

Ethnic Partisanship and its Menace in Joseph Boyden's *Three Day Road*

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Abstract

People's lives have been greatly impacted by literature. It portrays the deep reality of humanity through an empowered vocabulary. There's space for memories, foreboding, introspection, flashbacks, and horrific experiences laced with pain, trauma, and injury. Writing from today's perspective allows characters to freely articulate the issues they face, which results in stories of worry. Renowned Canadian author and activist Joseph Boyden uses his writing to explore the social, political, and spiritual ties that people experience. He wants the audience to understand the suffering and agony of the characters in order to become more self-aware and confident while speaking about their problems. Boyden has experienced racial issues as well. He belongs to the group of Metis Canadians, who are Canadians with Scottish and Irish ancestry. Some activists have questioned him for receiving tribal recognition despite having multiple identities. The current study, "Ethnic Partisanship and its Menace in Joseph Boyden's *Three Day Road*" explores the racial inequalities and threats that Joseph Boyden reflected in his fiction *Three Day Road*.

Key Words: racial discrimination, intergenerational trauma, distortion in natural ways of life

Across the world, discrimination of all types is always directed towards Aboriginal communities. They are factors like language, religion, race, and community. The person or group that differentiates the Aboriginal people from them makes the argument that they are more advanced in terms of culture and civilization than the aborigines. After that, the colonists used their advanced weaponry, rather than their superior intelligence, to subdue the Aboriginal people. Thus, through marginalization, the colonists asserted their dominance over the aboriginal people. The indigenous people struggle to survive after losing their homeland, natural ways of life, religion, and language.

When impacted people fight, argue, or seek their rights, violence against them results. Some discrimination is challenged verbally and may be successful for the targeted person or community. Some opposition reduces them to slaves in their own lives and communities. These people lack the voice to speak out against their more powerful colonizers. When individuals are reduced to the status of slaves in their own country, it hurts them more. In actuality, this actually leaves the next generation with a permanent scar of humiliation. The colonized people's descendants chose literature as a way to move past the trauma they experienced or to mend the scar left behind. It is generally accepted that, up until the international battle for independence, native people were a prime target for racial discrimination on the part of settlers and explorers. The novels in Joseph Boyden's *Bird* series are set on Hudson Bay, where the author has shown the hardships experienced by the Cree people.

In Ontario, Canada, Joseph Boyden was born in 1966. He is well-known for his writings about Canada's indigenous people and is of Irish and Scottish ancestry. He has released a collection of short stories, three non-

fiction works, and four novels. Racial discrimination and distortion in native life are frequently depicted in these works. The racial bias that the Canadian colonies perpetrated against the aboriginal people is highlighted in the article "Ethnic Partisanship and its Menace in Joseph Boyden's *Three Day Road*". Among the racial issues that the Native Americans encountered, according to the novel, were alienation and racial prejudice in residential schools and on the battlefield.

Niska, a medicinal woman, is shown at the start of *Three Day Road* waiting for Elijah to return from the front lines of battle at a train station. Because of his military trauma, Elijah lacks the mental and physical fortitude to face conflict. Niska is shocked to learn that Xavier, not Elijah, has returned from battle. Later in the narrative, when Elijah and Xavier barter military insignia on the battlefield, specifics of the confusion are revealed. The three main protagonists in the book are Xavier, Elijah, and Niska. They are members of the Hudson Bay Cree tribal clan and are very close relatives. To go to her house in Hudson Bay, Niska spends three days paddling Xavier in a canoe. Before returning home to begin a new life, she hopes to heal Xavier from his physical and emotional scars from her travels. After their canoe trip, the narrative closes with the hope that they will survive and recover. The story covers a variety of topics, including racial concerns in war, native residential schools, alienation, and how settlers have distorted native communities and interactions. This article discusses the several types of racial discrimination that are depicted in *Three Day Road*.

The colonists in *Three Day Road* alienated the aboriginal people. The settlers' prejudice is visible in the personas of Niska, Xavier, and Elijah. They experience alienation in a variety of ways, particularly for those who continue to live according to their national customs. Niska is one of the indigenous people who continues to live in her ancestral home. She never disrespects their way of life, but she also doesn't practice their customs or engage in non-native activities. The white people talk about her and stare at her as though they have never seen someone like her. She is socially alienated by the colonists, and she calls them "wemistikoshiw" (16), and to the colonists, she is a "wild old woman, an Indian animal straight out of the bush." (16) By seeing her, Niska is able to decipher the White people's inner monologue. The White people demand the Native Americans adhere to their language, customs, culture, and religion. The aboriginal people who refuse to conform themselves to White's suppositions will be acknowledged as White people. The White people view Niska as wild and uncivilized because they believe that she leads an uncivilized existence.

The White people view Niska differently since she does not share the principles of the other Native Americans who have assimilated culturally. The advantages that the settlers gave to the aboriginal people who did not oppose White existence are not depicted in the story. Rather, it is the result of the settlers' expectation of a wemistikoshiw life from the aboriginal people. Unfair social and community practices among Native Americans have become a typical occurrence among White people. However, Boyden's second book, *Through Black Spruce* (2008), highlights the benefits that Native Americans receive when they stand behind White people, even in cases where it is socially unacceptable. People who engage in socially unacceptable activities, such as selling drugs manufactured by White people, are not prosecuted or punished by the local police in *Through Black Spruce*. When someone who supports the settlers commits a crime, there is no recourse offered to the afflicted individuals or their families. While Boyden uses Niska as a vehicle for expressing racial humiliation, Niska is not the only character experiencing this; there are many others who share Niska's experiences of being treated unfairly because of their race. The Native Americans shown by Niska exhibit generational disparities in race. The tale depicts how racial unrest impacts people for decades.

While suffering from war fatigue, Elijah and Xavier in *Three Day Road* encounter racist threats while riding a train. Despite being aboard the same train, the soldiers are assigned different compartments according to their race. Elijah and Xavier are asked not to get in their automobile by a fellow soldier since separate vehicles are designated for Indians. The moment they boarded the train, "A man in a uniform said to us, soon as we got on, "No Indians in this car." He pointed down the aisle. "You belong four cars to the back"" (168). The unfortunate truth is that white people are assigned to cars with nice seats, whereas native people are sent to cars with wooden seats. Xavier refers to the same as, "The seats are wood and uncomfortable. The smell of animals in the next car is strong" (168). The hardships endured by Niska, Xavier, and Elijah demonstrate how European

immigrants treated the native population. When Lieutenant Breech is informed about Elijah and Xavier's prowess in combat, "Breech says that it is our Indian blood, that our blood is closer to that of an animal than that of a man" (109). Two of their troop's top snipers are Elijah and Xavier. Their years of native hunting experience enable them to accurately take out opponents. However, racial acceptance is necessary for an officer to express gratitude for bravery.

Threats from racism in Canada's residential schools are the third instance of racial disapproval mentioned in *Three Day Road*. In Canada, residential schools are designed to upend the indigenous systems that native children belong to in their families, communities, and society. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada referred to the residential school system as "aggressive assimilation" in its final report, which was submitted in December 2015 (12). On the third page of their final report, they refer to their results as "The Canadian government pursued this policy of cultural genocide because it wished to divest itself of its legal and financial obligations to Aboriginal people and gain control over their land and resources. If every Aboriginal person had been 'absorbed into the body politic,' there would be no reserves, no Treaties, and no Aboriginal rights." (3) The goal of the residential schools, which was to eradicate all of the positive aspects of First Nations and Indigenous traditions, has been accomplished.

Because of their racial identity, the native students in the Canadian residential schools experience difficulties in the classroom. The residential facility abuses children emotionally, physically, and sexually. Particularly when it comes to indigenous crafts, games, and sports, children are not allowed to engage in hobbies or games that are age-appropriate. Parents are not allowed to see their children in schools, and kids are not allowed to visit their parents at home because kids are only meant to see their parents on annual vacations. Residential schools caused suffering for Xavier, Elijah, and Niska.

Niska says she had a bad time at the residential school. Niska is penalized for speaking in her native tongue and is compelled to learn English. "When I was caught speaking my tongue, they'd force lye soap into my mouth and not give me anything else to eat for days," (101) Niska recounts in reference to the penalty for speaking in Cree. Her hair is cropped from her waist to her neck to symbolize the possibility that Native Americans are superior to White people if it reaches her waist. Niska claims, "They were going to shear us like sheep, removing the black hair that reached my waist as a symbol of wemistikosiw authority, of our defeat." (101). A nun at the residential school named Magdalene informs Elijah and Xavier that "the Cree are a backwards people and God's displeasure is shown" (65).

The Indians have been ignored by the Europeans throughout the novel *Three Day Road*, as told from their point of view. The Aboriginals are traumatized by the depiction of racial disregard. We refer to this state of affairs as racial trauma. Conflicts based on race, like attacks on people based on their skin colour and racial prejudice. People who live in risky environments that contrast with their skin tone may suffer from racial trauma. It significantly impacts all racial or ethnic minorities who are oppressed or disadvantaged. Prior to the arrival of the colonies, the Bird family in Hudson Bay governed themselves, but the colonists reigned over the aboriginal people. The European Union oversees the customs, culture, and youth of the indigenous people. The novel makes it rather evident that Europeans target Canada's indigenous population. The novel makes it quite evident that European colonizers attack Canada's indigenous population. Through their experiences on the battlefield, at residential schools, and in interactions with White people, Niska, Elijah, and Xavier endured mistreatment.

Three Day Road provides justification for the racial threats that White and European settlers pose to the indigenous people, who neither use force nor adopt a more homogenous way of life for themselves. They were unable to escape the distressing circumstances and impart the same to others. The impact of the stories of the past leads to intergenerational trauma. The psychic suffering described by Sigmund Freud in his book *The Origin and Development of Psychoanalysis* is described as "but in the unconscious the suppressed wish still exists, only waiting for its chance to become active, and finally succeeds in sending into consciousness" (21). Healing is the only way to overcome the trauma caused by partisanship. Though its menace is a threat to the growth of an individual and community, *Three Day Road* insists on story-telling through native healing skills as a method of recovery.

Works Cited

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