

## **Post-Colonialism in *Three Day Road* and *Whale Rider***

Imperialism is recognized as the policy of extending a country's rule over other nations through the use of force. This practice has tremendously harmful effects on the victimized indigenous peoples of the land, often leaving them without any power or rights. Edward Said, a colonial-theorist, observed that the colonizers justified this domination by viewing the native culture as inferior to their own and that through their interference, they were rescuing the native peoples from their inhuman and backwards ways. The process of colonization alters the political and cultural conditions of the land, but what about the effects on native peoples when this overt suppression stops? The effects of colonization continue to influence indigenous peoples generations later and these are the consequences of colonial rule. In Canada, the indigenous peoples were not given basic rights and were forced to either assimilate into Western culture or die out. In New Zealand, the Māori peoples lost much of their population and their political power in the process of colonization. The native culture in every country that has been colonized has faced losing some of their cultural identity. The effects of these losses are explored in the novel *Three Day Road* and the film *Whale Rider*.

*Three Day Road* has plenty of examples relating to the effects of residential schools on the main characters. The school's purpose was to integrate the Indigenous youth into Western culture and "to kill the Indian in the child." Residential schools were a part of the colonization of Canada. The Aboriginal children who attended the schools were forced into Western society and the abuse inflicted upon the children had life-altering consequences.

Like many other Aboriginal children, Xavier was abused at residential school. More than a decade later, he still has nightmares of his time at the school. He recalls on page 56, that "the boys [sat] frightened at their desks," as they were being taught that "the old Cree are heathen and anger God." Some children lived in terror of being sexually abused by the nuns and the staff. In fact, one out of five of them experienced this at residential schools. Elijah's story represents their experiences. On page 267 Elijah says that "[stealing the nun's rifle is] a small payment for her always trying to bathe me," which shows the resentment Elijah feels towards the nun. The nuns were meant to take care of the children, however, they abused their power. The traumatizing ordeals many of the Indigenous children experienced at residential school have a lingering effect on their mental health as well as future generations. Niska, for example, deeply feels the effect of residential school, even as an adult. On page 219, she "let[s] out a wail, the wail of years of hurting" towards a nun from the residential school. The nun's abuse of the children symbolizes how Western values have violated Native culture. After going through residential school, many First Nations people neither felt connected to their Indigenous heritage nor the Western way of life they were forced into. On page 168, Niska says that there's "an invisible wall, one impossible to breach, lay between her and the homeguard Indians of [the] white town."

It is made clear that Lieutenant Breech has a distaste for Xavier and the Lieutenant is racist towards him due to his background. At one point, Breech refers to the First Nations' medicine saying, "I will not even dare ask what sorcery this heathen practices in the wild forests back home" (256). White

Canadians were often this disrespectful to minorities, mocking their way of life and culture, partly because they felt threatened by them. Their lifestyle and traditions were foreign to Westerners and the racism Xavier and Elijah experience during the war is directly related to Lieutenant Breech viewing his culture as superior to that of a First Nations' person. Following the theme of believing that they are better, on page 203 the reader learns from a French soldier that "The (Commanding Officer) C.O refuses to acknowledge the kills [Peggy] makes since he doesn't work with a spotter. But he is the best. He has killed many Hun." In reality, the C.O. is not counting his kills because Peggy is Aboriginal. He does not want to admit that an Aboriginal person could be a better sniper than a British one. The belief that Indigenous peoples were inferior to white people was perpetuated with the idea that they were savages for not living the Western way of life and for celebrating a different God. It was normal and almost expected to have racist attitudes towards the First Nations peoples.

During the war Elijah slowly distances himself from his Cree culture. The British pronounce his name Whiskeyjack instead of his true Cree name *Weesageechak*, leaving him without his Cree identity. On page 154, Xavier claims that, "Whiskeyjack is how they say his name, make it their own." This demonstrates how Elijah has let a whole identity be constructed for him, just to fit in. Although this is not blatant racism, by mispronouncing his name and not taking the time to try and say it correctly, they are being racist. They believe a First Nations' person does not need to be given the same respect as a Westerner, and that it is not important to learn his real name. Elijah has learned from his time at residential school that his Cree background is frowned upon and that adopting Western customs is a way to achieve power and blend into this ignorant society. A substantial amount of the novel focuses on Elijah's battle between his two selves. Readers get to see some of his Cree characteristics like his astounding hunting and trapping skills while seeing bits and pieces of his upbringing in residential school like his ability to speak English fluently and generally fit in with Western customs and culture. Elijah is one of the most captivating characters as he has desperately tried to integrate himself into the Western community.

Elijah's morphine addiction plays a large role in his spiral out of control. Xavier describes Elijah's morphine addiction by saying that "When [Elijah] does not take the morphine, he is afraid of the world, and that is not a good feeling" (page 212). Throughout the novel, it is made clear that Elijah does not fear much. He constantly makes careless moves and engages in risky activities like going into no man's land alone. For the first time, before the the raid in Somme, we see him shaken and undoubtedly, Elijah, who is used to having control over situations, does not like the feeling. Morphine is the perfect substitute for both his physical pain and his fear. In war, fear is what kept the soldiers safe. It was what made the soldiers aware of their surroundings. The sliver of fear that Elijah had left in him was what was keeping him from going over the edge into insanity. Morphine was the perfect alternative to his fear as it made him feel like an "invincible hunter" which as a result made him dangerous to the Germans, the Canadians, and to himself. Ultimately, Elijah's insatiable hunger for morphine and the effects of the drug was the reason Elijah became insane. The story of addiction, however, is not specific to Elijah. Morphine, alcohol and addiction to these substances was first introduced and given to the Aboriginals by the Europeans during colonization. Between the Germans poisonous gas and the horrific shelling, morphine and other substances (e.g rum, tobacco) provided a safe haven for the soldiers. These substances were especially dangerous to the First Nations as they knew nothing about them or how to counteract their side effects, as

we see Niska struggle to do with Xavier's morphine addiction. Historically, reports show that these substances were given out without being monitored. In the novel, on page 65, when Xavier is talking about the accessibility of the drug, he says "[It's] so much easier, too, to find medicine here than I ever imagined. The medics carry plenty and are not always keeping an eye on their kits." The handing out of the drug with no limits further encouraged addiction. The introduction and unmonitored distribution of drugs and alcohol to first nations during the war over a century ago, affects current generations who as a result, have become more vulnerable to addiction and the side effects that come with it, with statistics reporting that those families with histories of substance abuse have higher incidences of suicide, violent crimes, illegal activity, and other forms of substance abuse. In fact, over 75% of First Nations communities feel that alcohol and drug use are a problem within their community and 25% feel that they have a personal problem with alcohol and drugs based on a survey done in 2008. Substance abuse and addiction is a direct consequence of colonization and the introduction of these substances had catastrophic repercussions for the future generations of the First Nations people.

Another observation can be drawn from Elijah's childhood when it was implied that he was sexually abused by one of the nuns while at residential school. Looking at sexual abuse as a whole, we can easily draw the conclusion that in most cases, the perpetrators have some sort of power over the victim. In this case, the nun who is much older and has authority over Elijah. While Elijah is serving in the war, it is shown that Elijah uses his teachings from residential school to speak English and mimic a British accent. As the novel progresses, and he starts to enjoy killing, he continues to use English as his main language along with the British accent that the higher-ranking British officers also use. From this, readers can draw a direct correlation between the traumatic experiences he had in his childhood by authority figures and his tendency to use English. Elijah feels that he has control and is superior to the enemy troops and even his fellow soldiers, just like the nun was when she committed those acts. Elijah associates the English language with people who have power and dominance, which is why he has the tendency to speak this way. In a way, Elijah's internal struggle can be used to represent the relationship between the English and the First Nations as a whole. There was a constant power struggle between the two sides with the English almost always having command and dominance over the First Nations.

In *Whale Rider*, the effects of colonialism are still present despite the Māori people being vastly different than those who are negatively impacted in *Three Day Road*. Before modern establishment, the Māori peoples were contently living in New Zealand separated from the outside world. As new technology was introduced, such as advancements in transportation and medicine, the indigenous people of the land adopted some of these styles. Some of these aspects are an improvement to their quality of life. Throughout the film, it is shown that the Māori people use bikes, boats, and buses. The ability to travel the globe was introduced with the invention of aeroplane transportation and this gave the option to explore new ways of life. This allows for people who rejected their culture or were rejected by it to have a chance to get away. An example of this is Paikea's father. He explains that he has built a life for himself in Germany acquiring work as an artist and getting into a relationship. This option of separating from one's family did not exist and was not desirable in traditional Māori culture. We see Paikea's father lose his connection with his people and family. One of the most committed members of the Māori community, Paikea's grandfather Koro, despises his own son for not following his native duties, not knowing that

freedom of choice is something that is more widely accepted outside of Māori culture. These disconnections can pull apart families hurting both sides just because they did not see the full picture.

Another example of colonial rule eroding bonds in families is Hemi's familial situation. It is visible that Hemi's family structure is not exactly sound as it is seen that his father is infrequent in his life. His visits can be spaced for weeks and even months with no sign of return. It is clear that Hemi's father has some sort of life outside the Māori tribe whether it be new friends, business, or trouble in the judiciary system. Either way, it creates a dissonance in the family. It also has some influence on Hemi as he says he wants to get out of the Māori people's tight connection and live with his father. This would only be happening if there was something that came along with colonizing modern New Zealand that would pull Hemi's family away from their natural roots and into something possibly darker. Although modern inventions commonly solve everyday problems, there are always dark aspects that follow. Whatever is causing Hemi's father to become distant has been introduced by European colonizers. Whatever aspect of contemporary civilization is affecting Hemi's family, it is destroying generations of undisturbed consistency.

*Three Day Road* and *Whale Rider* explore the effects of colonialism on two vastly different cultures. In the novel and the film it is evident that colonization has affected the behaviour and lifestyle of the characters. As a result of colonization, Indigenous communities were forced to assimilate into Western society resulting in many people lacking in cultural identity. The effects of imperialism are still deeply felt, but there is a growing effort to regain the culture that was lost in the process of colonization. As Franz Fanon, a colonial theorist put it, "Imperialism leaves behind germs of rot which we must clinically detect and remove from our land but from our minds as well." As we move forward with reconciliation, we must continue to acknowledge the pain that was inflicted upon the Indigenous peoples and learn from our past mistakes in order to strive for a unified future.

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