

Impossible Citizens? Memory Citizenship and Transcultural Identity in Joseph Boyden's *Three Day Road*

Hanna Teichler
Goethe University Frankfurt

Abstract: *On June 11th, 2008, the then-Prime Minister Stephen Harper issued an apology on behalf of the Canadian government. Harper apologized for the so-called Indian Residential School System through which Indigenous peoples were forcibly relocated and segregated, and their children were supposed to be 'culturally re-educated'. Canadian Reconciliation and First World War remembrance (2014 and 2018) mark instances of collective remembering which prompted critical reflections on contemporary Canadian national identity. The Canadian reconciliation process simultaneously contests and designs contemporary understandings of Canadian histories and culture(s). Against this identity-political backdrop, author Joseph Boyden published a novel in which Canadian collective memories of cultural re-education and WWI participation as Canada's 'origin story' intersect. Three Day Road (2005) sends two Indigenous protagonists as soldiers into the European theatres of war, where they excel as trackers and snipers. Boyden's novel thus opens up Canada's 'birth of the nation' to Canada's Indigenous peoples, and retrospectively indigenizes this national(ist) narrative. Though poignant in its imagination of Indigenous war participation, Three Day Road eventually kills its transcultural trickster-figure Elijah who embodies the playful oscillation between the cultural poles. Boyden's novel effectively deems transcultural identities unviable, if not impossible. Moreover, the text romanticizes an authentic Indigeneity, and proposes a seclusion from modernity as a possible Indigenous future. In this sense – as this essay argues – Boyden's novel is highly ambiguous in its identity-political agenda: It provides an important space where monolithic Canadian identities are problematized, where ethnically coded memories become entangled. Yet, whilst this novel re-presents formerly divisive national narratives as venues of imagining transcultural Canadian citizenship, transcultural citizens are rendered incapable of survival.*

Keywords: Canadian Reconciliation, Indigenous Literatures/Identities, Transculturality, Memory Citizenship, World War I

1. Introduction

The year 2017 was a particularly special one for the Canadian society: the nation celebrated the 150th anniversary. To pay tribute to Canada's ambiguous history and to critically reflect on contemporary Canada, commemorative and celebratory events were held all over the country. Such events gave "Canadians the opportunity to get involved in their community and to celebrate together our shared values, our achievements, our majestic environment and our country's place in the world".¹ 'Canada 150', as this series of festivities was

dubbed, is one event in the panoply of highly identity-political anniversaries that have been celebrated in Canada in recent years: in 2014 and 2018, the First World War's outbreak and end were remembered in countries across the world. For Canada, First World War remembrance holds a special importance, since the modern Canadian nation was supposedly 'born' in the trenches of European war theatres. Moreover, in 2010, the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) commenced its work to foster and guide a process of reconciliation with Canada's Indigenous peoples. This commission was the outcome of a decade-long struggle to come to terms with the Indian Residential School (IRS) legacy, a system designed to culturally 're-educate' Indigenous Canadians. Through the TRC, inspired by the South African TRC, Canada invests itself in establishing an ethical relation to the IRS legacy. Taken together, these processes of reinvestigating (*Residential School* legacy) and re-imagining (WWI memory discourses) Canada's past pursue a concerted attack on Canadian national identity and citizenship. To set these mnemonic discourses in relation to one another opens up a new perspective on the rifts and paradoxes of Canadian national identity, as it oscillates between reiterating "Canada the Good" (Rigney 2018, 456) and enabling a traditionally disinterested general public to experience a "colonial reckoning" (Wakeham & Henderson 2009).

Whilst World War I commemoration usually romanticizes Canada's losses in the trenches as the origin story of the nation's independence from Britain, it largely remains a settler-Canadian mnemonic legacy, much to the exclusion of Indigenous voices. In other words, it is a site of "national monumentality" that seems to 'belong' to non-Indigenous Canadians (Rothberg 2013, 376). The Indian Residential School System, conversely, did not play an important role in collective (non-Indigenous) perceptions of what it means to be Canadian, but rather used to be more of an issue that Indigenous communities grappled with on their own. This has significantly changed, notably since former Prime Minister Stephen Harper publically apologized for Indigenous suffering caused by dispossession and 're-education' in 2008. However, First World War remembrance as well as the Indian Residential School legacy traditionally gave rise to "ethnicized notions" of national identity (Rothberg & Yildiz 2011, 43). Processes of remembering and their specific framing are thus conceived as "key scenes" where ethnically and culturally marked conceptions of citizenship are (re)negotiated (Rothberg & Yildiz 2011, 39).

In 2005, writer Joseph Boyden published his novel *Three Day Road* where these specific strands of Canadian collective memories and sources of "ethnicized notions" of national identity come to intersect. *Three Day Road* sends the two Indigenous protagonists, Xavier and Elijah, as soldiers into the European theatres of war, where they excel as trackers and snipers. As I have argued elsewhere, Boyden's novel thus opens up Canada's 'birth of the nation' to Canada's Indigenous peoples, and retrospectively indigenizes this

national(ist) narrative (Teichler 2014). Moreover, World War I remembrance as the constituting site of a predominantly Euro-Canadian notion of citizenship is set in relation to legacies of cultural ‘re-education’ and dispossession. In the novel, Xavier is framed as being more ‘authentically’ Indian than Elijah who has gone through the ordeal of a Residential School education. Hence, within *Three Day Road*, these two national narratives – WWI participation and cultural ‘re-education’ – form the basis of a transcultural “memory citizenship” that Boyden explores (Rothberg & Yildiz 2011). As I argue in this article, *Three Day Road* negotiates Canadian citizenship as a complex interplay of belonging and exclusion. Boyden’s text understands citizenship as a question of national membership: the two Indigenous protagonists partaking and excelling in Canada’s ‘great effort’ are forced to (re)negotiate their two cultural backgrounds – one inherited, the other forced upon them – in order to make their way in battle, and in Canadian society. I argue that the text provides an important space where monolithic Canadian identities are problematized, where ethnically coded memories become entangled, and where formerly divisive national narratives become venues of imagining transcultural Canadian citizenship.

Yet, whilst this novel re-presents formerly divisive national narratives as venues of imagining transcultural Canadian citizenship, transcultural citizens are rendered incapable of survival. It is particularly powerful in shedding light on transcultural entanglements in Canadian history, but its readers are left doubtful as to the viability of transcultural identities. Though poignant in its imagination of war and Indigenous participation, *Three Day Road* romanticizes an authentic Indigeneity, and proposes a return to the bush – a seclusion from modernity and the Canadian society – as a possible Indigenous future. By the same token, *Three Day Road* kills its transcultural trickster-figure Elijah who embodies the playful oscillation between the cultural poles. The protagonists’ painful and ultimately harmful attempts to become members of the Canadian nation and to integrate difference, ambiguity and otherness into this ‘great Canadian myth’ are doomed to fail even before they had begun. In this sense, Boyden’s novel renders a transcultural citizenship an impossible undertaking.

2. Citizens Forged in Fire: Memory Citizenship, Canadian Reconciliation and the Boyden Controversy

On June 11th, 2008, the then Prime Minister Stephen Harper issued an apology on behalf of the Canadian government. Before Harper rose to speak, several “distinguished guests” were announced and entered the parliament. They were representative leaders of the Canadian *First Nations*, and were welcomed with standing ovations. In their honorable presence, Harper apologized for the systematic assimilation of Canada’s native populations under colonial rule and in its aftermath. Within the framework of the so-called Indian Residential School System, Indigenous peoples were forcibly relocated and segregated, and

their children were brought to residential schools in order to be ‘culturally re-educated’.² These schools were run by churches, and funded by the government. It was the schools’ designated aim to oversee the children’s (re)education as ‘proper’ citizens of the Commonwealth and members of Anglo-Canadian society, thereby eradicating all notions of indigeneity. Life in school was mostly dominated by violence, abuse, malnourishment, and disease (cf. Miller 1996; Milloy 2000). The last school was closed in the late 1990’s. Gradually, the Harper Government was confronted with numerous lawsuits from victims and survivors. On November 20th, 2005, the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement was reached, which consolidated all pending and emerging claims and designated a clear path on how to proceed when it came to dealing with the legacy of the past.³ The agreement provisioned the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) which commenced its work in 2010. Harking back to the legacy of the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa*, whose guiding mechanism to enable a transition from authoritarian Apartheid rule to democracy, Canada’s own TRC was conceptualized.

The TRC’s victim-centred approach also reflects the priorities articulated by former residential school students in their struggles against Canadian indifference and denial. Over the course of a decade, authorities first rejected the students’ claims of injustice and then attempted variously to resist, evade and callously minimize the country’s reparative obligations in relation to the schools. This official intransigence made the struggle for a truth commission one about voice and respect. Residential school survivors demanded that Canada open up, listen, learn and start taking responsibility for the damage caused. The Commission is their victory and tribute (James 2012, 184).

The Canadian TRC thus provides a platform for victims and survivors of the IRS to tell their story, and seeks to render this traumatic historical legacy a part of Canada’s national narrative. Canadian reconciliation exemplifies the shift in “memory cultures” in post-World War II national discourses (Rigney 2018, 453). In many contexts, state-sanctioned violence and oppression have been put on public trial, and the idea of engaging with a difficult past to reconfigure contemporary national identities has risen to prominence (cf. Olick 2007, Kymlicka & Bashir 2008). Instead of re-presenting glorifying national narratives such as victorious war engagements and national achievements, traumatic legacies become rallying points to reframe national identities (Olick 2007). Canadian reconciliation – as manifested in the apology and the TRC – is an example of how traumatic histories are reframed to be “generative” to a contemporary Canadian notion of citizenship that is, in a manner of speaking, sensitized towards past misconducts (Rigney 2018, 453). In this light, “[n]ation-building is precisely about overcoming differences and subsuming them into the national narrative” in order to provide a “relatively stable framework to which citizens affiliate themselves” (Rigney 2018, 453). Thus, citizenship is grounded in memory (cf. Rothberg & Yildiz 2011), and re-membling as an active performance of the past also entails strategic reframing of – in this case –

traumatic national narratives. Citizenship – when perceived as more than a legal or geographic category – relies on a story or myth, and how it is performed. Canadian reconciliation seeks to facilitate the emergence of a more nuanced national account of Canadian (post)colonial history – a national narrative that is inclusive, diverse, non-oppressive, plurivocal, multifaceted, and ultimately cognizant of (ongoing) Indigenous suffering. Melissa Nobles emphasizes that “the power of apologies [...] is that they not only publically ratify certain reinterpretations of history, but they also morally judge, assign responsibility, and introduce expectations about what acknowledgement of that history requires” (2008, 36). Traumatic histories and their re-presentation through reconciliation processes are imaginative, performative, thus cultural forces to help articulate national identities. Nobles speaks of “national membership” in this context:

The theoretical claim is that political actors use official apologies in ongoing efforts to reshape the meanings and terms of national membership. Membership in a political community exists along three dimensions: legal, political, and affective. [...] All three, then, are bound together, and along all three dimensions indigenous peoples and African Americans were excluded or severely constrained in ways that made meaningful participation extremely difficult, when not impossible. [...] The successful fulfillment of these three dimensions contributes to a broader conceptualization of reconciliation (36).

Implied in Nobles’ take on the “politics of regret” is that this national membership is ultimately constructed, performative, imagined and imaginative. National membership unfolds at the intersections of legal, political *and affective* dimensions of national identity; citizenship testifies to “relations among strangers who learn to feel citizenship as a common identity” (Thomas 2007, 3). It is based upon a “civic myth” that explains both to insiders and outsiders “why persons form a people” (5). Civic identity is – as with all identities – subject to constant negotiation and is constructed as well as contested in narrative frameworks, and particularly through stories.

In 2005, Joseph Boyden *Three Day Road* was published as a work of fiction in which Canadian collective memories of cultural re-education and WWI participation as Canada’s ‘origin story’ most interestingly come to intersect. Boyden, supposedly of Irish, Scottish, Ojibway and Nipmuk descent, wrote a historical novel which is set during World War I, and prominently features Indigenous soldiers. The successful participation of the Canadian forces marked the beginning of disengagement from England. The powerful national narrative of the Canadian ‘nation forged in fire’, born in the trenches of Europe, relates back to this understanding of Canadian World War I engagement. Canada’s “war of independence” essentializes Canadian national identity as predominantly male and white (Loeschnigg 2015, 10). Boyden’s novel opens up this glorifying narrative of the birth of the Canadian nation towards Indigenous participation and thus ‘corrects’ it, for Indigenous soldiers and their achievement in war did not predominately feature in public perception and historical representations (c.f. Boelling 2010). There is,

consequently, a strong identity-political agenda to *Three Day Road*, espoused by its author.

While Canadian reconciliation was in full bloom, the so-called Boyden controversy ensued. In recent years, Boyden has positioned himself as a voice of and for Indigenous peoples. He came to be the “handsome, light-skinned media darling who told folkloric-sounding stories about his background and filled up so many column inches and so much airtime” (Andrew-Gee 2017), and his work was met with both critical and popular acclaim. Eric Andrew-Gee (2017, n.p.), journalist for the *Globe and Mail*, describes Boyden’s transcultural identity-portfolio as highly beneficial to his success as a writer and public persona:

He was also, avowedly, of mixed ancestry – raised in suburban Toronto by Catholic parents amidst vague family lore of Indigenous blood. In an age of reconciliation, this mixed background was an asset: Boyden came to be seen as a “shining bridge,” as one Indigenous scholar called him, able to mediate between white and Indigenous, at a time when that task seemed more urgent than ever.

From this mixed background, Boyden has drawn a lot of his outspokenness; his position as a citizen combining several cultural poles has granted him authority as a commentator on colonial legacies and reconciliation. In recent months, a controversy about his cultural origins arose as a result of an investigation launched by the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN).⁴ Jorge Barrera initiated a nation-wide investigation into whether Boyden’s claim to Indigenous ancestry is in fact fraudulent. Canada’s most successful Indigenous writer, honorary witness to the TRC, is suspected to be a fraud. Boyden’s dubious Indigenous identity has taken on so many different forms, as Barrera argues, that he can be labelled a ‘shape-shifter’.

In an essay in his defense, Boyden (2017) outlines how he himself sees his connection to indigeneity:

I’d also been especially vocal for the last years in speaking about Indigenous Canadian issues, all of them sacred, so many of them painful. [...] For the past few years, when the media came calling, whether it be the CBC or *Globe and Mail* or a tiny radio station in the rural North with a listenership of 50, I was more than willing to stand up and be vocal. As an honorary witness [to the TRC Canada] my personal mandate is to speak in my role as a writer and public voice about the dark clouds and frightening basements of our shared history, and the abomination that was residential schools and the ongoing intergenerational tsunami of trauma. I look back now and I can see that I took to this role with the zealotry of a true believer (Boyden 2017, n.p.).

At the heart of the Boyden controversy is the question of what and who defines Indigeneity in Canada, and who is allowed to represent it. This heated debate is about the perception of being silenced by colonial discourses that continue to pit indigeneity against non-indigeneity in a hierarchical manner. It is almost ironic that Boyden produced a multifaceted text engaging with precisely these murky waters of negotiating (trans)cultures in relation to national belonging and cultural representation.

3. National Membership against the Cultural Grain: Imagining Transcultural Citizenship in Joseph Boyden's *Three Day Road*

Within *Three Day Road*, the reader (re)encounters the shape-shifter in the character of Elijah Weesageechak, one of Boyden's protagonists who has gone through Residential School education. In this novel, shape-shifting becomes a multifaceted metaphor: in Indigenous mythology, the trickster, a wily shape-shifter, is a connoisseur of the art of living. In the trenches of the First World War, the art of living becomes the art of survival. Furthermore, in *Three Day Road*, shape-shifting represents cultural identities which colonialism has forcefully brought to interact. Both his fellow soldiers and his best friend Xavier always meet Elijah with suspicion, as to a certain extent he successfully oscillates between the cultural poles.

Xavier and Elijah, the two young Cree boys Boyden sends into the First World War, are childhood friends, and have both been subjected to colonial 're-education', albeit to varying degrees. Xavier escapes a longer education period, whilst Elijah remains there for several years. At some point, the two friends voluntarily join the Canadian Expeditionary Forces. The two excel as a sniper team and earn fame beyond their own regiment. As the war progresses, Elijah makes friends with the other Canadian soldiers, and develops a taste for both killing and morphine. Xavier is increasingly concerned about the state of Elijah's mental health, and eventually murders his best friend. However, Xavier takes Elijah's dogtags in order to secure some of Elijah's fame for himself. He loses a leg in battle and develops a morphine addiction as well. On the eponymous three-day journey home, Xavier's aunt Niska tries to get through to her traumatized and silent nephew by telling him stories about their ancestors and communities. The reader only learns about the fate of the two Cree boys in retrospect, and through the narrative perspective of Xavier.

With his WWI novel, Boyden joins the ranks of a formative literary tradition in Canada. The 'Great War' has always been a pivotal site of identity negotiation for Canada. Timothy Findley's *The Wars* (1977) significantly contributed to establishing the idea of Canada being 'born' in the trenches of Belgium and France (cf. Kuester 2008, Ikas 2010). The 'Great War' legacy and its narratives were set in connection with Canada's emancipation from England. Notwithstanding the mass casualties in the Canadian ranks, war losses were reframed as a "transformative experience" and a ritual of "initiation" for the newly born nation (Kuester 2008, 325).⁵ Brigitte Glaser (2014) observes a gap of twenty years between Findley's *The Wars* and Joseph Boyden's novel *Three Day Road* (64). She describes a second phase of Canadian fictional writing engaging with the 'Great War', yet with a different identity-political agenda: The new generation of World War I fiction in Canada, of which Boyden is a part, re-politicizes Canadian participation by shifting the focus from representing the experience of war to a different reading and contextualization

of it.⁶ These writers have embarked on projects of revisionist history writing through works of fiction.

As part of this trend, *Three Day Road* re-introduces the ‘forgotten’ participation of Indigenous soldiers into Canadian historical consciousness. In alignment with the tension between loss and victory, Boyden’s text posits Canada’s emergence against the backdrop of mass casualties, amputees, addicts and mentally affected as the products of war on both sides of the trench line.

Once the shelling has gone quiet, we make our way out and survey the damage. I’m surprised to see that very little looks different than it did before. There is the same mud and puddles and torn-up wagons and piles of bricks. The only real difference is the smell of cordite and the sweeter smell of blood that is as rich as the air, as if we’d just butchered a large moose. We do what we can to help the wounded, and it is not long before stretcher-bearers appear to cart off the dead, and the living who can no longer walk (Boyden 2005, 19).

Schulze-Engler argues that “[t]he novel thus stages the history of indigenous participation in the ‘Great War’ as an act of transcultural memory and firmly embeds the two native soldiers’ experiences of global war into local, indigenous history, cultural and mythology.” (2016, 400). He further contends:

At first sight, Joseph Boyden’s historical novel on the role of Native Canadians in World War I is a book with a clear memory agenda: in the first paragraph of the “Acknowledgements” appended to the fictional text proper, Boyden invokes the heroism of Native Canadian soldiers and places his own novel unequivocally into a commemorative context. [...] One strand of Boyden’s novel is thus centrally concerned with setting the historical record straight, with acknowledging the contribution of Native Canadian “forgotten heroes” to Canada’s war efforts and with reinscribing Canada’s indigenous soldiers into a national narrative from which they have been unfairly excluded (Schulze-Engler 2016, 397).

Accordingly, an inner division of the Canadian Expeditionary Forces between Euro-Canadians and ‘Indians’ remains integral to the narrative, and are a reflection of the compartmentalized memory cultures of the ‘nation forged in fire’ paradigm. The two Indigenous soldiers become an integral part of the war in the course of the novel, but are constantly met with rejection and suspicion. On the passage from Canada to Europe, Elijah enters the officer’s mess to warn the other soldiers about an incident; they ignore the problem, and instead inquire about Elijah’s hunting skills. “‘That skill will come in handy,’ another [officer] says. ‘He’ll make a fine scout. We need to recruit more Indians to our regiment.’ The others laugh.” (Boyden 2005, 213). In this scene, Elijah is received as an “interesting new creature” (213), who is able to chase an animal through the forest whereas the Canadian officers are “tall and look the same with their carefully groomed hair and moustaches” (212). Boyden posits ‘cultivated’ Canadian soldiers against the ‘savages’ Xavier and Elijah. This binary opposition is fortified as the scene continues with Xavier ending the life of an injured horse, a deed for which he is almost arrested. While the other soldiers accuse Xavier of savagery and bloodlust, only Colonel McCaan identifies Xavier’s actions as being among “the best traits of an officer” because

he was able to come to a decision on his own (215-216). On this occasion, the text invokes stereotypical identities and corresponding attributes: the natives succeed in hunting and have a taste for slaughter, whereas the civilized Canadian soldiers attempt to maintain a degree of ‘cultivation’ in the midst of depravation.

We’ve been over here in this place that some call Flanders and others call Belgium for three weeks now. I felt stupid and small when Elijah had explained to me that Belgium is a country, like Canada, and Flanders is just one small part of it, like Mushkegowuk. I’m still uncomfortable with the language of the *wemistikoshiw*. It is spoken through the nose and hurts my mouth to try and mimic the silly sound of it. I opt to stay quiet most of the time, listening carefully to decipher the words, always listening for the joke or insult made against me. The others think that I’m something less than them, but just give me the chance to show them what I am made of when it is time to kill (Boyden 2005, 14).

This passage is indicative of how the dynamics of belonging and exclusion work within the novel. Xavier secludes himself from the other (Canadian) soldiers, and thus takes an active part in keeping the cultural difference very much alive throughout the novel. He positions himself as an antagonist to his fellow soldiers, and gradually withdraws from Elijah as well. Xavier remains an outcast almost throughout the entire narrative and leads an existence in solitude, as much as this is possible in the trenches. This “mnemonic landscape” remains culturally “compartmentalized” (Rigney 2018, 455).

Correspondingly, there is an inner tension between *Three Day Road*’s native protagonists: Boyden imagines two rather conservative Indians, aunt Niska and Xavier, whilst Elijah is marked as the one who can play with his mixed cultural background. Niska and Xavier represent a powerful, lively Indigenous culture and appear to function as the bearers of ‘true’, ‘authentic’ Indigenous identity. Niska’s narrative strand circles around depicting Indigenous everyday life, their myths, skills, fears, and losses. She holds the firm belief that to tell one’s story is the only possibility of healing and survival:

I know that Xavier wants to talk to me. He goes as far as to let words come out of his mouth when he sleeps. He says very little when he’s awake. I’m not able to make out more than the odd sentence when he is sleeping, though, and sometimes when he dreams he speaks aloud in English. I can’t help but smile a bit when he does. As a child he was so proud that more than once he claimed he would never speak the *wemistikoshiw* tongue. And now he does it even in his sleep. He cannot speak to me yet, and so I decide, here on the river, that I will speak to him. In this way maybe his tongue will loosen some. Maybe some of the poison that courses through him might be released in this way. Words are all I have left now (Boyden 2005, 100).

Niska’s character is a very self-confident representative of Indigenous past and present. She functions as the connective link between the growing influence of modernity and colonialism on Indigenous life and the resilience of traditional ways:

I steer the canoe into the faster current and let us drift with it, using my paddle only as a rudder. The mist is disappearing now and I can see a long way down the bank, can keep an eye sharp for the movement of animals along the shore. Nephew cries out but

then goes silent again. The sound of it, the animal fear at the very bottom of that cry, makes me think something I haven't thought about in a long time. It is the story of my childhood. Now I tell it to you, Xavier, to keep you alive (Boyden 2005, 39).

According to Schulze-Engler “the whole novel is narrated by two homodiegetic narrators [...], and narrative perspective and control is firmly placed into indigenous hands”(2016, 402). Niska and Xavier share this narrative agency, and, consequently, the novel engages in a dialogue between Indigenous ‘reality’ in Canada and the intrusion of European modernity.

After the death of my father, your grandfather, Xavier, our people were directionless. Flakes of snow in swirling wind. Some went back to Moose Factory and never really left it again, became homeguard Indians where they learned to stomach the *wemistikoshiw* food and ways. You could tell you were approaching Moose Factory on the river by the stink of sewage and refuse piled up onshore. And they all wondered where the diseases came from (Boyden 2005, 100).

Niska tells powerful stories of resilience in the midst of non-Indigenous dominance; encounters with the ‘white’ people which have left her with even more determination to remain detached from ‘white’ Canada. Xavier describes this inherent paradox in an apt formula:

I've been walking a well-marked trail that leads from the rivers of my north home across the country they call Canada, the ocean parting before me like that old Bible story that nuns forced upon me as a child, ending right here in this strange place where all the world's trouble explodes (Boyden 2005, 25).

Niska recounts how she has become the bearer of their kin's heritage by becoming the *windigo* killer. A windigo is someone who eats human flesh and is a position that is passed on from generation to generation. In the end, Niska performs a ritualistic cleansing from the ‘white’ world for Xavier, by retreating with him into the wild ‘natural habitat’ of the Indigenous population in order for him to realign with nature and its spirits, and to make peace with the world and his war experiences. The solution for those Indigenous people who came in contact with this foreign, alien world and its spirits seems to lie within the possibility to reconcile with their native origins.

However, upon scrutiny, it becomes obvious that Boyden is by no means an advocate for “self-contained indigenalities” (Schulze-Engler 2016, 418). At one point in the text, Niska tells Xavier the story of the Cree family turned *windigo*. Xavier unconsciously lays the explanatory foundations for the events to come:

Elijah's reputation [as a sniper] is growing, I know, and Elijah's vanity being fed makes him content and happy. But the real job still lies ahead of us, and if Elijah can get the Hun whose reputation grows like a legend in this place, bigger than Elijah's even, then Elijah's reputation will be secured, and mine will be too, and we will be given a higher rank, and we will make more money and have more freedom (Boyden 2005, 134).

Xavier, who considers himself to be a ‘true’ Indian in the midst of strange European men, is forced to watch Elijah excel. Xavier stays behind while Elijah

fully engages in exchanges with his fellow soldiers, and Elijah's ability to bond with others appears to make Xavier envious of him. After a while, Elijah supposedly turns *windigo* (at least this is the explanation that Xavier provides us with), for Elijah has made it a habit to scalp his victims during battle. In the course of the narrative, Xavier suspects Elijah of eating human flesh as an ultimate sign of victory over their enemies' very bodily existence. Having turned *windigo* is the only reasonable explanation for Xavier with regard to Elijah's deteriorating state of mind and increasing violent behavior.

Due to his upbringing in a Residential School, Elijah has a very good command of English and is even capable of mimicking accents. He can "out-talk even the officers with his nun's English and his quick thinking" (Boyden 2005, 73). The other soldiers are drawn to him and admire him for his shooting skills, whereas Xavier feels "forced by my poor English to sit back and watch it all happen, to see how he wins them over, while I become more invisible. A brown ghost." (Boyden 2005, 73). He feels unseen and unheard, forced to sit back and watch Elijah befriend the other soldiers. Thus conceived, Elijah counters Niska's and Xavier's unambiguity: being introduced as the *weesageechak*, Elijah Whiskeyjack, the shape-shifter, transgresses boundaries that Xavier continuously re-erect, and mostly for himself. Whilst Xavier is concerned with upholding the strict differentiation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous, Elijah transcends these limitations and oscillates between the poles. While Xavier feels marginalized for not being able to speak English sufficiently – a position which he maintains stubbornly – Elijah even mimics accents. When the soldiers begin to admire Elijah for his skills – which are attributed to his 'savage' background – Xavier feels like, as we have already seen, a brown ghost. This trickster Elijah travels between identities and cultures as if it were an easy undertaking. He is a mythological trickster figure, the shape-shifting *weesegeechak*, while he is at the same time a hybrid, a crosser of linguistic and cultural boundaries.

Paul Radin (1956) described the trickster figure as being indicative of a rather primitive evolutionary stage of mankind, and the embodiments of underdevelopment can be found in native American mythology (cf. Scheub 2012, Hynes & Doty 1993). A trickster can possibly take on any form they like, and thus are able to shift shapes at their own will. Others understand him as a rather transcultural phenomenon (cf. Bloom 2012): The trickster belongs to all world cultures – and none. He is a "wily" character who has become a literary theme across various genres and cultures (Bloom 2012, xv). Harold Scheub sees him "exist[ing] in a society that espouses traditional values while actually sanctioning dehumanizing modes of behavior" (Scheub 2012, 6). He is also an "agent of chaos", capable of "disrupting existing orders" and is suspected to "impose his own corrupt sense of order" onto the world which surrounds him (Scheub 2012, 6). One might rightfully claim that *Three Day Road* with its strong agenda of returning the agency of historical representation to the Indigenous required another character who is embedded in Indigenous mythology.

Our shape-shifter, however, will have to shift shapes once more, and appears to have turned *windigo*: Elijah, one might argue, has not been able to cope with the horrors of war, and thus develops some degree of insanity. Xavier has already made up his mind: In his eyes, Elijah has turned mad. This is eventually the reason the text provides the reader with to justify the events to come.

‘I’m not crazy,’ Elijah says. I continue to stare at the horses. ‘You must listen to me, X. This is war. This is not home. What’s mad is them putting us in trenches to begin with. The madness is to tell us to kill and award those of us who do it well. I only wish to survive. ‘You’ve gone beyond that,’ I say (Boyden 2005, 397).

Xavier frequently accuses Elijah of perceiving the war as a game to test his limits and prowess.

‘Do you know what I think?’ I say softly. ‘I think you did more than just kill that young soldier yesterday.’ I look at Elijah as I say this to see his eyes, but he remains a shadow. ‘Why do you say that?’ he says. He speaks loudly so that I can hear him. When I do not answer, he seems about to walk away, but then looks in my eyes, makes sure that I can see his lips, see what he is saying. ‘I came to talk to you to offer you help. We have a great future after this war. We will return home as heroes. I will become a great chief. I won’t let you or anyone else take that away.’ He turns and walks away, hands in his pocket. My stomach cramps again and makes me cry out (Boyden 2005, 398).

At this point, Xavier has already explained Elijah’s behavior to himself: Elijah has turned *windigo*. Instead of considering the struggle that Elijah goes through as a shape-shifting negotiator of cultural belonging, Xavier suspects him of having lost his moral compass. The ironic twist of the novel is that, in the end, Xavier will have finally lost his own moral compass, although it frequently appears as if Xavier (the ‘authentic’ Indian) has some moral high ground over the suspected madman and shape-shifter Elijah. It is finally Xavier who takes on the role of the *windigo*, notably when he kills Elijah – the hybrid, the supposed *windigo*, the figure who cannot exist as such. By the same token, Xavier rationalizes the murder by suspecting Elijah of wanting to take Xavier’s life in the first place:

‘We have got to get out of here’, I shout. ‘This bombardment’s too heavy.’ Elijah finally takes his eyes from his scope, looks at me, a sad smile on his bloody face. He says something to me, something I can’t make out. *We both can’t* ... he mouths, and then a shell lands close enough to blow and suck a hot wind across us. (Boyden 2005, 416)

The tension is carefully built here: being almost deaf, Xavier is not quite sure what Elijah is saying, and neither is the reader. At this point, it seems impossible that both will survive.

Leave, he mouths, still smiling, his teeth glinting. Elijah sits up and reaches for me to hug me. When his hands touch me, a cold shock runs the length of my body. I push him back, my wounded arm heavy. Elijah struggles up and reaches to wrap his arms around me again. He’s no longer smiling. His mouth is twisted in an angry grimace. (Boyden 2005, 417)

Without further ado, a fight ensues, and the reader is left with figuring out whether Elijah actually wanted to kill Xavier. “Are we not best friends, Xavier?” he asks. ‘Are we not best friends and great hunters?’ (Boyden 2005, 417) So the struggle continues:

‘Elijah,’ I whisper, eyes blurring from the tears. ‘Elijah.’ Elijah doesn’t struggle anymore, just stares up at me. ‘You have gone mad. There is no coming back from where you’ve travelled.’ I press down harder. ... He tries to whisper words to me but I know that I cannot allow Elijah to speak them. I must finish this. I have become what you are, Niska. (Boyden 2005, 418)

So it is not a German bomb that kills Elijah, but his best friend Xavier. The conservative Indian tasks himself with finishing off the very threat to his existence. First, there is the immediate threat of Elijah killing Xavier. Second, Xavier claims that Elijah has supposedly turned *windigo* and that he is accordingly a threat to the sanity of the Indigenous collective and the personification of the utmost evil. Third, Elijah’s hybrid identity, his ability to playfully oscillate between cultural poles and to master the necessary performances of identity as skillfully as he does, makes him after all a threat to ‘authentic’ Indigenous identity. Elijah is the figure who emphasizes the constructed nature of markers of cultural belonging, and that their performance is a necessity in order to show their arbitrariness. He is the one who reminds everybody of the growing influence and dominance of ‘Western’ ways on Indigenous cultures and lives. Elijah is the trickster-fool who constantly reminds us that unambiguity is the most powerful of all identity constructions – one that, according to Boyden, is not meant to survive. Significantly, it is not with the death of Elijah that the novel ends, but rather with letting the reader know that Xavier actually stole his best friend’s dog tags, and thus his identity:

You must get better, Corporal Whiskeyjack, she says to me, her lips moving slowly so that I can understand. You are a good man. You are so brave that they want to give you another medal. Her expression is sad then. Your friend, Xavier. He is dead. I stare at her mouth. But you tried to save him. Soldiers saw you walk from safety into a bombardment trying to rescue him. They say you were looking for him. That is the most any man could do for his friend. (Boyden 2005, 424)

Xavier neither replies to nor corrects the error. He returns home as an amputee and morphine-addict. Elijah’s death, the end of a hybrid Indigenous identity, has only opened up the floodgates to ambiguous identities. Furthermore, Xavier is not Xavier anymore; he also leads an existence somewhere in-between, neither a war veteran nor a traditional Indian. In this sense, modernity, Western dominance and the carnage of war have finally left their imprint on Xavier. The ostensibly romantic return into the hinterlands consequently marks a point of departure into what is in effect an uncertain future for both Niska and Xavier. Niska predicts: “I lie here and look at the sky, then at the river, the black line of it heading north. By tomorrow we will be home.” (Boyden 2005, 432) Home will never look the same.

4. Conclusion: Impossible Citizens or Transcultural Memory Citizens?

Boyden's novel has brought us back to the theatres of war where Canada was supposedly politically and narratively born. *Three Day Road* literally and literarily travels to the very places where an idea of a Canadian identity, a notion of citizenship, came to existence. Boyden uses First World War theatres, in which soldiers fight for national entities and identities which appear stable and fixed, to construct a transnational and transcultural space of identity negotiation. Canadian citizenship, which became possible after the sacrifices of the war, was not extended to Indigenous soldiers. The novel has thus been received as a 'correctional' narrative, and has contributed to broadening the scope of national belonging and citizenship towards the indigenous populations, because it includes them, re-inscribing their contributions into the myth of the Canadian birth. Our prime negotiator, Elijah Whiskeyjack, the shape-shifting protagonist, not only succeeds in transgressing boundaries, but also in commenting on indigenous identity in the light of shifting power paradigms. Elijah embodies a version of an indigenous past (mythology, trickster figure and *windigo*), present (Residential School upbringing, cultural contact and exchange) and future of indigenous culture and identity (in oscillation, transformation), thus represents a transcultural indentity. Elijah, with his hybrid, culture-shifting potential, transgresses ethnicized Canadian identities. He moves between the cultural poles with great prowess and enthusiasm, and seems to fruitfully combine the different and competing cultural backgrounds he (had to) acquire(d). Through this protagonist, *Three Day Road* shows how entangled memory cultures of the IRS and the First World War are. This novel imagines memory transcultures, and the trickster figure becomes the representative of them.

Yet, Boyden effectively problematizes the happy hybrid, rendering him morphine-addicted and drawn towards killing. Xavier, the 'authentic' Indian, unable to oscillate between the cultures, kills Elijah in the end. The text renders this deed almost a necessity, a sacrifice which needed to be made to keep indigeneity 'unscathed'. The one protagonist who is member to both cultures, in a sense an antecedent to transcultural citizenship, perishes. This end might point towards the realization that such transcultural identities were unthinkable at the moment of Canada's birth, for the new countries' gaze was directed at freeing itself from the colonial yoke. Yet, the inner colonization and mistreatment of Canada's native (non)citizens continued well into the 20th century. I posit, though, that the death of our imagined transcultural citizen who has actually witnessed the birth of his nation reaches well into the contemporary: the idea of a possibly damaged Indian might still be more viable than the image of a transcultural Canadian citizen.

Notes

- ¹ 1867 marked the date when provinces and territories were first joined together to form the *Dominion of Canada*. The Government of Canada published this statement here: <http://www.canadainternational.gc.ca/france/150Canada150.aspx?lang=eng> (4.09.2018).
- ² For more on this, see Miller 1996; Furniss 2000; Milloy 2000; Regan 2010; Henderson and Wakeham 2013.
- ³ The Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement is available online at <http://www.residentialschoolsettlement.ca/settlement.html> (14.11.2017).
- ⁴ Barrera's article makes Boyden's repeatedly voiced references to his indigeneity appear fictitious, because genealogical inquiries into Boyden's family records did not unveil such familial connections. See <http://aptnnews.ca/2016/12/23/author-joseph-boydens-shape-shifting-indigenous-identity> (23.11.2017).
- ⁵ Peregrine Acland inaugurated the Canadian war novel by publishing *All Else is Folly* in 1929 (cf. Thompson 1981, 81-96). The war itself was depicted as a dreadful experience and was not glorified by romanticized notions of war. His stance already delineates the "emblematic" nature of Canadian attempts to make sense of its frontier existence, both in a literal sense as existing at the geographical margins of the British empire, and metaphorically as entering the war as a dominion (cf. Thompson 1981, Glaser 2010).
- ⁶ Frances Itani's novel *Deafening* (2003), for example, features a hearing-impaired woman who remains at the home front with her husband joining the army medical corps. Jane Urquhart's novels *The Underpainter* (1997) – depicting the struggle of various highly traumatized protagonists to come to terms with life in peace, and *The Stone Carvers* (2001) – in which European immigrants to Canada return to the battlefields to participate in the creation of the Canadian War memorial at Vimy Ridge.

Works Cited

- Acland, Peregrine. [1929] 2014. *All Else is Folly. A Tale of War and Passion*. Toronto: Clarke Irwin.
- Anderson, Benedict R. 2016. *Imagined communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. New York: Verso.
- Andrew-Gee, Eric. 2017. "The Making of Joseph Boyden" *The Globe & Mail Online*, August 4. <https://beta.theglobeandmail.com/arts/books-and-media/josephboyden/article35881215/?ref=http://www.theglobeandmail.com&>,
- Banerjee, Mita, ed. 2016. *Comparative Indigenous Studies*. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter.
- Barrera, Jorge. 2016. "Author Joseph Boyden's Shape Shifting Indigenous Identity" in *APTN News*, December 23. <http://aptnnews.ca/2016/12/23/author-joseph-boydens-shape-shifting-indigenous-identity/>
- Bloom, Harold, ed. 2010. *The Trickster*. New York: Infobase Publishing.
- Boelling, Gordon. 2008. "'A Part of our History that So Few Knew About'. Native Involvement in Canada's Great War - Joseph Boyden's *Three*

- Day Road*". Klaus D. Ertler und Martin Löschnigg, eds. *Inventing Canada. Inventer le Canada*. Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 253–268.
- Boyden, Joseph. 2005. *Three Day Road*. London: Orion.
- _____. 2017. "My Name is Joseph Boyden". *Macleans's Online*, August 2. <http://www.macleans.ca/news/canada/my-name-is-joseph-boyden/>
- Chrisjohn, Roland; Wasacase, Tanya. 2009. "Half-Truths and Whole Lies: Rhetoric in the 'Apology' and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission." Younging, Gregory, Jonathan Dewar, and Mike DeGagné, eds. *Response, Responsibility, and Renewal: Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Journey*. Ottawa: Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 219-229.
- Episkenew, Jo-Ann. 2009. *Taking Back Our Spirits: Indigenous Literature, Public Policy, and Healing*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press.
- Ertler, Klaus D.; Löschnigg, Martin, eds. 2008. *Inventing Canada. Inventer le Canada*. Frankfurt am Main: Lang.
- Findley, Timothy. 1977. *The Wars*. Toronto: Clarke Irwin.
- Furniss, Elizabeth. 2000. *Victims of Benevolence: The Dark Secret of the Williams Lake Residential School*. Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press.
- Glaser, Brigitte. 2010. "(Re)Turning to Europe for the Great War". *Zeitschrift für Kanada-Studien*, 30 (2), 62–75.
- Gword, Matt. 2017. "Ask a Prof", January 22. <https://www.thegatewayonline.ca/2017/01/ask-a-prof-boyden-controversy/>.
- Henderson, Jennifer and Wakeham, Pauline. 2009. "Colonial Reckoning, National Reconciliation? Aboriginal Peoples and the Culture of Redress in Canada". *English Studies in Canada*, 35(1), 1-26.
- Henderson, Jennifer, Wakeham, Pauline, eds. 2013. *Reconciling Canada. Critical Perspectives on the Culture of Redress*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Hirsch, Michal Ben-Josef. 2014. "Ideational Change and the Emergence of the International Norm of Truth and Reconciliation Commissions". *European Journal of International Relations*, 20(3), 810–833.
- Hynes, William J, ed. 1993. *Mythical Trickster Figures, Contours, Contexts, and Criticisms*, London: University of Alabama Press.
- Ikas, Karin. 2010. *Global Realignment and the Canadian Nation in the Third Millennium*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.
- Itani, Frances. 2003. *Defeating*. New York: Atlantic Monthly Press.
- Jagos, Robert. 2017. "The Boyden Controversy is not about Bloodline" in *The Walrus*, January 10. <https://thewalrus.ca/the-boyden-controversy-is-not-about-bloodline/>
- James, Matt. 2012. "A Carnival of Truth? Knowledge, Ignorance and the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission". *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, 6(2), 182–204.

- James, Wilmot G. 2001. *After the TRC. Reflection on Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa*. Athens: Ohio University Press.
- Kuester, Martin. 2008. "The English-Canadian novel from Modernism to Postmodernism". Reingard M. Nischik, ed. *History of Literature in Canada. English-Canadian and French-Canadian*. Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 310–329.
- Kymlicka, Will; Bashir, Bashir, eds. 2009. *The Politics of Reconciliation in Multicultural Societies*. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press.
- Lefko-Everett, Kate. 2017. *Rethinking Reconciliation. Evidence from South Africa*. Capetown: HRSC Press.
- Löschnigg, Martin; Sokołowska-Paryż, Marzena, eds. 2014. *The Great War in Post-memory Literature and Film*. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter.
- MacDonald, David B., and Hudson, Graham. 2012: "The Genocide Question and Indian Residential Schools in Canada". *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, 45 (2), 427–449.
- Miller, J.R. 1996. *Shingwauk's Vision. A History of Native Residential Schools*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Milloy, John S. 2000. *A National Crime. The Canadian Government and the Residential School System*, Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press.
- Moon, Claire. 2008. *Narrating Political Reconciliation: South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission*. Lanham: Lexington.
- Nagy, Rosemary. 2014. "The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Genesis and Design". *Canadian Journal of Law and Society*, 29(2), 199–217.
- Nischik, Reingard M., ed. 2008. *History of Literature in Canada. English-Canadian and French-Canadian*. Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer.
- Olick, Jeffrey Keith. 2007. *The politics of regret. On Collective Memory and Historical Responsibility*. New York: Routledge.
- Regan, Paulette. 2010. *Unsettling the Settler Within. Indian Residential Schools, Truth Telling and Reconciliation in Canada*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia.
- Rigney, Ann. 2018. "Epilogue: Citizenship, Memory, and the Curious Case of Canada". *Citizenship Studies*, 22(4), 452-457.
- Rosenthal, Caroline. 2008. "English-Canadian Literary Theory and Literary Criticism". Reingard M. Nischik, ed. *History of literature in Canada. English-Canadian and French-Canadian*. Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 291–302.
- Rothberg, Michael. 2013. "Remembering Back: Cultural Memory, Colonial Legacies, and Postcolonial Studies", Graham Huggan, ed. *The Oxford Handbook of Postcolonial Studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 359-379.

- Rothberg, Michael; Yildiz, Yasemin. 2011. "Memory Citizenship: Migrant Archives of Holocaust Remembrance in Contemporary Germany". *Parallax*, 17(4), 32-48.
- Scheub, Harold. 2012. *Trickster and Hero*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Schulze-Engler, Frank. 2016. "Global History, Indigenous Modernities, Transcultural Memory: World War I and II in Native Canadian, Aboriginal Australian, and Māori Fiction". Mita Banerjee, ed. *Comparative Indigenous Studies*. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 383-396.
- Schulze-Engler, Frank; Helff, Sissy, eds. 2009. *Transcultural English Studies. Theories, Fictions, Realities*. Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi.
- Teichler, Hanna. 2014. "Joseph Boyden's Three Day Road: Transcultural (Post-)Memory and Identity in Canadian World War I Fiction". Martin Löschnigg und Marzena Sokołowska-Paryż, eds. *The Great War in post-memory literature and film*. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 239–254.
- Thomas, Brook. 2007. *Civic Myths. A Law-and-Literature Approach to Citizenship*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.
- Thompson, Eric. 1981. "Canadian Fiction of the Great War." *Canadian Literature* 9 (4), 81–96.
- Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. 2017. *Our Mandate*. <http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/index.php?p=7> (11.10.2017).
- Urquhart, Jane. 2001. *The Stone Carvers*. London: Bloomsbury.
- _____. 1997. *The Underpainter*. London: Penguin.