quotes to signal they are from me.

This portfolio draws from two recent learning resources by Indigenous authors. The web-based Open Access version of [As I Remember It: Teachings \(?ams ta?aw\) from the Life of a Sliammon Elder](#) provides the teachings of Elder Elsie Paul and her team of Indigenous and non-Indigenous collaborators. [Fatty legs – A True Story](#) is a collaboration between mother-in-law and Indigenous Elder Margaret-Olemann Pokiak-Fenton and her daughter-in-law Christy Jordan-Fenton. Jordan-Fenton’s curiosity about her mother-in-law’s life led to her devotion to understanding colonization for herself, her children, and others. In [Fatty legs – A True Story](#) the two have recounted Pokiak-Fenton’s years at a residential school run by the Roman Catholic Church in Aklavik, Northwest Territories. The story explains how Indigenous children were shamed into renouncing their culture. Although Pokiak-Fenton has recently passed Jordan-Fenton continues to write and present on the residential school experience.

A Way Forward for Academics: Decolonization and the Two-way Wampum Belt

As I Remember It and *Fatty Legs* are part of a significant trend in the last decade towards Indigenous people telling their own stories. Yet, both books similarly disrupt the concept of *allyship* as it has been understood by non-Indigenous people until this day. The books teach that what allyship is and what it is not is often misunderstood. For example, I cannot even count the number of times in the last few years that a colleague or student has said, “I want to incorporate Indigenous ways of knowing, but I don’t want to tax, already overtaxed, Indigenous academics and communities.” They are here referring to the fear of ‘extraction,’ when mistaking allyship for merely visiting Indigenous communities for the collection of their oral histories. I used to share this fear myself for years, until Indigenous Elder, Donna Wright offered me a way to move forward by saying:

It is a great honour for Indigenous people when their work is cited, so don’t stop doing that. However, this does not mean you can begin applying Indigenous knowledge or practices that you learn about out of context. Dialogue must continue and relationships must be maintained. (Donna Wright, message to author, 2020)

Referencing Indigenous academics and people, Wright argues, can thus be a part of the process of appreciating Indigenous ways of knowing, as long as this practice is embedded in a continuous dialogue. The same accounts for non-Indigenous people learning about Indigenous peoples solely through reading their works: this approach can lead to inaccurate interpretations of Indigenous ways of knowing, and the mere reading will never involve learning if it is not embedded in an ongoing relational practice.

I remember my early days working on the cultural centre, Nattinak in Pond Inlet, Nunavut. After two years interviewing Elders and other community members in this arctic community I began to see how ‘content’ could not be extracted for interpretive panels or dioramas in the planned centre as has been done in so many cultural centres in the South. Nattinak needed to be built for the people who were communicating these topics through their stories, their hide scraping, and their food preparation. The two: teaching and learning and everyday life cannot be separated.

The difference between the often content-driven methods of teaching and learning in Western culture and the embodied nature of Indigenous teaching and learning is just one difference that helps us see that learning about Indigenous people cannot be achieved by just reading books – either as academics or general interest readers. Misunderstandings stemming from differences like these can quickly turn into racism if one way is pronounced ‘better’ than the other, or worse if the ‘other’ is disregarded entirely. A brief detour into what constitutes racism bears consideration.

Racism cannot be separated from issues of power. According to Ashley Doane (2006), in one end of the spectrum of the concept, racism is viewed as prejudice and discrimination carried out by individuals. At the other end of the spectrum racism is linked to institutional power of dominant groups, i.e. white males living in the United States. In this portfolio, racism is discussed across the spectrum, i.e. both in relation to individual academics such as instructors and as in popular culture or ‘academia’ where white male power continues to pervade. Doane aptly defines these mechanisms of racism:

Discourses of dominant groups work to legitimize and reproduce dominance by minimizing the extent of inequality, marginalizing claims of subordinate groups, and

moving to make dominant group understandings normative for the larger society.
(Doane 2006, 262)

This portfolio is a call to academics and academia to be antiracists by challenging racism both individually and as members of institutions and society, in classrooms, their discourses, community forums, publishing, and popular media.

For example, in popular culture elected official Alan Lagimodiere, Manitoba, Canada's new minister of Indigenous reconciliation and northern relations, said just after being sworn in, that the residential school system was meant to give Indigenous children the skills they needed to fit into society (Petz 2021). Such statements reveal a lack of historical awareness and the banalization of the complexity of racism. If individual academics were to reference a pronouncement such as this, without discernment, or any other statement that constituted hatred, stereotyping, or unequal treatment, then they would be contributing to ongoing colonization in the institutions where they work and, if they published such remarks they would be acting as a racist in academia as well.

Indigenous children in residential schools in Canada were for long verbally and physically abused. Recent identification by non-Indigenous people of mass graves for these children (Indigenous people always knew the graves were there) attest to the fact that these were not schools but places of cultural genocide (van den Akker 2021). However, the common sensical racism that comes so natural as to become opaque to non-Indigenous people—in literature cited and literature absent, methods used, writing style and findings—is far from evident to Indigenous people, who are often unheard in academia and thus continue to face systemic racism (Bonneau 2021). It is exactly because academia often mirrors oppression and discrimination in mainstream culture, that it has an important task in diagnosing and remediating it in her own practices. This means becoming uncomfortably aware of blatant forms of racism that seem innocent and are covered in discourses and practices that are 'well-meant.'

While in academia the racism today may be subtler, universities and colleges certainly are not safe or decolonized places. For example, in a recent study by Mohamed & Beagan (2019, 344) on the experiences of Indigenous scholars in Canadian universities, one Indigenous scholar said:

I just don't feel part of the conversation, generally. I think the topics that we're talking about are not necessarily ones that I think are the most important things to be talking about. You know? A lot of meetings are like that. I feel like they're just air.

Racism can thus also mean to feel detached from the hegemonic discourse, not to feel represented, to feel absent while formally 'included' (Eisenkraft 2010). This portfolio shows alternative paths forward for the academy: the way of the beaded two-row wampum belt (see Figure 1). In dialogue with the Indigenous teachings from *As I Remember It* and *Fatty Legs*, I here discuss five practices that constructively invite academics to actively counter these racist tendencies, namely, allyship and decolonized solidarity, relationship-building, right action, unsettling our colonized minds, and being of service. Later in this portfolio, we'll explore what adopting these practices means for an academic and the academy as a place of knowledge production, learning, and teaching. Until recently, I thought about myself as an ally, but in speaking with Indigenous people and reading their work, I became acutely aware that allyship can actually become a shrugging of responsibility when allyship stops there, and that it is important to, like the wampum signifies, act on solutions mutually discussed and agreed upon in recognition of one's different situatedness. To explore this further, I will first pause on the difference between allyship and standing in decolonized solidarity.



Figure 1: The wampum belt signifies “that each nation will respect the ways of the other as they meet to discuss solutions to the issues that come before them” (Onondaga Nation 2021). Courtesy: Darren Bonaparte who made the wampum replica above and to Tara Pringle-Block for making the beads

Allyship and Decolonized Solidarity

Many middle school children have become allies after reading *Fatty Legs*. The author, Margaret Pokiak-Fenton, “endured bullying by caregivers, separation from her family and an education aimed at erasing much of her Inuvialuit knowledge” (Smith 2012, para 4). Children are inspired by the young Pokiak-Fenton’s ability to fight back against authority while maintaining her personal dignity. After book readings Pokiak-Fenton says she noticed her stories “resonated with aboriginal and non-aboriginal adults, and residential school survivors too” (Smith 2012, para 9).

When first visiting the web-based version of [As I Remember It: Teachings \(?ams ta?aw\) from the Life of a Sliammon Elder](#), you will be asked to agree with the “Protocol for Being a Respectful Guest.” This consent to a protocol of respectful learning, may be a prompt to be remembered by all academics who are interacting with Indigenous people—whether an explicit protocol as it is in [As I Remember It](#) or not—and as such could be an academic’s first step towards allyship. Allyship is here understood as “an active, consistent, and arduous practice of unlearning and re-evaluating, in which a person of privilege seeks to operate in solidarity with a marginalized group of people” (British Columbia Teachers’ Federation 2021, 1). Although there are no validated measures of allyship, there is agreement on broad categories of behaviours that constitute allyship, namely: individual advocacy, awareness of racism, and institutional advocacy (Williams and Sharif 2021). [As I Remember It](#) is such a serious invitation to transformative learning from the Sliammon. Transformative learning, as a constitutive part of allyship, is a slow and embodied process, and in my own experience with learning about Indigenous ways of knowing and being, it has been both awkward and humbling. In the following memory I learned about why regalia is not costume (Lara-Cooper and Cooper 2016; Biber 2016; Begay 2019)

I remember one powwow I was invited to at Twin Lakes near Inchelium. Even though we were late in arriving, Arrow Lakes CCT Cultural Liaison Virgil Seymour had reserved some chairs near the dancing and in shade. After a while, I remarked on the beauty of the “costumes.” Thankfully my Indigenous colleague kicked me and whispered that these were regalia. Regalia are sacred and have cultural meaning. How could I have mistaken this event for the many non-sacred celebrations of western society? I blushed to my temples and have not made that mistake again.

Yet Kluttz, Walker, and Walter (2020) argue that allyship is not going far enough. Allyship tends to entail a more passive learning, such as reading Indigenous work, visiting Indigenous community events, and inviting Indigenous people to speak. Although learning can be unsettling to our minds and souls (i.e., personal values and beliefs may be challenged), in allyship we may not go beyond personal change or advocacy within our institutions. Effectively involving ourselves in Indigenous resistance, issues, and rights on the other hand, moves us “from performative partnership to an unsettled, insistent commitment to something different.” This “something different” is not the logical next step of allyship, because. . . “(I)t’s harder to own the uncomfortable nature of a colonial past and continued colonial present beyond the performative” (Kluttz, Walker, and Walter 2020, 61). This unsettled state may lead us to act in solidarity rather than leaving all of the resistance to Indigenous people themselves (Amnesty International Australia 2021).

Fatty Legs may never have been written if Christy Jordan-Fenton, who is not Indigenous, didn’t pester her mother-in-law to publish her stories of residential school. Jordan-Fenton didn’t only want to learn herself, but wanted her children and others to learn about residential schools as well. She supported her mother-in-law to publish and went on the speaking tours with her. In a personal conversation, Indigenous colleague and post-secondary educator Jessica Morin shared her positioning in moving towards decolonized solidarity. Although Morin speaks about being invisible in the quote below, I’ve watched her put hundreds of hours into building relationships so that significant events can occur. The events have required institutional changes in policy, etiquette, and processes that must happen in advance. At the event Morin does not speak for the Nations present but she is not afraid to continue making changes at the institutional level so that Indigenous ways of knowing and being can be honoured. She needs courage because her decolonized perspective may not be popular or well understood by the institution or the non-Indigenous participants who are also her colleagues:

For me, I ask where I can stand so that I am not in front, but rather guided from (Be)side. I am ‘Beside’ in presence, understanding, courage, commitment. I also try hard to be as invisible as possible. (Jessica Morin, email to author, 2021)

In another personal conversation, Dianne Biin, Manager, Indigenous Education and Engagement at Selkirk College clarifies how decolonized solidarity means being an active part of an often-unsettling effort:

A metaphor that focuses me is theatre production; those who are behind the curtain wear black so the audience is not distracted and yet they work to support the production. Without the stage crew those who try to portray the story struggle.

As Indigenous women and educators, Morin and Biin extend the more personal reflective learning of allyship to engage in the more active and public resistance of decolonized solidarity. Activist and author Brittany Packet (2019) further describes the difference between standing in solidarity as an ally and being an accomplice. She says,

Knowing that our freedom is connected is the first step in living by the concept of solidarity. Beyond that is the willingness to take risks in the service of justice. This is the difference between an ally and an accomplice.

All three of these women would agree that these processes call for the, often uncomfortable, process of unlearning. One aspect of unlearning is the ways in which we consume and share knowledge. Visitors to *As I Remember It*, are asked to adhere to Traditional Knowledge (TK) protocols. The concepts of open

education and creative commons licensing form an introduction to TK labels (António Andrade 2011). However, TK labels go much further than open education (Local Contexts 2021). *As I Remember It* has adopted specific TK protocols for attribution, outreach, non-commercial use, and cultural sensitivity. These protocols form “a counter-narrative to incorrect and inappropriate interpretations previously drawn by settlers” (Paul *et al.* 2021).

Ally	Accomplice (involves decolonized solidarity)
process of unlearning dominant ideologies often leading to individual advocacy, awareness of racism, and eventually institutional advocacy	individual or institution takes risks in the service of justice, more active and often results in public resistance

Figure 2: Differences between allyship and being an accomplice

A person who has agreed to Traditional Knowledge Protocols and is engaging in allyship and/or decolonized solidarity must also be building relationships. We will discuss building relationships next. The other three practices: right action, unsettling colonial mindset, and being of service will be discussed subsequently. However, even though in this article the practices follow each other, academics should consider all practices in tandem, essential in decolonizing knowledge and academic practice.

There Must Be Relations...



Figure 3: Slocan River eventually joins the Kootenay River and finally the Columbia River which flows into the US and then the sea near Portland, Oregon. Pictured is Frog Mountain a sacred place to Sinixt people. Slocan in the Sinixt dialect means “speared in the head”. Selkirk College’s nine campuses are located on the traditional territories of four Nations: the Sinixt (Lakes), the Syilx (Okanagan), the Ktunaxa, and the Secwépemc (Shuswap) peoples. These lands are important to all four Nations. Courtesy: Mike Graeme

Twenty years ago, when there was first talk of ‘indigenizing’ Selkirk College where I work, our first step, on the recommendation of experienced Indigenous educators Janice Simcoe and Dianne Biin (then at Camosun College), was to visit and build relations with the four Nations whose traditional territories Selkirk operates on: Sinixt (Lakes), Syilx (Okanagan), Ktunaxa, and Secwépemc (Shuswap). At first, this meant Selkirk staff attending council and education-related meetings of the four Nations. As time went on, College representatives were additionally invited to powwows,¹ funerals, and other ceremonies. The friendships between individuals that grew from these repeated visits grew into enduring relationships between Nations and the institution over time.

The relationships between Nations and Selkirk College employees were, according to our memorandum of understanding, forged for the betterment of students. As relations continued to deepen, College employees learned about the particular challenges each Nation faced, such as negotiating land developments, maintaining a privately run post-secondary institution, and generating sustainable economic development. The College maintains agreements with each Nation to acknowledge their separate sovereignty. Becoming gradually better informed about their priorities as relations continue to deepen, the College and its employees can act accordingly. For example, one of the Nations, the Sinixt who are represented by the Colville Confederated Tribes (CCT) were declared extinct by the Government of Canada until an important supreme court judgement this year (Stefanovich, 2021). The judgement found the Sinixt, who live south of the US/Canada border, have constitutionally protected Indigenous rights to hunt in their ancestral territory north of the border in Canada (see Figure 4).



Figure 4: In this photo, Sn̓ayč̓kstx (Sinixt Arrow Lakes) Spokeswoman and cultural coordinator Shelly Boyd waits for a judgement on the steps of the Supreme Court of Canada building located in the country’s capital-Ottawa. The decision she waits for will either facilitate or deny her people hunting rights in Canada (CTV News 2021). Courtesy: Derrick LaMere

Every presentation, workshop, or change in curriculum that the College and the CCT collaborated on had the potential to affect their court case, which urged the College to be continuously reflexive and critically aware of the impact of teaching and research practices. Careful considerations are also made in relation to collaborations with the Syilx (Okanagan), Ktunaxa, and Secwépemc (Shuswap) peoples. Although the focus of indigenization remains on recognizing Indigenous ways of knowing and helping non-Indigenous students learn about colonization and the lands on which they are studying, College employees also endeavour to remain aware of the political and economic implications of their actions.



Figure 5: Author with colleague Jessica Morin (another Selkirk College employee at the time) in front of the offices of the Colville Confederated Tribes (CCT) during a visit in 2018 where approval was sought from CCT Council and members for a course that would introduce Indigenous people in the Region Selkirk College operates, including Sinixt people. Courtesy: Theresa Southam

Right Action

Like the cookie pop-ups that appear on many websites when you first visit them, the request to accept *Protocol for Being a Respectful Guest* on [As I Remember It](#): is a choice: if you don't agree you are sent back to the world wide web without entering the worlds of a Sliammon Elder. In agreeing with the Protocol, you have acknowledged that the site is situated in local contexts, that teachings are to be treated with cultural sensitivity, and that you commit to respect and attribution. You have agreed to "come ashore" and visit the four chapters "Territory," "Colonialism," "Community," and "Wellness"—at your own pace. In essence, you agree to right action. Reflecting on the difference between allyship and decolonized solidarity, right action in this context is more like the former—where the reader/viewer resists Western cultural norms that do not make sense such as the linearity of reading. Decolonized solidarity would involve challenging linearity in academic texts as the only 'correct' form.

Unlike cookies on other websites that are meant to direct your use of the Internet based on decisions you have made in the past, the *As I Remember It* protocol agreement is not used to personalize your visit: you do that on your own by viewing any section of the website in any order. With *As I Remember It*, I started with “An Invitation to Listen,” which begins with one of the many video and audio recordings that can be found throughout the site (each media usually run 15-30 minutes in length). In the “Invitation”, Elsie Paul, the primary author of the related print book and an Elder of the Sliammon Nation, explains her purpose for the collaboration that led to *As I Remember It*, all while ravens fly in the background, a fire burns, salmon cook, and a child plays. Her purpose, she tells, is to provide teachings, especially for members of her Nation that no longer live in close geographical proximity to their community. However, Paul, does not limit her audience, academics can choose to act on these teachings and perhaps approach their research or interpret their results in different ways.

Next, I jumped to “Our Process,” because I was curious about the collaborators and why they had chosen this medium. I’ll say more about that in the section of this portfolio titled “Being of Service.” After reading and listening amongst the chapters, I visited “Features and Resources” where, under “Additional Readings,” I found one of the most comprehensive bibliographies on cross cultural understanding I have ever come across. Engaging deeply in this bibliography while continuing to create relationships with Indigenous people might lead to right action as decolonized solidarity. In this practice Western cultural norms do not always form the basis of decisions, in fact the academic might make decisions based on Indigenous ways of being. “The Sliammon Language,” section is not only about speaking the language but understanding Sliammon ways of being so as potentially to enact these ways. Learning an Indigenous language is an excellent way of discovering an Indigenous people’s worldviews and perhaps changing your own way of being in the world.

Fatty Legs too has something to teach us about right action. In the section “A Note on the Writing Process” Jordan-Fenton says that first Pokiak-Fenton would tell her a story, then Jordan-Fenton would replay those stories over and over, she would ask Pokiak-Fenton question after question and do research to learn more. She finally writes a story and then goes back to her mother-in-law with what she has written to find out if she has misunderstood. The book editor’s advice leads to more research by Jordan-Fenton and more reviews by both. I suspect not all oral histories are as dialogical in nature. Jordan-Fenton demonstrates right action by proceeding with such care, attention, and respect.

Unsettling Colonial Mindset

Although [As I Remember It](#) challenges colonial mindsets in many ways, the unsettling is often subtle. For example, a viewer could agree to the Protocol and yet not fully understand the implications of this agreement until they have formed deep and lasting relations with Indigenous people. *Fatty Legs – A True Story* is far less subtle. The residential school experience for most Indigenous people was painful and traumatizing. As explained above, residential schools were places of cultural genocide where children were tortured, abused, and died due to the conditions of the schools and neglect. Christy Jordan-Fenton helped her mother-in-law share these experiences in this (children’s) book. In the Foreword, Debbie Rees, Founder of American Indians in Children’s Literature, says *Fatty Legs* is rare because it is written by an Indigenous person. Rees says that “(p)eople who are not Indigenous have been writing biased stories about Indigenous people for hundreds of years” (Jordan-Fenton, Pokiak-Fenton, and Amini-Holmes 2010, ix). Here’s a story about some steps I took to decolonize my mindset.

I first really learned about the residential school experience by taking [Aboriginal Worldviews and Education](#) from the University of Toronto and [Reconciliation through Indigenous](#)

Education from the University of British Columbia. Both courses were facilitated by Indigenous teachers. Listening to survivors' stories was so upsetting that I sought counseling from an Elder who worked for the College. I didn't know where to put the grief and shame I felt as a white settler. An Elder helped me not be frozen by this learning.

To get some sense of who is effectively writing Indigenous memoirs, biographies, histories, and teachings, I explored the website of Strong Nations, an online retailer and a publishing house that specializes in Indigenous literature and art. Most publishers are part of colonial structures that can make Indigenous people feel like they can't publish. Under the section, "Non-fiction Biographies," 46 memoirs are written by Indigenous women and men. However, under the section, Indigenous histories and teaching, approximately half were written by non-Indigenous authors and many titles were co-authored by non-Indigenous and Indigenous authors, further continuing along the colonial mindset, which holds that Indigenous people cannot teach about themselves, by themselves. There is still a long way to go towards Indigenous history and teaching being written by Indigenous authors.



Figure 6: Far left book cover for Elsie Paul's book and far right another book by Indigenous authors [Mary Louisa Plummer](#) and [Ma-Nee Chacaby](#) (Strong Nations Publishing 2021). In the middle, photos published on the tenth anniversary of Jordan-Fenton and Pokiak-Fenton's book release of *Fatty Legs* (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation 2021). Pokiak-Fenton has since passed away.

Edosi (Judy) Thompson, an Indigenous researcher and instructor at the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC), has developed a rubric for instructors to use when introducing Indigenous knowledge and wisdom into the curriculum. She asks that six criteria be considered: Elders and community members are involved at all stages; Indigenous languages are recognized as being an integral part of Indigenous ways of knowing and worldview; focus of curriculum is on one particular Indigenous group; it is recognized that there are protocols to be followed and these protocols are clearly stated; the land, plants and animals are incorporated; and traditional ways of learning and teaching such as observation, practice, participation, active involvement, and formative evaluation are incorporated (First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) 2016).

Hogan, McCracken, and Eidinger (2019) are non-Indigenous historians and researchers who write about decolonizing post-secondary instruction. They give several recommendations to academics who want to teach Indigenous history including that "the resource was developed and validated by a qualified, reputable, Indigenous source. . . (such as) Indigenous organizations, Elders, knowledge keepers, authors, or scholars" and that "the resource includes appropriate strategies, activities, or visuals that support teaching and learning of Indigenous storytelling traditions" (para 15). *As I Remember It* certainly meets these criteria, going further than many by extending from print into multimedia. The same

accounts for *Fatty Legs*: Margaret-Olemaun Pontiak-Fenton passed away this Spring, but her daughter-in-law Christy Jordan-Fenton has continued developing teachers' resources (Jordan-Fenton 2020).²

At Selkirk College we once asked for advice on 'Indigenizing' the College. Ktunaxa representative and academic Dr. Christopher Horsethief was contracted to give advice. Horsethief spent an entire afternoon carefully laying out why people from his Nation struggle today. He described individual and collective trauma from the residential school system and the trauma that continues today through racism, for example, politically, educationally, and the child services system. The vice-president at the time admitted later that he wasn't listening closely because he was waiting for the advice on 'how to' Indigenize. Then much later he realized that the stories he heard were the advice for "Indigenizing". He was being asked to be an ally and an accomplice. More importantly he was being asked to bring an institution, one in which he held a lot of power, along with him as an ally and an accomplice.



Figure 7: A free downloadable teachers' resource from Christy Jordan-Fenton's website where students may dress Margaret in traditional clothing or in the stockings residential schoolteachers used to shame her. (Jordan-Fenton 2020)

As the title [As I Remember It: Teachings \(?ams ta?aw\) from the Life of a Sliammon Elder](#) implies, the book and the site are principally about teachings, but as Paul points out, not as scoldings, but as fictitious and real life stories that are meant to be enjoyed. *As I Remember It* collaborator Davis McKenzie adds that Paul's stories are suggestive but not bossy. Paul refers to her teachings as offerings of her memories, not as the only truth. When we reflect back on the six criteria that Thompson recommends when introducing Indigenous knowledge and wisdom into curriculum, *As I Remember It* meets all of these. It's almost as if Elsie Paul and her collaborators are encouraging readers to embrace cognitive and social dissonance (Festinger 1962; Maddamsetti 2020) as a conscious strategy rather than slip back into unchallenged belief and knowledge systems they already hold. Actively experiencing and responding to cognitive dissonance is one aspect of what I consider the unsettling of the colonial mind.

I have many memorable teachings from reading this book. For example, that each person is responsible for themselves, including to be well from the inside (from the “Invitation to Listen” and affirmed in other sections). However, as I reflected on this teaching, I was also acutely aware of As I Remember It’s non-Indigenous scholar Paige Raibmon’s warning to watch for confirmation bias and false equivalency while experiencing As I Remember It (from the page [Transformational Listening](#) embedded in the larger section “Our Collaboration”) because that might lead to misunderstanding of the work.

Being of Service

Another practice, for scholars, according to Raibmon,³ is to be of service on projects that arise from and are directed by Indigenous families. For example, in *As I Remember It*, collaboration did not end with non-Indigenous led interviews, but interviews were then followed by community consultations. The meanings of Elsie’s teachings, when they were expanded on by the team with text, visuals, or explanations on video, were checked by Elsie Paul’s community collaborator Harmony Johnson. One of Johnson’s jobs is to care for Paul, to make sure she is respected and cared for during the production process. The first transcripts were discussed by Sliammon community members for their accuracy historically as the community remembers and today. Johnson was central to this process while taking care of Paul at the same time. New interviews were conducted by Johnson where the meanings weren’t clear, and punctuation was debated by her. Raibmon says that although she wasn’t trained to implement historical research in this way, she learned a lot about issues of representation and translation and also about how history is created, in this case not by one researcher, but a researcher in close contact with a community. For after all, *As I Remember It* isn’t primarily a resource for scholars but for Sliammon people as well. Paul also says in the video, “[Life History of this Project](#)” in *As I Remember It*, that there are so many Sliammon living away from home that don’t have access to their teachings. She wants Sliammon everywhere to have access to teachings through a project that grew from solidarity. Like Raibmon, who learned being a historian can include being of service, I too have learned that education can include being of service.

When Selkirk College first ran Indigenous 100 – Regional Perspectives on Indigenous Cultures and Practices, I felt nervous as a non-Indigenous course facilitator. Dianne Biin had suggested that Selkirk’s first step was to have the Nations in the region where the College operated introduce their history. The first offerings of the course were taught by representatives of the Sinixt, Syilx, Ktunaxa, and Metis peoples. Metis are descendants of First Nations and European unions and have been residing in British Columbia as early as 1793 (Metis Nation of British Columbia 2021). The Metis module was taught by an instructor who was also willing to speak for Indigenous people living off reserves. A reserve is a geographical place that has been allocated to a Nation by a government. Almost 900,000 Indigenous people lived in Canadian towns and cities with a population of 30,000 or more in 2016. This accounts for more than half of Indigenous people in Canada (BC Campus 2021). Selecting instructors involved new human resource practices including requiring applicants to have letters of recommendation from their Nation. The Selkirk College Faculty Association agreed to waive a requirement for a Master’s degree to teach, acknowledging that knowledge keepers might not have gained their status from post-secondary institutions which they had much right to distrust due to systemic racism and disregard, but rather have gained their status in their communities through means dictated there.

Agreements amongst the Nations about order of modules was tricky as it could have indicated territoriality. We agreed to rotate order year to year. Although instructors for the four modules were able to agree on course outcomes, their histories of the land varied widely. Before the course,

Elders from two of the Nations had very different stories related to one plant, camas. I had to facilitate conversations with these differences and stand in solidarity with each Nation's worldview. This is like the two-row wampum belt where non-Indigenous and Indigenous worldviews are both respected. Breaking the course into four modules allowed us to meet Thompson's criteria: "Focus of curriculum is on one particular Indigenous group." The instructors also met the other criteria that Thompson lays out including involving Elders and community members, teaching Indigenous languages, stating and following protocols, incorporating land, plants and animals, and using traditional ways of learning and teaching. In the end, the course included a meal with all instructors and students present. I was so fortunate to have facilitated the first offering of this course. The course continues today with Indigenous facilitators.



Figure 8: Camas is a significant food source for the Sinixt, Syilx, and Ktunaxa peoples. The location of large camas fields is in sight of anyone standing on the Castlegar Campus of Selkirk College. These fields were utilized by Sinixt people before colonization. Courtesy: Mike Graeme

Being of service means considering who the project will serve. The *As I Remember It* team moved from print to multimedia to be of service to off reserve community members, especially youth. The collaborators said that they had to "undo the process" and "show the seams" (Paul *et al.* 2019). By showing the seams, they mean they wanted to reveal not only the final product as in the book, but also the processes that lead to Elsie's sharing, the context that she works in, and why she shares her teachings. While creating the multimedia site, the team considered the Sliammon people first, as well as what information could be made into what they call "snacks." By snacks they meant the teachings that could stand alone. They debated the frames they would use in the online version, aiming to avoid

appropriation and to support Sliammon culture and ways of knowing and learning. They considered accessibility. Here's what production team member Davis McKenzie has to say about how accessibility informs the team's choice to go from the book to multimedia.

The Internet is ... undeniably one place where łaʔamun people now live. For example, more than half of our łaʔamun people live outside łaʔamun territory, and most are in cities. We also have a very youthful population, with over half of our people under the age of twenty-five. Digital spaces hold the potential to keep us connected to the territory, the teachings, and each other across physical distances and generations. Chichia [Elsie Paul's familiar name] herself joined Facebook at the age of eighty-four with some of these intentions; (Paul *et al.* 2019)

Elder Elsie Paul says in "Our Process": "I never thought in a million years it would go this way" (Paul *et al.* 2019). But if it reaches more people, especially younger Sliammon people that are living away from home and don't have access to Elders, then Paul believes the project has been worth it.

At Selkirk College we once had Dr. Jeannette Armstrong, a scholar, powerful Okanagan Elder, once Director of the private Indigenous-led post-secondary Enowkin and once Canada Research Chair on Indigenization give a lecture. At that lecture she was rudely asked why she was lecturing on Sinixt territory. Armstrong in fact has Sinixt heritage and so this was a highly unsettling charge from a non-Indigenous 'local.' Instead of challenging the untutored questioner she told stories that would elucidate the complex relationships between Sinixt and Sylix peoples. I believe the questioner went away entrenched in their righteous uneducated allegation, thinking it a courageous act. Armstrong, gracious and kind, even in such a circumstance, left the lecture shaken by the depth of racism in the community.

Paul describes *As I Remember It* as a "ripple in the water" of change (Paul *et al.* 2019). Given the evidence from the inventory of the retailer Strong Nations, the tide is indeed turning. In the future, we may see not only more histories and teachings by Indigenous people, but their format may also change to be more accessible and representative of Indigenous cultures. This will both reflect and require a decolonizing solidarity: an affirmative relation not only sensitive to the content of teachings, but also of the ways teaching is done and of the potential of Indigenous teachings for ways forward in the future.

In Summary

There is a growing trend over the past two decades to reaffirm and recognize Indigenous voices and worldviews as valid and authentic scholarship. Publishers like UBC Press are pushing those boundaries with sharing Indigenous stories and knowledge in the way of *As I Remember It*. Indigenous people are telling their own stories as Pokiak-Fenton does in *Fatty Legs*. Non-Indigenous academics can expand their own worldviews by familiarizing themselves with this scholarship while embracing decolonization. Decolonization practices scholars might adopt allyship and solidarity, engaging in relationship-building, right action, unsettling our colonized minds, and being of service. These are important practices that further contribute to decolonizing the western mind, one of the most important, profound, and transformative tasks of academics today.

Acknowledgements

For the acknowledgements, you are kindly invited to watch: <https://youtu.be/DNuIyVEmn2g>.

Notes

1. Powwows are “gatherings where you’ll find multiple generations coming together to enjoy food, honour traditions, forge a sense of community, and practice spiritual healing” (Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada (ITAC) 2021).
2. Follow Jordan-Fenton on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/CJordanFenton>.
3. In the video [Life History of this Project](#) in *As I Remember It* Raibmon describes how other history projects have been her idea, as the historian. In this project she learned how to listen better, especially amongst all of the possible priorities for what was wanted and needed most by the community.

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