

Depictions of Colonialism in Eden Robinson's *Traplines*

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"Just as none of us is outside or beyond geography, none of us is completely free from the struggle over geography. That struggle is complex and interesting because it is not only about soldiers and cannons but also about ideas, about forms, about images and imaginings."

–Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*

In "Queen of the North," the last story of Eden Robinson's short-story collection *Traplines*, the reader is introduced to the many effects the Canadian residential school system has had on its survivors and the generations that followed in its wake. After reading "Queen of the North" one is essentially compelled to reflect back on the previous stories, read them through the lens of "Queen of the North," draw connections between characters in each of the stories, and consider the impacts that the residential schools may have had on characters in other stories as well. There are many reasons as to why a reader may be impelled to draw these connections between Robinson's fiction and the impacts of colonialism. In *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said illustrates connections between colonialism, imperialism, and culture. These theories can help one understand *Traplines*: Said's study helps readers to recognize the way in which colonialism, especially through the Canadian residential school system, is represented throughout these stories.

In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said aims to demonstrate how past and present coexist with one another, and in the case of Robinson's *Traplines*, Said's text suggests how Indigenous literature is sometimes linked to circumstances in the past. The events of the past, whether they are representative of discrimination, war, or cultural genocide, will in some respect, always influence the present. When reading the short stories of Robinson's *Traplines*, one's knowledge of the past and present lives of Aboriginal people largely impacts the way in which the content of these stories is interpreted. Even though they may be subtle, Robinson's descriptions throughout *Traplines* display haunting remnants of past treatment of Indigenous people, and knowing that past further impacts the way in which her text is viewed and interpreted. Throughout history, Indigenous people were not treated with proper respect. Many circumstances threatened the lives of Indigenous persons, and

there have been many attempts to assimilate Indigenous people into the "mainstream." Many events have taken place in the past that have, in particular, jeopardized the lives and existence of North American Indigenous cultures. One of these events was the Wounded Knee Massacre of 1890:

The Wounded Knee Massacre (1890) ended the long history of Indian wars. It, as well as the many other conflicts, was the result of a complex chain of events that included the destruction of the Indians' way of life, the failure of Congress to meet its obligations to them, and the appointment of unskilled and corrupt Indian agents. Specifically, the spread of Ghost Dance religion¹ and the death of Sitting Bull contributed to the Sioux's final psychological and military defeat at Wounded Knee. (Ellis)

The uncertainty—for white people—behind the spread of The Ghost Dance Religion ultimately contributed to the Wounded Knee Massacre, which reflected an extremely colonial view. The white people were frightened and felt threatened by this new practice, or spiritual belief, and basically wanted it to come to an end. That was one of the main reasons behind the first Wounded Knee Massacre.

¹ The Ghost Dance is a religious movement among American Indians that began in 1889. Although this movement is complex and significant in its own right, the term *Ghost Dance* is inextricably linked to Wounded Knee, South Dakota....At the core of the Ghost Dance are the teachings revealed by spiritual forces in 1889 to a Paiute living in Nevada, Wovoka ("The Cutter," circa 1856–1932). Each Indian nation named the new movement in its own language. For example, the Paiute name for the Ghost Dance is *Nänigükwa* ("dance in a circle"), while the Lakota (Sioux) term is *Wana'ghi wa'chipi* ("spirit dance"). The Ghost Dance actually is a complex philosophy that is expressed in ceremony by a series of dances. The philosophy and the dances prepare followers for a rebalancing of a world that had been nearly destroyed by the United States government. The rebalance would be carried out by spiritual forces and would include the return from the dead of all of the Indians' relatives, including both human relatives and the buffalo. (*Encyclopedia of Canadian Studies*)

The second of these events, and the event that seems to have particularly influenced the contents of *Traplines* as well as the reactions of Canadian Indigenous cultures, was the introduction of the Residential School system in Canada and what has been referred to by many as "cultural genocide." The main goal of this school system was to take Indigenous children away from their families and place them in a "normal" environment in an attempt to assimilate entire Indigenous cultures into the "mainstream" and to make them adhere to "civilized" Canadian culture:

Residential schools were established with the assumption that aboriginal culture was unable to adapt to a rapidly modernizing society. It was believed that native children could be successful if they assimilated into mainstream Canadian society by adopting Christianity and speaking English or French. Students were discouraged from speaking their first language or practising native traditions. If they were caught, they would experience severe punishment. Throughout the years, students lived in substandard conditions and endured physical and emotional abuse. Students at Residential schools rarely had opportunities to see examples of normal family life....When students returned to the reserve, they often found they didn't belong. They didn't have the skills to help their parents, and became ashamed of their native heritage. The skills taught at the schools were generally substandard; many found it hard to function in an urban setting. The aims of assimilation meant devastation for those who were subjected to years of abuse.

("A History")

The children who attended these schools endured a lot of mistreatment, including many forms of abuse. Most, if not all, children who were forced into this education system were impacted in many negative ways later in life. Many resorted to drugs and alcohol, suicide, and many even became abusive towards their own families as a result of repressed rage. The consequences of the Residential school system not only negatively impacted the children who attended but were also passed on through generations to their own children who also fell victim to much abuse and torment. One study conducted on the trauma brought on by the Residential school systems among the Canadian Indigenous population found

the following:

Upon release from the schools, survivors reported a legacy of alcohol and drug abuse problems, feelings of hopelessness, dependency, isolation, low self-esteem, suicide behaviours, prostitution, gambling, homelessness, sexual abuse, and violence....Today, there are four generations of First Nations residential school survivors in Canada who may have transmitted the trauma they experienced to their own children and the children of their children, and to non-descendants by way of indirect trauma effects at the level of the community. (Elias et al. 1561)

A lot of Indigenous people lived through this nightmare. The ill-treatment and suffering which Indigenous peoples endured in these school systems, and the problems they continue to face today as a result of this history, is recognized and acknowledged by many.

In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said explains how the past is never exactly "quarantined" in the past. As he states, "how we formulate or represent the past shapes our understanding and views of the present" (4). The way in which one portrays the past has a considerable impact on the way in which literature gets interpreted. Said presents an excerpt of T. S. Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent" to support this claim:

[T]he historical sense involves a perception not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place and time, of his own contemporary. No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. (4)

What Eliot is illustrating in this essay is that both past and present work together. The meaning that lays within literature is neither just of the past nor

just of the present: both the past and present inform and coexist with one another. When reading Indigenous literature, such as Robinson's *Traplines*, the relentless history which plagued Indigenous cultures, especially in relation to the Residential school system, leaves an undeniable impression. One might consider when reading the short stories that make up Robinson's *Traplines*, with the exception of the last story, "Queen of the North," that Robinson never explicitly outs any of her characters as being Indigenous. Yet her stories are littered with the haunting remnants of the impact the Residential school system had on the people who attended and the generational impacts it had as well. Robinson neither dwells on the past nor concentrates on the present; rather, it could be argued that she uses past influences and present knowledge to subtly represent her characters as victims of a deep-rooted history of abuse and wrongdoings.

In "Queen of the North," the reader is explicitly informed that the main character, Adeline, is, in fact, Haisla, and a victim of the abuse brought on by a residential school survivor, her Uncle Josh. Adeline has been sexually abused by her Uncle Josh ever since she was a young girl. She explains how Uncle Josh would try and get close to her when she was a little girl, while she would sit in front of the TV and watch cartoons:

I copy the two aliens on Sesame Street mooing to a telephone. Me and Uncle Josh are watching television together....Uncle Josh undoes his pants. 'Moo.' I keep my eyes on the TV and say nothing as he moves towards me. I'm not a baby like Alice, who runs to mommy about everything. When it's over he'll have treats for me. It's like when the dentist gives me extra suckers for not crying. Even when it really hurts.

(Robinson, *Traplines* 190)

Later in "Queen of the North" Adeline becomes suspicious that her Uncle Josh was sexually abused as a child, by Father Archibald, while attending a residential school. Adeline finds a picture of Uncle Josh and Father Archibald with an odd note written on the back of the picture by Father Archibald, who tells Josh how much he misses him:

I held up a picture of a priest with his hands on a little boy's shoulder, the boy looked happy.

'Oh, that,' Mom said. 'I forgot I had it. He

was uncle Josh's teacher.'

I turned it over. *Dear Joshua*, it read. *How are you? I miss you terribly. Please write. Your Friend in Christ, Archibald.*

'Looks like he taught him more than just prayers.'

'What are you talking about? Your Uncle Josh was a bright student. They were fond of each other.'

'I bet,' I said, vaguely remembering that famous priest who got eleven years in jail. He'd molested twenty-three boys while they were in residential school. (212)

The survivors of residential schools often display their rage by taking it out on either themselves through self harm or by taking it out on other people, especially family members. The students of Residential schools were abused themselves, and through violence, is how they've learned to express emotions. Basically, abusive behaviour is what they were taught: if they misbehaved, abuse (either psychical or sexual) was their consequence. Unfortunately, sexual abuse got passed on through generations.

Because Adeline was undergoing this type of abuse, she needed an outlet for the pain. The reader is informed from the beginning that Adeline is an extremely troubled teen. In the first pages she explains a dream she has had regarding a Barbie Doll speedboat she received from Uncle Josh for Christmas when she was a child:

There's a dream I have sometimes. Ronny comes to visit. We go down the hallway to my room. She goes in first. I point to the closet and she eagerly opens the door. She thinks I've been lying, that I don't really have a speedboat. She wants proof. When she turns to me, she looks horrified, pale and shocked. I laugh, triumphant. I reach in and stop, seeing Uncle Josh's head, arms, and legs squished inside, severed from the rest of his body. My clothes are soaked dark red with his blood. 'Well what do you know,' I say. 'Wishes do come true.' (187)

As the reader can clearly see, by Adeline explaining this reoccurring dream she has a lot of repressed anger towards Uncle Josh. Many times it seems as though she takes this anger out by being a bully and abusing other people. Right after Adeline's reflection of the dream, the narrative jumps to her and her cousin Ronny assaulting a girl in the locker room:

There are four of us against her. It doesn't take long before she's on the floor trying to crawl away. I want to say I'm not a part of it, but that's my foot hooking her ankle and tripping her while Ronny takes her down with a blow to the temple....The girl's now curled up under the sink and I punch her and kick her and smash her head into the floor. (188)

Incidents such as these occur all throughout the rest of the story. Violence seems to be Adeline's way of coping with the disgust and resentment she has for Uncle Josh.

After reading "Queen of the North," the reader may be compelled to look back on the previous three stories of *Traplines* in order to make sense of the trauma and abuse taking place throughout each story. In "Strategic Abjection: Windigo Psychosis and the 'Postindian' Subject in Eden Robinson's 'Dogs in Winter,'" Cynthia Sugars comments on the depictions of violence throughout the stories:

[T]his pre-occupation with violence represents Robinson's engagement with the effects of colonization (or colonial attitudes) on Native peoples....First, she invokes the often negative imagery conventionally associated with Native peoples (hunting, cannibalism, savagery, primitivism, the windigo/sasquatch) and uses it to strategic effect. Second, she frustrates the reader's desire to interpret her characters on the basis of their ethno-cultural identity. (78)

Many of the characters in *Traplines* subtly show the effects the Residential school system has had on its students, their families or children. Knowing these effects, along with the ways in which Robinson depicts her characters, leads one to assume this violence is a result of the colonialism undergone by Indigenous peoples. This further leads to assumptions of her characters as being Indigenous.

In the first and title story, "Traplines," Will, a troubled teenage boy, lives with his abusive father and brother and his alcoholic mother. Throughout the story the reader is shown the torment that Will has to go through daily. Will's father often abuses his brother which, in turn, results in Will's brother abusing him. One of Will's teachers, Mrs. Smythe, asks Will to move in with her and her husband because she sees the bruises Will's brother leaves on him, and she knows that his home life is not ideal. Will's father takes him out to dinner one

day and questions a phone call he received from the Smythes when they asked if Will would consider staying with them. It seems as though Will's father is concerned that Will has told the Smythes about his home life and abuse:

Dad nods. 'Did you tell them anything?'

'Like what?'

'Don't get smart,' he says, sounding beat.

'I didn't say anything.'

He stops chewing. 'Then why'd they ask you?'

'Don't know.'

'You must have told them something.'

'Nope. They just asked.'

'Did Eric tell them?'

I snort. 'Eric? No way. They would...He wouldn't go anywhere near them. They're okay, Dad. They won't tell anybody.'

'So you did tell them.'

'I didn't. I swear I didn't. Look, Eric got me on the face a couple times and they just figured it out.'

'You're lying.'

I finished my half of the cheeseburger.

'I'm not lying. I didn't say anything and they won't either.'

'I never touched you.'

'Yeah, Eric took care of that,' I say.

(Robinson, *Traplines* 32-33)

Even though Will's father may not abuse him, he has passed his anger on to Will's brother who, in turn, takes it out on Will. This could be argued to be a relevant example of how each generation was, and still is, affected and influenced by the malpractice that took place in the Residential school system. It is also very apparent that Will's mother is an alcoholic, and this seems significant because many Residential school survivors suffer from alcoholism. There are many references in "Traplines" that point towards Will's mother's alcohol problem. Robinson paints a particularly chilling scene of Will taking care of his drunk mother:

When I go into the kitchen, Mom is there. She sees me and makes a slushing motion with her hands, she pulls out a bottle from behind the stove and sits down at the kitchen table. 'You're a good boy,' she says, giggling. 'You're a good boy. Help your old mother back to bed, hey.'

'Sure,' I say, putting my arm around her.

She stands, holding onto the bottle with one hand and me with the other. "This way, my Lady."

'You making fun of me?' she says, her eyes going small, 'you laughing at me?' then she laughs and we go to their room. She flops onto the bed. She takes a long drink.

'You're fucking laughing at me, aren't you?'

'Mom, you're paranoid. I was making a joke.'

'Yeah you're really funny. A laugh a minute,' she says giggling again. 'Real comedian....' She throws the bottle at me. I duck. She rolls over and starts to cry. I cover her with the blanket and leave. (19-20)

This scene is significant because it displays how both parent and child are affected by alcoholism. There is no doubt that having to deal with issues such as these, especially as a child, has negative impacts on most people later on in their lives. Both Will's mother and father display the harsh qualities found in many Residential school survivors. The reader is clearly able to recognize how these negative impacts have a substantial influence on the family dynamic.

In each story "Dogs in Winter" and "Contact Sports," the reader is introduced to a character who can be said to represent psychosis. In "Dogs in Winter," the reader finds out that the main character's (Lisa's) mother is a serial killer who has killed Lisa's father, aunt, and several other people as well. The police raid their house and find body parts in big plastic bags all packed into a freezer. Lisa describes the officers' discovery of the pieces of her mother's victims:

He reached down and lifted the lid. For a moment, the skinned carcasses inside the freezer looked to him like deer or calves. Then he saw the arms and legs, sealed in extra-large plastic bags oiled high.

Three days later, Moreen Lisa Rufford was charged with seven counts of murder. (69)

By pointing out how the victims were discovered—chopped up in pieces like meat in Lisa's freezer—the reader is able to visualize just how psychotic and troubled Lisa's mother actually is. Another psychotic character in Robinson's short stories is Jeremy in "Contact Sports." Jeremy is extremely controlling and manipulative, especially

when it comes to his younger cousin Tom. It isn't explicitly said that Jeremy has murdered anyone, but the reader is informed that he has been kicked out of the military. The reason why is not clear, but Tom's mother protects Jeremy and says to Tom, "He didn't mean to go that far. It was self-defence" (147). This paints a fairly clear picture that Jeremy has killed someone. Also, in regards to the fact that Tom's mother has protected the reason as to why Jeremy was kicked out of the military, it could be argued that she is making an excuse for Jeremy's actions. Using Jeremy as an allegory for the Canadian residential school system, it could be said that Tom's mother represents all the excuses made by residential school teachers and administrators for the awful behaviour that went on in the school system.

A couple of days after Jeremy arrives to visit his cousin Tom and his mother, he starts controlling Tom in unusual ways. As mentioned previously, using Jeremy as an allegory for the Canadian residential school systems, this desire to control represents the desire to control all Indigenous persons through the residential school system, and to assimilate them into the "mainstream." Jeremy goes about 'assimilating' Tom's identity in ways similar to how residential schools controlled students. At first the controlling started with Jeremy forcing Tom to clean his car spotless in exchange for Jeremy paying some of Tom's and his mother's bills. The controlling behaviour then escalates to Jeremy demanding Tom to completely change his look, from buying him brand new clothes, to forcing him to get a new hair cut. Tom unquestionably refuses to do these things, but Jeremy demands Tom behave the way Jeremy insists, and he threatens Tom he will not pay any of his and his mother's bills if Tom does not comply with Jeremy's demands. Both Lisa's mother, Moreen, and Tom's cousin, Jeremy, could be said to represent the tragedy that happened surrounding and underlying the events that took place during Residential school systems. In an interview with Eden Robinson conducted by professor Stephanie McKenzie, Robinson was asked if the character Jeremy is representative of the psychosis of a nation—Canada—and its operation of Residential school systems in Canada. Robinson replied:

Our culture is weird and violent because people are weird and violent. If the Canuck fan riot in Vancouver showed us anything, it's that we have a lot of repressed rage. What are we angry about? What aren't we angry about? We have our

generous moments, our kind moments, but we're glossing over a lot of ambivalence. The violence towards women, especially the missing and murdered indigenous women, underlies the things we aren't talking about, the things we're leaving unsaid. The residential schools were an example of the way we treat fellow humans as if they weren't human, as if a group of people didn't have the same feelings, fears, needs and joys as everybody else....We aren't comfortable believing 'other' people are human. You won't get our empathy, our sympathy, our compassion unless you look and think just like us.

Robinson's characters, in particular Lisa's mother and, especially, Jeremy are treating humans in these stories as if they aren't really human or, in Robinson's words, as if they do not "have the same feeling, fears, needs and joys as everybody else." These characters could arguably be said to represent the psychosis of the entire nation of Canada with regards to the residential school systems. The actions and behavior that these characters portray, represents the roll Canada has played in these school systems, and the actions and behaviour that were manifested throughout the schools. Lisa's mother, and the people whom she has killed, could be argued to represent the many children, and adults who may have died during, or as a result of, Canadian residential school systems. Now, the idea of this school system was not to kill, but to assimilate Indigenous culture. However, in a way this assimilation did kill people, not psychically, but spiritually and emotionally. It could be said that the victims of Lisa's mother represent this loss of spirit and culture. Also, the way in which Jeremy forces Tom to adhere to his standards might represent the way in which Indigenous children were forced to adhere to the standards upon entering into the school system for the first time. Many residential school survivor stories mention how they would be showered, made to dress the same, and have the same hair cuts. On a website titled *Where Are the Children*, many residential school survivors share their stories of life during their time at residential schools throughout Canada. One survivor, Joseph Desjarlais, explains his first encounters with a residential school:

The first thing I noticed right off the bat when I got off the air craft was all the kids were dressed exactly the same. They all

had blue jean overalls. They all had tennis shoes. They all had their hair cropped and they really didn't look too happy, a lot of them...They threw me in the shower...they threw all the guys in there. We had shower shorts. That's what they called them, anyway. They just threw us all in there. And then it's kind of like getting processed, in a way.

The way in which Jeremy forces Tom to wear new clothes and get a new hair cut could be said to represent the way in which the students of residential schools were forced to look a certain way. As well, the ways in which Jeremy bullies Tom, manipulates him, and demands he follow his rules, mimics the actions of the authority figures operating these school systems, such as the priests and nuns.

Because of the depictions of abuse and violence seen in "Queen of the North," potentially due to negative impacts brought on by the residential school system in Canada, the reader may be impelled to reflect back through the previous stories and use this knowledge in order to make further connections between the residential school system and the negative impacts it brought on such as abuse, violence, and substance abuse. This claim is supported by what one sees in the other stories. "Queen of the North" directly displays the oppression of a residential school survivor and the things endured during stays at residential schools, which were experienced by many students. The story also shows the negative consequences of affected family members as well by showing the reader how troubled and violent Adeline's character is.

"Traplines" and "Dogs in Winter" represents the disruption in a family dynamic due to alcoholism and abuse. As already noted, the characters Moreen in "Dogs in Winter" and Jeremy in "Contact Sports" represent the psychosis of Canada throughout the duration of the residential school systems through the actions and behaviour that these characters portray and represent. In "Indigeneity and Diversity in Eden Robinson's Work," Kit Dobson quotes Vikki Visvis' argument that "Josh's 'violation of Adelaine can be read...as a distinct dimension of his traumatic experience' (43) of sexual abuse at residential school" and adds Visvis' view that "Robinson's work encourages the reader to approach the traumatic event in light of historical circumstances specific to native culture" (Dobson 63). After reading "Queen of the North," one is compelled to view *Traplines* as a work that

describes past experiences coexisting with present knowledge, both working together. When reading Robinson's *Traplines*, it is impossible to put the experiences of the residential school systems out of one's mind; rather, one uses the information given in "Queen of the North," along with current knowledge of today's repercussions regarding residential school survivors to view and interpret this literary work.

In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said states the following about the representation of World War II in literature:

A whole range of people in the so-called Western or metropolitan world, as well as their counterparts in the Third or formerly colonized world, share a sense that the era of high or classical imperialism, which came to a climax in what the historian Eric Hobsbawm has so interestingly described as "the age of empire" and more or less formally ended with the dismantling of the great colonial structures after World War Two, has in one way or another continued to exert considerable cultural influence in the present. For all sorts of reasons, they feel a new urgency about understanding the pastness *or not* of the past, and this urgency is carried over into perceptions of the present and the future. (7)

In an attempt to understand and interpret literature, a reader cannot simply leave the past at the door. The past will continually be carried on into our perceptions of the present and even the future. Simply knowing about events of the past has a substantial influence on literature because the reader uses the past in an attempt to decipher or understand the present.

Said also describes how culture is a fundamental component of identity. After reading "Queen of the North," and realizing Adelaine is Indigenous, the reader may draw comparisons between Adelaine's life and the characters lives in the previous stories of *Traplines*. In turn, this revelation further impacts the narrative through the implications and the enduring perceptions of the indigenous culture the reader may have. Said states,

In time, culture comes to be associated, often aggressively, with the nation or the state...Culture in this sense is a source of identity, and a rather combative one at that, as we see in recent "returns" to

culture and tradition...Culture is a sort of theater where various political and ideological causes engage one another. Far from being a placid realm of Apollonian gentility, culture can even be a battleground on which causes expose themselves to the light of day and contend with one another, making it apparent that, for instance, American, French, or Indian students who are taught to read *their* national classics before they read *others* are expected to appreciate and belong loyally, often uncritically, to their nations and traditions while denigrating or fighting against others. Now the trouble with this idea of culture is that it entails not only generating one's own culture but also thinking of it as somehow divorced from, because transcending, the everyday world. (Said xii)

There are many negative connotations surrounding Indigenous cultures and a lot of harshness and stereotyping as well. People are often taught to believe, or to think, their culture (often white culture) is superior to all others, and they learn to negatively interpret other cultures (who are not white) as well. Said explains that "validating" our world has negative consequences on the way we view other worlds: "But positive ideas of this sort do more than validate 'our' world, they also tend to devalue other worlds and, perhaps more significantly from a retrospective point of view, they do not prevent or inhibit or give resistance to horrendously unattractive imperialist practices" (81). Individuals' views of their "own world" can completely alter and influence their view of someone else's.

Robinson, being of Haisla descent herself, chooses not to out her characters as Aboriginal, and one might wonder at this. In "'Just Say No: Edén Robinson and Gabor Maté on Moral Luck and Addiction," Sabrina Reed discusses *Blood Sports*, a novel continuing the story of "Contact Sports" which follows the same characters Tom and Jeremy. Reed's following comments help readers understand *Traplines* as well:

One could also speculate, however, that Robinson omits Aboriginal markers from *Blood Sports* because otherwise her novel might be limited by her audience's assumptions about Aboriginal peoples

and addiction. As Maté² notes, popular belief often settles on the "tragic vulnerability" Indigenous cultures have toward alcohol and drugs (Robert Dupont qtd. in Maté 260)...It could be that, in explicitly naming her characters as Caucasian, Robinson recognizes how comforting it would be to non-Aboriginal readers to see addiction and poverty as a piece of antecedent luck primarily affecting Aboriginal peoples. (160)

Robinson probably does not "out" her characters as Aboriginal because she thinks this would have a negative impact on her reader's assumptions of the contents. Readers may assume this book is written strictly about the negative characteristics of Indigenous culture and Robinson may have wanted to avoid this assumption. Speaking of this idea, Sugars notes something comparable:

The story "tricks" the reader into making stereotyped judgements. For instance, the "savage rituals" and criminality engaged by Lisa's mother may be read as evidence of her "aboriginal" identity, especially given their associations with hunting practices; so, too, can Lisa's placement in a series of foster homes. Thus, one may be led to interpret the story according to a certain anti-colonial trajectory. (82)

Robinson may not "out" her characters as Aboriginal, but as Sugars suggests, the author tricks the reader into making those stereotyped judgements about her characters through the characteristics they portray. The inferences made about cultures other than one's own, whether they be positive or negative, has an influence on the way in which one views cultural representations.

Said's discussion of Rudyard Kipling's novel *Kim* further explains that even when independence is gained, cultures are still viewed in an imperialistic way:

Even though India gained its independence (and was partitioned) in

1947, the question of how to interpret Indian and British history in the period after decolonization is still, like all such dense and highly conflicted encounters, a matter of strenuous, if not always edifying, debate. There is the view, for example, that imperialism permanently scarred and distorted Indian life, so that even after decades of independence, the Indian economy...continues to suffer. Conversely, there are British intellectuals, political figures, and historians who believe that giving up the empire...was bad for Britain and bad for "the natives," who both have declined in all sorts of ways ever since. (135)

What is said here about Indian life declining relates to the supposed decline of Indigenous life after the residential school systems. There is no doubt that aspects of Indigenous lives did, in fact, decline, especially for those who suffered through the residential school system. The ways in which we view these declines, however, has an effect on the way in which we interpret the stories of *Traplines*, and this recognition may lead one to draw the wrong conclusions. The reader may, in fact, focus more on negative aspects of Indigenous culture, such as how most characters in the short stories of *Traplines* live in low-income households. In "Traplines," Will explains how his father hunts martins and how his family sells the martins' fur for Christmas money. There are also several occasions where Will goes to the refrigerator only to find spoiled milk and stale bread. In "Contact Sports," Tom tries to support himself and his mother the best he can while going to school plus working. Tom and his mother live in a run-down apartment building scattered with graffiti, and, on several occasions, the reader is informed that Will can never pay all of their bills on time. Lastly, in "Queen of the North," Adeline explains how her mother always has a toss up between Christmas gifts she wants, school supplies, or paying the bills. As with Said's description of India, and his view of "imperialism permanently scarring and distorting Indian life," the same goes for that of the view readers may have of Indigenous life. Looking back on the example of drug abuse in "Contact Sports," one may come to the conclusion that all Indigenous life declined after the introduction of residential schools in Canada. There is no doubt that the lives of many Indigenous people did, in fact, decline after this horrible event, but it needs to be understood that negative impacts such as the ones

²Reed states that, "In 2009, Eden Robinson and Dr. Gabor Maté participated in a panel entitled 'Mean Streets' at the Denman Island Readers and Writers Festival....Maté's non-fictional work recounts his experiences working for the Portland Hotel Society, a non-profit organization that provides accommodation, living assistance, and medical help to severely addicted clients who live in the Downtown Eastside." (Reed 151)

presented throughout *Traplines* are not characteristics of Indigenous people only. There is a chance that these negative characteristics did, in fact, arise from the ongoing abuse and mistreatment brought upon Indigenous people, but all sorts of abuse, including substance, physical, and sexual abuse, are found in many cultures all over Canada and the world.

When drawing connections between "Queen of the North" and the other stories of *Traplines*, the reader may be compelled to view these inferences, such as the impacts residential school systems had on their survivors, as only negative. Even though Indigenous people did inherit many negative attributes because of these school systems, they were brought on because of the fact that White society "validated" the culture of the schools and "de-valued" Indigenous culture. This in turn, caused a lot of Indigenous people to de-value themselves, creating negative characteristics associated with Indigenous culture, such as abuse.

In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said also explains how imperialism and colonialism create an idea of an "us" and a "them." This shines light on cultural differences, the representations of white culture in *Traplines*, and the superiority that white cultures are viewed to have. In mostly all the short stories of *Traplines* the notion of a cultural divide is present. In Part II of Chapter One of *Culture and Imperialism*, Said states the following:

As the twentieth century moves to a close, there has been a gathering awareness nearly everywhere of the lines *between* cultures, the divisions and differences that not only allow us to discriminate one culture from another, but also enable us to see the extent to which cultures are humanly made structures of both authority and participation, benevolent in what they include, incorporate, and validate, less benevolent in what they exclude and demote (15).

Here, Said explains how aware everyone is of the "lines between cultures" and how these lines are socially constructed on the basis of such things like "authority." He further goes on to explain how cultures (particularly white) are accepting of things they validate, but are not as accepting of things they oppose (such as Indigenous cultures). This line between cultures is very apparent in the short stories that make up *Traplines*. Noticing this cultural divide in *Traplines* helps one to understand the power and authority White people assume they have over Indigenous cultures. This

cultural divide also aids in one's understanding of the ways in which Indigenous cultures in turn, view non-Indigenous cultures. Seeing these divides from the perspective of an Aboriginal author gives insight into how apparent this divide still is in the world today. The reader is able to see how authoritative non-Indigenous cultures are perceived to be through the eyes of an Indigenous author and the assumed Indigenous characters that Robinson portrays. By not outing her characters as Indigenous until the last story, it can be argued that Robinson encourages the reader to take a step back and take into consideration how this divide between "us" and "them" is viewed on both ends of the spectrum—the ways in which non-Indigenous cultures view Indigenous cultures, and vice versa.

First, one can assume the "White" characters in *Traplines*, by the way in which they are more or less represented as being superior to other characters in the stories, are also depicted as living the "American," or, as is the case in "Traplines," the "Canadian dream." In "Traplines," Mrs. and Mr. Smythe (Will's teacher and her husband) live in a nice house with a pool table. They own a boat, and buy only "good" groceries. Mr. and Mrs. Smythe also propose to Will that he come live with them. In a way, this makes the Smythes seem as if they are superior to Will's family as they think they could care better for him than his own mother and father. The way in which they propose this question to Will also suggests superiority because they ask him in an extremely inappropriate manner without his father present and without going through the "proper social agency channels" (Robinson, "Interview"). Robinson is questioned about this matter in her interview with McKenzie and answers as follows:

People often come up with solutions to help other people that don't include asking the people who need help what they need. When you impose a solution on someone, the power dynamic is always weird, no matter how good your intentions. You can see the same dynamic all through Canada. Solutions imposed on other people don't often benefit the people they're meant to help.

The idea of "imposing a solution" also goes back to the role Canada has played in "helping" Indigenous people through the residential school system. This is not to imply that the intentions of this school system were good intentions, but people thought their intentions were to "help" or

benefit Indigenous people as they were forced to adhere to "normal" and "civilized" Canadian culture. This in fact, was not the case for many residential school survivors.

In "Dogs in Winter" the main character, Lisa, is adopted by Paul and Janet after her mother is charged with murder. Lisa always describes Paul and Janet in the best ways possible:

I stayed where I was. At thirteen, I felt gawky and awkward in clothes that didn't quite fit me and weren't in fashion. Paul and Janet looked like a couple out of a Disney movie. I couldn't believe my luck, I didn't trust it...Paul and Janet talked cautiously about my new school, my room, meeting their parents. I couldn't get over how perfect they looked, how normal they seemed.

(Robinson, *Traplines* 42)

Later, Lisa goes on to explain how Paul "smelled like old spice" and says she "felt like [She] was in a commercial" (57). This tells the reader, Lisa feels as if she's living a better life than she would if she were perhaps, still living with her mother. In both "Traplines" and "Dogs in Winter" it seems as though the white characters, such as the Smythes and Paul and Janet, are described as the "perfect" families. This, in turn, divides the way in which the characters' families in *Traplines* is described—abusive, alcoholic, psychotic, or dysfunctional.

As previously mentioned, the character of Jeremy in "Contact Sports" could be said to represent the psychosis of the nation of Canada and the role Canada played in the residential school system. In "'Just Say No:' Eden Robinson and Gabor Mate on Moral Luck and Addiction," Reed explains Helen Hoy's interpretation of Jeremy's and Tom's relationship as an allegory of the colonialism brought about by residential school systems: "Helen Hoy³...writes that the narrative in 'Contact Sports' 'systematically replicates facets of early and continuing settler-native interaction,' with Jeremy allegorically the 'European newcom[er]' (155) and Tom the Indigenous person who must 'cede control of his life, and submit to Jeremy's authority' (157)" (Reed159). Along with the fact that Jeremy might be said to represent the role Canada played in the residential school system, it could also be said that Jeremy might also represent this cultural divide of

³ Hoy, Helen. "'How Should I Eat These?' Eden Robinson's *Traplines*." *How Should I Read These? Native Women Writers in Canada*.

"us" and "them." Perhaps Jeremy is "the white North American," and perhaps Tom represents Indigenous persons who have had to succumb to being forced into "mainstream" Canadian culture. Jeremy and Tom have a volatile relationship which mirrors impasses between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

In "Queen of the North," the reader gets a further glimpse of this cultural divide when Adelaine is helping her Aunt and cousins at a Helping Hands event. Adelaine is frying "fry bread" when a "middle-aged red-haired" man named Arnold approaches her and asks to buy some. Adelaine declares several times that they are all out of the bread, but the man keeps putting money on the table and insisting she make him some more. Adelaine finally agrees after he puts one hundred dollars on the table and she does so because, as she says, "it was a good cause." The man asks her if she is Indian and ignorantly asks why she is so pale. She says, "I could feel him watching me, was suddenly aware of how far my shirt dipped and how short my cutoffs were" (Robinson, *Traplines* 208). After she hands him his fry bread Adelaine describes the man's further action which represent the way Indigenous women are often understood:

He blushed suddenly and cleared his throat. 'Would you do me a favor?'

'Depends.'

'Would you—' he blushed harder, 'shake your hair out of that baseball cap?'....

'You should keep it down at all times,' he said. (209)

In this scene, a very common Indigenous stereotype is depicted: the stereotype of an "Indian"-like princess—Pocahontas, if you will. In her book *Neither Indian Princess nor Easy Squaws*, Janice Acoose addresses these stereotypes:

Stereotypic images of Indian princesses, squaw drudges, suffering helpless victims, tawny temptresses, or loose squaws falsify Indigenous women's realities and suggest in a subliminal way that those stereotypical images are Indigenous women. As a consequence, those images foster cultural attitudes that encourage sexual, physical, verbal, or psychological violence against Indigenous women. Stereotypic images of Indigenous women also function as sentinels that guard and protect the White-Christian-patriarchal

power structure (and now the White-christian-matriarchal structure) against any threatening disturbances that might upset the status quo. (55)

Here, Acoose explains the stereotypic views that are represented in many forms in the media and in literature, and they have a negative effect on the ways in which Indigenous women are viewed. Indigenous women are often considered to be sexual figures which feeds the violence experienced by many Indigenous women, and these stereotypical views, created mainly by colonial patriarchy, are regarded as excuses for the violence. This violence experienced by many Aboriginal women is very apparent especially with regards to the inclining numbers of these women who are missing, or murdered. In a 2016 Canadian Medical Association editorial "Not Just Justice: Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women Needs Public Health Input From the Start," Kristen Patrick explains:

A recent report from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police confirmed that rates of missing person reports and homicide are disproportionately higher among Aboriginal women than in the non-Aboriginal female population. As rates of female homicide have declined in Canada overall, the rate among Aboriginal women remains unchanged. (78)

Patrick's comment is evidence pointing towards the enduring injustice Aboriginal women face in Canada, essentially because of the culture they are a part of. Acoose goes further:

In order to maintain power, the English-Canadian patriarchy employs stereotypical representations of Indigenous women, which according to "'Indians' and Native Americans in the Movies: A History of Stereotypes, Distortions, and Displacements" by Hartmut Lutz, "[S]erve as ideological contracts to justify inequality and to uphold the status quo." (57)

Again, the divide between "us" and "them" is highlighted. Disregarding other cultures, and viewing them as inferior or powerless, seem to be ways in which people validate inequality.

Said explores notions and the vocabulary surrounding this cultural division between "us" and "them:"

In our time direct colonialism has largely ended; imperialism, as we shall see, lingers where it has always been, in a kind of general cultural sphere as well as in specific political, ideological, economic and social practices.

Neither imperialism nor colonialism is a simple act of accumulation and acquisition. Both are supported and perhaps even impelled by impressive ideological social formations that include notions that certain territories and people *require* and beseech domination, as well as forms of knowledge affiliated with domination: the vocabulary of classic nineteenth-century imperial culture is plentiful with words and concepts like 'inferior' or 'subject races,' 'subordinate people,' 'dependency,' 'expansion,' and 'authority.' Out of the imperial experiences, notions about culture were clarified, reinforced, criticized, or rejected. (Said 9)

Today in Canada, direct colonialism, such as the Residential school system, or wars over territories, are not as apparent. However, people still engage in imperialistic ways every day. One aspect of this behaviour that is very apparent is the manner in which people are stereotyped or discriminated against. The imperialism in *Traplines*, the notions of "us" and "them," is a result of a long and appalling history of colonialism. What could be interpreted as "white" characters in *Traplines*, such as the Smythes in "Traplines," Paul and Janet in "Dogs in Winter," Jeremy in "Contact Sports," and the red-haired man, Arnold, in "Queen of the North," all represent these assumptions and perceptions of "superiority" or "authority." White cultures consider themselves to have these characteristics in regard to Indigenous culture. This, in turn, shows the reader how these notions contribute to the viewing of Indigenous characters as unequal or inferior and White characters as "powerful" and fitting into the "status quo." By pointing out these characteristics, such as superiority or authority, Robinson also paints a picture of how Indigenous cultures view non-Indigenous cultures.

In conclusion, by reading "Traplines," "Dogs in Winter," and "Contact Sports" through the lens of Robinson's "Queen of the North," it is evident that the effects of colonialism, especially residential school systems in Canada, have had undeniable negative impacts on the lives of Indigenous people. Even though subtle, Robinson

represents her characters as victims of an ingrained history of "cultural genocide" and the effects that this genocide has had on one generation to the next. By using the theories that Said forwards in *Culture and Imperialism*, one can see how colonialism is represented in Eden Robinson's *Traplines*. *Culture and Imperialism* aims to demonstrate how past and present coexist with one another, and one can use Said's ideas to understand literature. In *Traplines*, Robinson uses past experiences and future knowledge in order to subtly represent her characters as victims and allegories of the horrendous acts that took place through the duration of the residential school system. Said describes how culture is a fundamental component of identity, which further impacts narrative through the implications and the enduring perceptions of a culture the reader may have. He does this by explaining how validating one's own world leads to devaluing another culture's own world because validating one's own culture creates thoughts such as "superior" and "inferior." And lastly, Said explains how imperialism and colonialism create a division between an "us" and a "them." This, in turn, shines light on cultural differences and the superiority which some cultures claim to have. The "White" culture displayed in *Traplines* is depicted as "normal," or "perfect" even, especially in the White families of "Traplines" and "Dogs in Winter." In "Contact Sports" and "Queen of the North" the "White" characters depicted in these stories represent the power white cultures assume to have (and always had) over Indigenous culture. Noticing these cultural divides in *Traplines* helps one to consider how non-Indigenous, as well as Indigenous peoples might view the divide of "us" and "them" in the aftermath of the Canadian residential school system.

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