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Critical Reflection on Place

I was listening to a podcast recently and the guest, Zach Woods, said something that stood out to me as I reflected on my own sense of place. It is a quote that, I feel, fits well with what we have been thinking about and discussing throughout this course. He said, “places aren’t places they’re times”. Places are not merely geographic locations; they are the individual and collective memories of a time and the product of the narratives that have been told about the place. Therefore, one’s sense of a place is inextricably linked to the memories one has in that place and the stories they have heard about it. The place where I have spent the most time and, therefore, the place that I have chosen to examine my sense of is right here in Kamloops, BC. Kamloops is home to me; I was born and raised here and, in fact, have spent my whole life on the same small piece of land in the same house. I have a deep love for the natural beauty of Kamloops. I love watching the sunset at Riverside Park and how the setting sun makes the water of Thompson River sparkle. I love watching the seasons change as I walk along the Rivers Trail near my house at various times of the year. I love standing in awe as I gaze down at the whole city from one of the many scenic lookouts. To me, Kamloops means comfort, familiarity, and safety.

My knowledge of the history of this place and the people who live here has changed significantly throughout my life, especially in the past five or so years. In elementary school, I

remember visiting the Kamloops Museum countless times with my grandparents, on class field trips, and even once attending a summer camp put on by the museum. When I was in Grade 2 my class read a novel from the Canadian Flyer Adventure series by Frieda Wishinsky. The book was called *Crazy for Gold*; in it the child protagonists use their time-travelling sled to travel back in time to the Yukon during the gold rush. The reason for reading this particular book was that we were learning about the Canadian gold rushes. We learned about when the gold rush came to Kamloops, bringing an influx of settlers, which culminated in a trip to the museum where we learned how to pan for gold from "Yukon Dan". I remember in the children's section of the museum there was a costume area where you could dress up like a pioneer and learn all about what life was like for the first settlers in the area. I even had my picture taken for the newspaper dressed up like a pioneer. This was the history of Kamloops that I knew. I had a vague sense that this land had been occupied prior to white settlement, however, when I think about my sense of Kamloops as a child, the pioneer image is predominant. There is no doubt that my sense of Kamloops as a child was heavily influenced by the narratives of the hard-working pioneer that I heard, almost exclusively, at school, in books, and from historical experts. My understanding of the place where I lived was a product of a decades-long cultural narrative that systematically erased Indigenous presence from the land and made it available for the creation of Canada. The fact that I can easily recall learning extensively about the gold rush and the pioneers but struggle to remember ever learning about the Secwépemc people who occupied this land long before the pioneers ever set foot here is evidence of this on-going cultural narrative.

Like Di Brandt, I cannot pinpoint exactly when I came to understand the other side of Kamloops history. A history of violence and dispossession that cleared the way for those "heroic" pioneers to settle this land and the implications in that history for me as a white woman

living on this land. I was about seven or eight years old when I was first introduced to the concept of Indigenous sovereignty. Of course, I did not have the language to describe it as such until I was much older. As I mentioned earlier, I had somewhat of a sense that I was living on Indigenous land, and I vaguely remember hearing someone at school say something about Indigenous people wanting their land back. What I remember clearly about that moment, however, was how hearing that made me feel worried, even fearful. I thought that if Indigenous people took their land back it would mean that I would have to leave. I did not want to leave; I loved Kamloops and I loved my house. This feeling of fear, too, was culturally influenced; it stemmed from a sense that I was entitled to live on this land, a sentiment which was present among the first white settlers of this area and has been passed down to subsequent generations. At the time I did not understand that this land had been violently stolen from the Secwépemc people who have lived here and cared for the land since time immemorial. I did not know about treaties or the reserve system or residential schools. It is ironic that the feelings I was experiencing – the fear of having to leave my home that I loved – had been a reality for many Secwépemc children who were forcibly removed from this land that was their home before it was mine. In my later years of high school and university, I have come to know and understand more fully this side of Kamloops history. A history that is markedly different from the one I knew as a child.

Now, as an adult, I have mixed feelings about this place called Kamloops. I still love Kamloops. It holds so many wonderful stories and memories for me. It is the place where I feel most at home. But I also know now that for all the happy memories it holds equally as many painful ones. I now understand that my sense of Kamloops as home is only made possible through a cultural narrative that physically and ideologically erases Indigenous presence and

sovereignty, thereby making the land available for white settlement. As I continue to learn and understand how my sense of place is culturally constructed and navigate the tensions produced in this process, I am filled with gratitude to be able to call Kamloops my home.

Works Cited

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