

“The biggest adventure”¹: Indigenous People and White Men’s Wars

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“Know that you go to a place that will change you for ever”
Aunt Niska in Joseph Boyden, *Three Day Road*, 293.

Some years ago I was staying with friends in Nice in the South of France. One Sunday my hosts took me to the cinema. When we arrived there – just before 11 o’clock in the morning – there was already a long queue waiting to buy tickets. I was somewhat surprised since it was so early on a Sunday morning, but by the time we came out I understood why the film we had just seen had caused such a stir in France and was so highly regarded by critics and public alike.² Made by the director Rachid Bouchareb and filmed in France and Morocco, it was called simply *Indigènes* – or *The Indigenous* – and focused on the story of the North African colonial troops who had fought on the side of the French in the Second World War from 1943 to 1945.

The film traced the story of four soldiers from their recruitment in Algeria in 1943, through their participation in the campaigns in Italy and Provence, their progress up the Vallée du Rhône and on to the Vosges in 1944, to the heroic deaths of all but one of them in the battle to liberate Alsace. It concluded with a moving scene in which sixty years later the sole survivor, now an old man, searches for the graves of his erstwhile comrades in an Alsatian military cemetery, pays his respects to their memory and then returns to his solitary room in the immigrant hostel which is now his home in France.

While documenting the North African soldiers’ code of honour, their strong religious faith, their sense of solidarity, their heroism in battle and the ultimate sacrifice they make for France, the film also recorded the discrimination to which they were constantly subjected: the many ways they were denied equal rights in an army they had regarded as a rare bastion of equality; the refusal to serve them equal rations in the mess, for instance, or

the consistency with which they are overlooked for promotion. The film frequently emphasised their loyalty to France: the insistence on signing on of one of them in spite of his mother’s remonstrations that his grandfather had never returned from the First World War; the reminder that the family of another of them had been killed by French colonists in Algeria; the scene where a group of Muslim soldiers sing the *Marseillaise* in an emotional assertion of their rights as French citizens; and their conviction, as they embark on the mission which is to be their last, that “on sera les premiers français en Alsace – c’est notre devoir. [“We will be the first French in Alsace – it is our duty”]. The film exposed the hypocrisy of the patriotic rhetoric of high-ranking French officers who grandly assure them that “la France est fière de vous” [“France is proud of you”] while remaining blind to the fact that all their talk of “égalité” and “fraternité” is undermined by the North Africans’ lack of prospects both during and after the war. This was particularly underscored in a powerful scene in which one of the more radical North Africans’ lambasts such official hypocrisy by ironically quoting the words of Général de Gaulle in calling for the very equality they are consistently being denied.

Indigènes is one of those relatively few war films in which a politically committed director and his actors sought to make an important political point by highlighting the connection between the historical events described and present-day social injustice.³ Such injustice resides in the lack of recognition accorded indigenous people who fought in their thousands (130,000) in the French army to liberate “la mère patrie” [“the mother country”]. This theme is first addressed in a scene where

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the colonel who dispatches the North African soldiers on the dangerous mission to Alsace which will lead to the deaths of three of them assures them – on his word of honour – that all that they have done for France during the war will be recognised. This is of course the expectation of the men themselves. But as a text superimposed over a shot of a Muslim military cemetery at the end of the film makes clear, full recognition was not accorded them. After the war the colonial troops who had survived were paid a pension which was paltry when compared with that received by French ex-servicemen. Even though the French *Conseil d'État* had finally ruled in 2001 that this disparity, in effect since 1959, should be redressed, the ruling had subsequently been ignored by successive governments. It was, as Alec Hargreaves reports, only after President Chirac had seen the film that action was finally taken.⁴

Indigènes makes a strong political statement and articulates a convincing call for justice, with its success at the Cannes Film Festival and subsequently which the French public amply recognised. Although it was a French film, the story it has to tell has many parallels in the history of indigenous people fighting alongside the British in that same war. Only recently, in September 2008, we were reminded that there were cases in Britain too where the question of recognition and compensation had remained unresolved, for instance when the press carried photographs of two aged, highly decorated Nepalese Gurkhas, Laxman Gurung and Rahadur Pun, clutching Union Jacks and sitting on either side of a photograph of the Queen outside the Old Bailey in London awaiting the High Court's judgement on their hitherto unacknowledged right to retire in Britain and to receive a British pension.⁵

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Although I have long been acquainted with the writings of those English authors who participated in the First World War – Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, Robert Graves and others – I have only recently become aware of the work of authors from Commonwealth countries, who, while mostly not having taken part in the First or Second World Wars themselves, have nevertheless sought in their work to re-evaluate the impact on their own societies of those wars, in which so many of their countrymen had fought. From the former settler colonies of Australia and Canada, in particular, have come a number of texts by major writers which have addressed their country's participation in European wars on the side of the mother country from which their ancestors had

once emigrated. The Australian David Malouf, for example, has in his novels *Fly away, Peter* (1982) and *The Great World* (1990), sought to depict his country's involvement in both world wars, motivated as he was not so much by a desire to describe the events of the wars themselves but to define Australia's particular experience of them. Malouf's concern was not only to investigate the impact of the wars – socially and psychologically – on ordinary Australians, both those who were combatants and those who remained at home, but also primarily to seek to understand how Australia had itself been transformed by its participation in the wars in Europe and Asia and what that meant later for his own non-combatant generation.

And then there is the Canadian Timothy Findley, author of a celebrated novel entitled *The Wars*, equally concerned to ascertain the impact of the war on his country, impugning the responsibility of the older generation for sending the younger one to war, exploring the complex moral issues thrown up by the brutalisation of men in war. Findley's novel is a historiographic metafiction which plays with the possibilities of postmodern narration while not eschewing the harrowing realism of its subject. It is a novel, however, which has in common with Malouf's works that it is by a white male author and explores the fates of white male protagonists. Rarely indeed has the participation of indigenous combatants in war found expression – Kip in Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient* is one example, as is Jules Tonnerre in Margaret Laurence's *The Diviners* – but examples such as these are few and far between. To find accounts of such experience we have to turn to the writings of indigenous authors themselves.

Among the earliest examples is the diary Sol Plaatje kept of his experiences in the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902. Later to become first secretary of the African National Congress and a noted author and translator, Plaatje observed the war in his capacity as interpreter at Mafeking. Another major early text is Mulk Raj Anand's 1937 novel of the First World War, *Across the Black Waters*, which he wrote while himself taking part in the Spanish Civil War. That the theme has lost nothing of its interest for postcolonial writers is clear from a number of much more recent publications, works such as the Nigerian author Biyi Bandele's novel *Burma Boy* (2007), which tells the story of the West Africans who fought with the Chindits against the Japanese in 1944. In the present article I shall, however, be focusing on the New Zealand Maori author Patricia Grace's novel *Tu*, published in 2004, the first novel to concern itself with the history of the legendary Maori Battalion in Italy during World War II⁶

and the Ojibway Canadian author Joseph Boyden's bestseller *Three Day Road* of 2005,⁷ the first novel to relate First Nations experience in World War I, which has already come to be regarded by critics as a "milestone in North American fiction," as a "Canadian classic."⁸

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New Zealand, as a Dominion of the British Empire since 1907, had participated in the First World War alongside Great Britain. Together with the Australians its troops had formed part of the ANZAC forces at Gallipoli. During the war the country had sustained almost 60,000 casualties (of whom over 16,000 had been killed), a number regarded as higher per capita than that for any other nation involved in the war.

When Britain declared war on Germany in 1939, New Zealand again followed suit, although this time it issued its declaration of war independently. The country's unconditional loyalty to Britain was expressed in a much-quoted statement by the then Labour Prime Minister Michael Joseph Savage: "both with gratitude for the past and with confidence in the future, we range ourselves without fear beside Britain. Where she goes, we go. Where she stands, we stand."⁹ Over the course of the war when conscription was in force, some 306,000 men were called up.¹⁰ New Zealand forces saw action in the catastrophic campaigns in Greece and Crete in 1941 – they suffered heavy casualties on Crete with 661 killed and 1943 captured – and they also fought against the Germans in North Africa the same year, where the number killed was even higher (900) and some 1900 were taken prisoner. When after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour the focus of the war moved to the Pacific, it was decided rather controversially that New Zealand forces would not be redeployed nearer home, as were their Australian counterparts, but would remain on in Europe, while the defence of their own country would be entrusted to the Americans. Thus from 1943-45, New Zealand troops took part in the Italian campaign, which saw them involved particularly in the murderous battle at Cassino in 1944¹¹ and subsequently moving up through the Italian peninsula to Trieste, which they entered at war's end. The Italian campaign proved very costly for New Zealand, since their forces suffered 9000 casualties, of which 2003 were deaths.¹² By the end of the Second World War the country had suffered 36,038 casualties overall, of whom 11,625 had been killed and 24,413 had been wounded.¹³

As part of the New Zealand war effort Maori played a significant role. In spite of the fact that not all of them

had been in favour of the idea of fighting overseas on the side of the British during the First World War, a volunteer Maori Pioneer Battalion had been formed in 1916 and had served in Egypt. This proved to be the forerunner of the Maori Battalion which would be established at the beginning of the Second World War. Of the 16,000 Maori (out of a population of only 90,000) who served in various capacities during the war, some 3,600 volunteered for the Maori Battalion, which fought in North Africa and Italy. During the battle for Cassino it fell to them to lead the attack on the railway station. In Italy the battalion suffered heavy losses with 649 killed, 1700 wounded and more than 150 taken prisoner.¹⁴ It is worth quoting what Patricia Grace has to say about the motivations of those who joined the Maori Battalion, since this will be a basic theme of her novel *Tu*:

this new battalion was the hope of the people. It was the means by which the people and culture would achieve recognition and equality – their salvation in a way – so no matter what his immediate reason might be for going off to war, resting on the shoulders of the Maori soldier was the mana of his family, his iwi and his race. His first duty was not to king and country but to the people at home.¹⁵

On their return home after serving in the First World War Maori had suffered discrimination in that, unlike their Pakeha counterparts, they had not been granted any rehabilitation assistance. After the Second World War, however, they were accorded equal treatment.¹⁶ "This time," M.P.K. Sorrenson comments from a Pakeha perspective, "Maori ex-servicemen were treated with the same generosity as their Pakeha comrades, and many, through trade training, higher education or loans to buy farms or businesses got a good start."¹⁷ This is a view which Grace's novel *Tu* would seem to dispute.

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Canada's contribution to the imperial forces in World War I was also very high in terms of the number of men who enlisted. Out of a population of ten million approximately 600,000 signed on and of those 60,000 died. The number of First Nations soldiers who joined the Canadian Expeditionary Force has been estimated at about 3500-4000, which is about 35% of those who were in the eligible age group at the time.¹⁸ Although the statistics are unreliable,¹⁹ it has been estimated that over three hundred of them were killed.

Dempsey identifies three reasons why so many First Nations men volunteered for war service: their loyalty to the British crown (with whom during the nineteenth

century the native peoples had concluded treaties) rather than to Ottawa; the persistence of the warrior ethic, which had been the basis of male concepts of honour in pre-colonial times but had been undermined by Europeans; and the opportunity enlisting offered to young males of escaping the boredom of an enforced existence in residential schools or on reserves.²⁰ Although, as in New Zealand, there was an initial reluctance on the part of the military authorities to accept Native recruits, this vanished when Canadian losses increased, particularly after the Battle of the Somme.²¹ The advantages it was thought might proceed from recruiting Natives were outlined in a revealing letter to the Minister of Militia and Defence, which Dempsey quotes: "They are excellent shots, scouts and fine travellers, live in the open air with or without tents. They have scrapped with nature all their lives and are surely fitted for the greatest scrap of all times."²² (22). And indeed, as the careers of Henry Norwest and Francis Pegahmagabow would later amply demonstrate, they did prove very effective snipers.

Several commentators have emphasised the fact that – like the Maori in New Zealand and North Africans in *Indigènes* – First Nations soldiers met with unequal treatment after the war. The hopes of returned soldiers that they would be accorded social equality were disappointed, as they found themselves still "subject to the provisions of the Indian Act and [...] in the same position as they were before enlisting."²³ Nor did they experience any economic improvement. Dickason points out that "as veterans [...] Amerindians soon discovered that they were not getting the same benefits as non-Amerindians." (307) Boyden himself confesses himself "shocked and amazed" that First Nations soldiers were not awarded the pensions others received. "Native soldiers," he reports, "didn't get any compensation whatsoever. They were made a lot of promises, too, huge promises of land, of the vote, for freedom, and those promises all disappeared immediately on their return home."²⁴ In these circumstances it is hardly surprising that Dempsey ends his study with the bitter remark: "It appeared that Indian soldiers were good enough to fight and die for Canada but they were not 'civilized' enough to have the rights of Canadian citizens."²⁵

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In the informative "Author's notes" to *Tu*, Patricia Grace relates how the novel came to be written. She records how her father went to join the Maori Battalion reinforcements in Italy in 1944 and how he kept a

notebook of his journey. As is apparent from her remarks, his notes are remarkable for what they do not say about the war itself.

His notes begin with the words "Left Papakura by train,"²⁶ and cover only the journey by sea and train until reaching camp in El Maadi, where preparations began for the campaigns in Italy. He took up his pen again on 13 December 1945, after the war had ended and when he was about to leave a rest camp in Florence: "So after many months of varied experiences I take off again..." His diary is just twenty-five pages in all. (284)

In common with many, if not most, of those who took part in the war, her father displayed a great reluctance ever to talk about what he had experienced. Grace remembers hearing as a child the songs her father and her uncles sang and the new languages they had learnt overseas and she recalls how he spoke warmly of Italy and of the people there, but she recognises that the men "returning from war [had come] home with a silence also," that "they had their ghosts" and that they never spoke about "the action of the war itself" (284). It was only when she read his notebook long after his death that she became curious about the motivations of the men of her father's generation who volunteered to go to war. *Tu* is the product of that curiosity. It is a novel with considerable significance in the literary history of New Zealand, since as Janet Wilson has pointed out, "it marks out the twentieth-century wars of empire as a subject for Maori fiction for the first time."²⁷ For Grace writing the novel was itself a voyage of discovery. "I can say now," she writes, "I have been on a journey too, especially as far as understanding more about the overseas war experience of the soldiers is concerned. It was an engrossing and illuminating journey on the one hand, on the other, one that was both sad and horrifying" (284).²⁸ That journey involved a great deal of historical research, using the memoirs of other members of the Maori Battalion, as well as letters, photographs, memorabilia of all kinds, contemporary newspaper clippings and the archival resources of major New Zealand libraries. Through Radio New Zealand Grace also gained access to recordings of the Maori songs, which had been sung at concert parties.²⁹

When she began writing *Tu* in 2002, Grace could not have known that the journey of which she speaks would turn out to be very much longer than she had originally thought. In 2007 it would take her to Crete to research the unusual family history of a wounded Maori soldier, who had married a Cretan woman he had met while being sheltered on the island by her family and had eventually brought her back to New Zealand. Approached by their

sons with the request that she write the story of their parents, Grace “realised that this was a story that needed to be told” and embarked on the task of writing the biography, *Ned & Katina. A true love story*, “for the first time [...] a story I did not own,”³⁰ as she puts it.

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It is interesting when reading some of the texts in which Joseph Boyden goes into his own biography – the 2008 *Henry Kreisel Lecture*, for example, or the interview contained in the *Penguin Reading Guide* – to note the elements in his family background and the aspects of his own experience which seem to have contributed to the genesis of his novel *Three Day Road*. Among the former are his father’s distinguished service as a highly decorated medical officer in World War II and his Uncle Erl’s wholly contrasting pursuit of a traditional Ojibway way of life. The latter include his familiarity with Northern Ontario through having lived and worked in the James Bay area and the long periods he spent with remote communities on reserves,³¹ not to mention the many canoeing trips he undertook, for instance on occasions when he and his son “need[ed] to reconnect.”³²

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Before going on I should perhaps briefly summarise both novels.

Tu covers the period from June 1943 to March 1946. It tells the story of three Maori brothers – Pita, Rangi and Tu – who, undeterred by the fate of their father who was gassed and wounded in World War I, enlist in the Maori Battalion in World War II and take part in the Italian campaign from 1943 to 1945. The novel begins with Tu’s departure by sea from Wellington, follows his progress to Suez and thence to Italy, describes his longing to see action, his first experience of killing an enemy in combat, and his feelings of pride as a member of the Maori Battalion who has risen to the challenge of war and has not been found wanting. Throughout the novel there is an emphasis on Tu as standing in a warrior tradition: he feels he has a right to belong to the battalion, since his very name, which evokes the Maori god of warfare Tumatauenga, had been bestowed on him to honour his father who had been in the First World War as a member of the Pioneer Battalion, known in Maori as Te Hokowhitu-a-Tu (34-35). As a “backhome boy” from New Zealand Tu is excited at being involved in events of such global import and with his strong sense of duty is reluctant to return home before the task is completed.

He participates in the arduous battle for the strategic town of Cassino, “one of the most relentless and unrewarding ventures in which the New Zealand Division was involved,”³³ learns of the death of his brother Pita and hears Rangi’s confession of his affair with the Pakeha woman back home who had once been the hesitant Pita’s “dream girl”. Subsequently Rangi injures Tu with the intention of getting him invalidated out of the war. Tu returns to New Zealand, where he chooses to live a solitary existence at the place under Mt. Taranaki which had been his childhood home.

All of this is told by Tu himself in the first person. His account is, however, interwoven by a third-person narrative, which essentially takes the form of a chronicle unfolding the family history up to the time when he enlists. This narrative of memory includes Tu’s educational prowess and the hopes the family places in him, which lead them to oppose his enlisting; his childhood memories of his father, a veteran of the First World War, whose war wounds and resulting mental instability had contributed to his early death at the age of 39; the family’s move from a rural community to the urban environment of Wellington and the difficulties they face in assimilating to white society, a process rendered tolerable only by their membership in a Maori cultural club, which provides “a home away from home” (41) and enables them to hold on to their traditions, “the songs and dances and arts of the Maori” (42); the story of Pita’s relationship with Jess, a narrative of interracial love frustrated by social convention; and, finally, the mystery surrounding the births of the children Rimini and Benedict, to whom, in letters which frame the narrative, Tu addresses his account of his wartime experiences. (Their names evoke the Italian campaign, Benedict being the saint after whom the monastery of Monte Cassino, destroyed in the war, was named). Much of the impact of the novel depends on the interplay between the narrative strands along which it is structured, on the relationship of past and present both in the history of Tu’s family and in the political history linking the First and Second World Wars, and on the sense of the strong Maori culture and the life back home which the soldiers have left behind.

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Joseph Boyden’s novel *Three Day Road* similarly demonstrates how oral narrative may be integrated into a written text. Furthermore it illustrates how, in the manner which has been described by Jo-Ann Episkew, indigenous story-telling may be used as a means of

healing historical trauma, in this case the trauma of war.³⁴ (As will become clear in the course of this article, her argument, although primarily oriented to the literary representation of social history in Canada, applies equally well to New Zealand.) Episkenew first offers a damning political analysis of the impact of colonialism on indigenous people, dismissing white superiority as a foundational myth of Canadian settler society which has had traumatic effects on the health and wellbeing of indigenous people (77-78) and has inflicted a "soul wound" on them (78). The pressure to acculturate to settler society exerted over centuries on indigenous people (78) has resulted in what she terms "postcolonial stress disorder" and has brought about social abuses such as poverty, alcoholism, and violence.

It must be the task of indigenous literature, in her view, to challenge the "master narrative" of white settlerdom in Canada through articulating a "counterstory" which will redress the falsities of an imposed history from a Native perspective. Indigenous literature for her is, thus, a form of counter-discourse. (76) Stories and indigenous literature in general have "healing power" (76). "Indigenous people," she says, "have believed in the healing power of language and stories since time immemorial and today's Indigenous writers continue to apply this belief to the creation of works of literature and theatre in English" (80). When indigenous people articulate their own narrative of their own history, the effect is therapeutic and transformative. It brings people out of their isolation through establishing a commonality of experience and providing people with the means to engage with historical trauma.

Much of what Episkenew has to say resonates throughout *Three Day Road*. The novel, which has bilingual chapter titles in Cree and English, is structured around two parallel, alternating narratives told by two native voices. The first narrative, that of Xavier, tells of two Cree natives, Xavier himself and Elijah, friends from childhood, who volunteer to serve in World War I and fight with the Canadian forces in the major campaigns on the Somme, at Vimy Ridge and Passchendaele. The second narrative, that of Xavier's Aunt Niska, tells of how after the war she transports him wounded and with his supply of morphine running out, by canoe back towards his home country in Northern Ontario where, the reader assumes, he has come to die.

Xavier's account of his experiences takes the form of the memories which run through his mind as he lies for three days in Aunt Niska's canoe. He relives the trench warfare in Flanders in all its terrible reality, sparing the

reader none of the horrors of war. He remembers how accomplished hunters and marksmen he and Elijah were deployed as snipers, using the skills acquired in the Canadian bush to survive in no man's land. He records his own growing revulsion at the large number of kills they were notching up, while Elijah, increasingly dependent on drugs, came to love the act of killing and indulged in ever greater brutality, even to the extent of murdering two of his fellow soldiers. Elijah's moral decline led in a final struggle to his death at the hands of Xavier, after which Xavier himself lost a leg in a shelling.

Throughout the novel this narrative is counterpointed by that of Aunt Niska, a native diviner who still lives in the bush, following the traditional way of life. We learn how during Xavier's youth and in resistance to what was being drummed into him at a Catholic residential school she had taught him native knowledge. It is on such knowledge that she now has to rely in attempting to save his life by bringing him back spiritually into the world he had left behind when he went off to the war. Not fully understanding what he has gone through and knowing nothing of the place where his suffering was inflicted, she decides to try to heal him by telling him stories. By the end of the novel after a ritual of healing Xavier is restored and can return to his people.

Interpolated between the episodes Xavier recalls from the war, Aunt Niska's stories are intended to heal him. Since the traumatised Xavier cannot yet speak to her, she decides to speak to him in the belief that "maybe some of the poison that courses through him might be released in this way" (88). When he initially cannot take food, she resolves to "feed him with my story instead" (130). So she tells him stories of the history of the Cree, of her own childhood growing up in the traditional manner, of her being forcibly taken away to residential school, of the abuse she suffered there until her mother helped her escape "back into the time of our ancestors" (95), and of how she had later been raped by a French Canadian (171). She tells him, too, of how when he in his turn had been forced to attend residential school she had stolen him back from the nuns so that he could be raised "in the old ways" (216), of their subsequent nomadic life together, which she recalls as "the happiest [months] in [her] life when they were "trapping and hunting in the bush" (219), and of how, when he had announced to her that he and Elijah had "decided to paddle to a town where we can join their army," (203), she had built a *matatosowin* (sweat lodge), prayed to *Gitchi Manitou* and tied medicine bundles around their necks for protection, warning them: "Know that you go to a place that will change you forever" (293).

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The history of First Nations involvement in World War I has largely been neglected. They have received only scant mention in military histories and, as Donna Coates reminded us in her review of the novel for *Canadian Literature*, “to date, no other writer has examined Aboriginal participation in the Great War in fiction.”³⁵ *Three Day Road* thus amounts to what Gordon Billing has described as an “attempt to destabilize Eurocentric accounts of Canada’s past.”³⁶ Although Boyden may not have seen his novel in quite those terms, it is clear that the book does represent something new in Canadian writing in as far as it sets out to tell the First Nations story of the war from a First Nations perspective.³⁷ We know too of his concern about misrepresentations of native people in the North American media from his scathing remarks about films such as *Dancing with Wolves*³⁸ and we can thus read the novel as an honest attempt to offer an authentic representation of native people.

It is evident from his own account in the *Reading Guide* that the original idea for *Three Day Road* lay in Boyden’s own family history and particularly in the contrasting lives of his father and his uncle. With this he wished to combine the myth of Francis Pegahmagabow, the much decorated, First World War Ojibway sniper and scout, whom he describes in the “Acknowledgments” to the novel as “one of Canada’s most important heroes” (383).³⁹ This concept provided him with the interplay of modern war history and traditional native life, which is at the core of the work. To situate his fictional narrative of the war within an authentic historical context, he decided to place his protagonists, Xavier and Elijah, with the Second Canadian Division, which was involved in some of the worst battles of the war. This also has the effect of writing the First Nations into the general Canadian story.

Among the interesting facets of *Three Day Road* is its structure. Thus, as Batarbee has pointed out, it makes use of the motif of journey in the form of “the two young men’s journey from the bush to the recruitment station and to their various destinations on the Western front; the literal ‘three-day road’ of Niska and Xavier’s canoe journey back home; and the mythical three-day road used by the Cree as a metaphor for the transition from life to death.”⁴⁰ The canoe journey with Aunt Niska is in fact a reversal of their original trip to enlist.

A further remarkable feature of the novel is the storytelling technique Boyden adopts. Since he wanted to avoid having his storytellers address the reader directly, he structured the narrative so that the

protagonists would tell their stories to one another. Thus, “Niska and Elijah tell their stories to Xavier, and Xavier tells his own stories to himself.”⁴¹ Keith Batarbee has even calculated that Aunt Niska has 25% of the narrative and Xavier 75%.⁴² Not only does Boyden integrate traditional oral narrative into the novel, he also departs from the strict linear chronology which he had adhered to in the first draft of the story. His dissatisfaction with that draft had lain in the fact that he felt he was inappropriately “applying a Western style of storytelling to an aboriginal story.”⁴³ So he chose a more circular mode of narration which would take account of the Cree notion that life proceeds in cycles and would re-enact the Cree manner of storytelling. Thus the novel with its twin narrative strands now begins near the end of the story, when the war is already over and Xavier is back in Canada, and goes back over earlier events until it reaches the present. It thus takes Xavier – and the reader – full circle.

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Tu and *Three Day Road* have much in common. Both novels display a dual focus: they describe in detail the lives of indigenous communities – the Maori and the Cree – both in their home environments and through the experience of the men who go overseas to war. People like the Cree, who led the nomadic lives of hunters in Northern Canada, effectively became nomads abroad when at the behest of their colonial masters they enlisted to fight in wars they barely understood in places they had never heard of.

There are many questions which arise from these texts, not least the comparable experiences of indigenous people from different parts of the British Empire they address. One central question worth investigating – especially in view of the fact that so many indigenous people were not conscripted but actually volunteered, and in such large numbers, for both world wars – is that foregrounded by Patricia Grace in *Tu*: “Why did they go to war? Why did they commit themselves to a war so totally? What was their cause?” (283)

In describing their motivations in writing these novels both authors acknowledge the curiosity engendered by their own fathers having taken part in World War II. Similarly both make obeisance to the example of their forebears who so readily volunteered for military service: Patricia Grace celebrates the achievements of the Maori Battalion; Joseph Boyden speaks of his desire “to honour the Native soldiers who fought in the Great War.” Both authors seek to establish the particular contribution of their native communities to the wars, to gain an insight

into the minds and motivations of those who served and to ascertain the nature of the psychological and social transformations that participation in the world wars brought about. Both novels offer compelling studies of the psychology of the native combatant, analysing both those who fell victim to the brutalisation of war (Rangi and Elijah) and those who confront their moral conflict and thus survive (Tu and Xavier).

Both novelists seek to preserve indigenous identity amid the horrors of war by integrating elements of indigenous culture in their narratives. Language in particular plays an important role here. In *Tu* Maori terms are used throughout; in *Three Day Road* Xavier and Elijah communicate with one another largely in Cree and regard English as a language which is "better for lies" (51). In *Tu*, where Grace places the famous "Maori Battalion Marching Song" as an epigraph to the novel (7), the music and performances of the Maori concert parties and of the Maori Battalion soldiers contribute to the construction and retention of their identity. Both novelists structure their texts as parallel narratives, which has the effect of depicting the native world of peace as one of security and the white world of war as one of madness. In *Tu* the emphasis on family and community provides a real contrast to the scenes of war; in *Three Day Road* the traditional world which Aunt Niska inhabits and draws Xavier back into is a place of healing.

Both novels foreground the mode of their narration. Tu's narrative is based on his diary, what he calls his "mixture of thoughts, ideas, observations and memories" (23). During the war he fills notebooks with jottings and after it is over he resolves to try to understand his experience through continuing to write about it. Writing becomes a therapeutic process for him; it will, he feels, enable him to establish the truth. It is thus what, on the last page of the novel, he resolves to do "from now on" (282). In *Three Day Road* Boyden uses traditional oral narrative to tell Aunt Niska's story and – as I have mentioned above – this process of storytelling becomes a healing process too. In interview Boyden has explained how he tried to get away from the strict chronology he had adopted in the first draft and which he came to feel was inappropriate to telling a native story in favour of a more circular mode of narration which he considered to be closer to the Cree manner of storytelling.

Both novelists portray protagonists who seem aware that participation in the war is unlikely to improve their positions in society when they finally return home – and here again one is reminded of *Indigènes*. This is particularly important in *Tu*, where Grace on the one

hand evokes the Maori hope for post-war racial equality (156) and on the other portrays characters like Pita who senses that even in a free world he would not be able to marry Jess (119).

Both authors address the moral and political conflicts inherent in indigenous participation in the wars they describe. Boyden stresses the moral conflict inherent in the Crees' activity as snipers; what Xavier describes as the realisation that "all men are really fighting on two fronts, the one facing the enemy and the one facing what we do to the enemy" (326). It is, however, Patricia Grace who in *Tu* more comprehensively addresses issues arising from Maori participation in European wars and provides a spectrum of opinion on such questions. She sketches the brothers' motivations in enlisting – Tu's desire for instance "to escape from boredom and boyhood", to see the world "outside the school gates, away from my family, from my mountain" (25), to embark on what he thinks will prove "the biggest adventure" (34) of his life. She shows how through most of the war he remains excited at being a member of the Maori Battalion and of being part of such events. Grace refers the reader to those dissenting voices, few in number, which had been heard when the Maori Battalion had first been formed. "It's not our war, some would say. We've already given men to one war on the other side of the world. That's enough." (89) Accordingly, she gives particular prominence to the well-known Maori activist Te Puea Herangi

who had stood firm in refusing to allow her people to go away to fight for God, King and Country. They had their own god, she said. They had their own king. They had their own country too, but much of their country had been stolen. Why should they want to fight for the people who had stolen their country? (142)

And towards the end of the novel, when Tu has been back in New Zealand for some years, she records his reflections on his own participation in the World War and his speculations on why others had enlisted. Although he is particularly proud of belonging to his battalion, which he comes to regard as his "home place", he is aware that the motivations of others were sometimes driven by issues like poverty: "They joined for a coat and a pair of boots, for food, army pay, and so as not be another mouth to feed at a time when there was no work, no money for them" (259). Having joined up as a young man with little understanding of the war, Tu devotes himself after the war to studying its causes and to communicating what he had learnt to the younger generation represented by Rimini and Benedict. He

dismisses such arguments as that the Maori would “be deemed equal” if they fought the “white man’s war” (278) or that war was part of the Maori inheritance (278). What he has come to believe is that: “It had nothing to do with god and King, and we were too far away for it to really be about our country” (278). What it did have to do with was the freedom and citizenship of the Maori people themselves. And if that was the case then the price had been too high, for as he concludes. “We took full part in a war but haven’t yet been able to take full part in peace” (279). And it is this thought that leads him – and indeed Patricia Grace herself – to a final plea to the younger generation, to which Boyden would surely also subscribe: “I ask you not to follow in our footsteps, your father’s and mine” (281).

NOTES

1. The phrase is taken from Patricia Grace’s *Tu*, where it is used to describe Tu’s feelings as he sets off to the war as a member of the Maori Battalion. See p.34.
2. The film won the award for best actor at the Cannes film festival in 2006 and was nominated for an Oscar in 2007.
3. As Alec Hargreaves points out in his article “*IndigÈnes: A Sign of the Times*,” the film may also be read with reference to the situation of North African immigrants in France today, a reading encouraged by the fact that – as was well known to French cinema audiences – the director and the actors involved in making the film are themselves North Africans living in France. See *Research in African Literatures* 38, 4 (Winter 2007): 204-216.
4. Hargreaves, “*IndigÈnes: A Sign of the Times*,” 204.
5. The case was decided in their favour.
6. Patricia Grace, *Tu* (Auckland: Penguin, 2004). References in the text are to this edition.
7. Joseph Boyden, *Three Day Road* (Toronto: Penguin, 2005). References in the text are to this edition.
8. Ellen Bielawski introducing Boyden’s Henry Kreisel Lecture (*A Mixed Blood Highway*, 3) and Donna Coates in her review for *Canadian Literature* (Vol. 195, 122), for example.
9. Quoted from Keith Jackson & Alan McRobie, *Historical Dictionary of New Zealand* (Auckland: Longman, 1996): 259.
10. Figures from Alison Parr, *Home. Civilian New Zealanders Remember the Second World War* ((North Shore, Auckland: Penguin, 2010): 17.
11. *A Fair Sort of Battering. New Zealanders Remember the Italian Campaign* edited by Megan Hutching (Auckland: HarperCollins in association with the Ministry for Culture and Heritage, 2004) provides absorbing and moving personal testimonies from thirteen New Zealanders, one of whom is Maori, who took part in the Italian campaign. The well illustrated volume is a fine example of the power of oral history.
12. Figures from Hutching, Megan (ed.). *A Fair Sort of Battering. New Zealanders Remember the Italian Campaign*, 43.
13. Figures from Jackson & McRobie, *Historical Dictionary of New Zealand*, 259.
14. Figures from Alison Parr, *Home. Civilian New Zealanders Remember the Second World War*, 15. See also pp. 263-264 on the Battalion’s return to New Zealand.
15. Patricia Grace, *Ned & Katina. A true love story* (North Shore, Auckland: Penguin, 2009): 42.
16. See Jackson & McRobie, *Historical Dictionary of New Zealand*, 260.
17. M.P.K. Sorrenson, “Modern M ori. The Young M ori Party to Mana Motuhake,” in Sinclair (ed.) *The Oxford Illustrated History of New Zealand*, 338.
18. See L. James Dempsey, *Warriors of the King. Prairie Indians in World War I* (Regina, Saskatchewan: Canadian Plains Research Center, University of Regina, 1999): 17 and Olive Patricia Dickason, *Canada’s First Nations. A History of Founding Peoples from Earliest Times*. Third Edition (Don Mills, Ontario: Oxford University Press, 2002): 307. Dempsey is himself a Blackfoot scholar.
19. One reason for this is that Inuit and MÈtis were not always counted.
20. Dempsey, *Warriors of the King*, 1-16, 46.
21. Dempsey, 22.
22. Dempsey, 22.
23. Dickason, *Canada’s First Nations*, 307; and see also Uwe Zagratzki, “Fighting on Three Fronts – First Nations Soldiers in the Canadian Expeditionary Force 1914-1918,” in *Krieg und Literatur/War and Literature* 9 (2003): 108.
24. “Pushing out the Poison: Joseph Boyden. Interview with Herb Wylie.” In: Herb Wylie, *Speaking in the Past Tense: Canadian Novelists on Writing Historical Fiction* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2007): 222.
25. Dempsey, 81.
26. The phrase “Left Papakura by train” is used as the title of the first part of the novel and in the first line of Tu’s diary (*Tu*, 15, 16).
27. Janet Wilson, “The Maori at war and strategic survival: *Tu* by Patricia Grace,” *Hecate* 34, 1 (2008): 73.
28. See too the interview Patricia Grace gave Ulla Ratheiser, which is included in the latter’s Innsbruck thesis *Agents of Change: Childhood and Child Characters in Patricia Grace’s Novels*. (unpubl. ms)
29. Those interested may be referred to the 2CD set *Ake, Ake, Kia Kaha E! Songs of the New Zealand 28 (M ori) Battalion* produced by the National Library of New Zealand (ACD 206), which contains original 1940-43 recordings made at Papakura Military Camp, NZ, at Maadi Camp, Egypt, in North Africa and at Taranto in Southern Italy.
30. Grace, *Ned & Katina*, 10, 11.
31. Boyden, *A Mixed Blood Highway*, 22-23.
32. Boyden, *A Mixed Blood Highway*, 17.
33. Janet Wilson, “The Maori at war and strategic survival,” 74.
34. See Jo-Ann Episkenew, “Contemporary Indigenous Literatures in Canada: Healing from Historical Trauma,” in Ganesh Devy, Geoffrey V. Davis & K.K. Chakravarty (ed.). *Indigeneity. Culture and Representation* (New Delhi: Orient BlackSwan, 2009): 75-86 and *Taking Back Our Spirits. Indigenous Literature, Public Policy, and Healing* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2009).
35. Donna Coates, “On the Warpath,” *Canadian Literature* 195 (Winter 2007): 122. See also Ellen Bielawski’s introduction to the Kreisel lecture “*A Mixed Blood Highway*” where she

describes Boyden as "the first to tell the whole Canadian story, the one that includes Aboriginal people," 3.

36. Gordon Bölling, "A Part of Our History that So Few Know About': Native Involvement in Canada's Great War – Joseph Boyden's *Three Day Road*," in *Inventing Canada – Inventer le Canada*, ed. Klaus-Dieter Ertler & Martin Lischnigg (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2008): 255.
37. This is not to imply that other native writers, Tomson Highway for instance, have not written of other aspects of First Nations history in fiction.
38. "A Mixed Blood Highway," 28.
39. See also Dickason, 307. There are two references to him in the text (24, 203).
40. Batarbee, 18.
41. "An Interview with Joseph Boyden," in *Penguin Reading Guides: Three Day Road*. http://us.penguin.com/static/rguides/us/three_day_road.html.
42. Keith Batarbee, "Imaginative outreach: two fictional representations of Native-White Contact: Armin Wiebe's *Tatsea* and Joseph Boyden's *Three Day Road*" in *At Home in the World. Essays and Poems in Honour of Britta Olinde*, ed. Chloë Avril and Ronald Paul. Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis/Gothenburg Studies in English 94 (Gothenburg: University of Gothenburg, 2008): 17.
43. "An Interview with Joseph Boyden," in *Penguin Reading Guides: Three Day Road*.
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