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Robertson, David. (2020). Black Water: Family, Legacy and Blood Memory. Toronto: HarperCollins Publishers Ltd.

Reviewed by: Kaitlyn Greenwood, MacEwan University

David Robertson's book, "Black Water: Family, Legacy and Blood Memory," is a powerful memoir recounting Robertson's experience as the son of a Cree father and non-Indigenous mother, who chose to raise Robertson and his brothers without acknowledging their Indigenous roots. Robertson shares his journey of reconnecting with his father and his Indigeneity through stories, teachings, and self-reflection as he travels with his father to visit Black Water (the trapline Robertson's father grew up on) a final time. Intricately interwoven within Robertson's memoir is the exploration of identity, its connection to Indigenous ways of knowing, and the intergenerational effects of colonization. Throughout the book, Robertson seamlessly transitions between memories from his childhood and personal life, his father's stories, and their journey to Black Water, which all collaborate to demonstrate the interconnectedness between identity, language, family, education, and blood memory.

According to Robertson, "Who you are, your identity, is informed by your experiences and the experiences of those who came before you were born. If you want to understand yourself, take the initiative to seek out what came before you" (p. 62). Growing up, Robertson's parents hid him from the Indigeneity that came before him, and as a result, he experienced low self-esteem from

an "incomplete sense of self" (p. 12). Robertson felt he was missing a piece of his identity because he did not know where he came from or understand his culture. Despite Robertson not understanding his history, he indicates a strong association with blood memory; "The first time I visited [Norway House], years earlier, it felt familiar to me, even though I'd never been there before. An Elder told me during the trip that the feeling of familiarity was called blood memory, and that Norway House, as well as the water and trees surrounding it, had always been apart of me." (p. 25). Robertson may not have known the specific details of his history but he had blood memories of his cultural land and practices. Blood memory, according to Robertson are "the memories and lives of our ancestors [that] are woven into the fabric of [our] DNA (p. 263). Robertson's "incomplete sense of self" came from not being able to identify his blood memories, not from a complete lack of connection to his culture (p. 12).

In addition to a lack of knowledge surrounding his Indigenous history, Robertson explains how not learning about the truthful and positive aspects of Indigeneity led him to accept and enforce Indigenous stereotypes. As a child, Robertson "was educated by ignorance, by the perpetuation of stereotypes through popular culture, [and] by the willful denial of colonial history in the classroom" (p. 13). These experiences and teachings shaped Robertson's view of Indigenous individuals and subsequently influenced his relationship to his identity. Robertson explains how "building self-image and confidence in young people [involves] presenting their culture in a positive way, not as something that [needs] to be eliminated or doesn't hold intrinsic value" (p. 161). Colonialism created stereotypes about Indigenous people, taught Indigenous individuals to

be ashamed of their culture, and utilized horrific practices in an attempt to "get rid of the Indian problem" (p. 100). Robertson acknowledges that discussions about Indigenous identity in Canada can not occur without considering the colonial practices used to wipe out Indigenous people; however, he also emphasizes the importance of sharing the beauty in Indigeneity.

Education was and is a powerful tool used to indoctrinate and enforce the belief that Indigenous children "could not have had their education, and kept their language at the same time." (p. 106). However, "The truth that *pēyak* plus *pēyak* equals *nīso* is just as valid as one plus one equals two." (p. 106). Throughout the book, Robertson emphasizes the importance of Indigenous education, learning from the land, and education in Indigenous languages in the understanding of one's identity. Robertson's father learned from the land and "everything [he] knew, [he] learned in Swampy Cree. And [he] learned a lot" (p. 103). Once Robertson's father began attending English federally run day schools, he "switched languages, and all those things [he] knew- all those things [he'd] learned - fell unceremoniously to the wayside" (p. 103). Robertson and his father both advocated for Indigenous language programs because they believed that "language = culture" and that teaching according to Indigenous ways of knowing creates an environment for children to thrive (p. 105). Additionally, Robertson knew firsthand the negative impact of never learning his language; his father says his greatest regret in parenting was that he did not teach his kids the language (p. 247).

Despite not learning Cree and being hidden from his cultural identity, Robertson talks about how he has always been Cree.

> I am Cree, I have always been Cree, and I will always be Cree. Being Cree meant something different when I was in junior high because I lacked the knowledge and had had only limited exposure to the Cree people, including Dad. I associated Cree with negativity. But I was still Cree. As I've grown older, my identity as a Cree man has grown with me, changed with me, evolved with me. Identity is fluid and personal (p. 172).

Robertson's identity has always included being Cree, even if he did not know. As Robertson progresses through the book, he demonstrates how his identity grew and changed as he understood his blood memories, learned about his family history, and what it meant to be Cree outside of stereotypes.

Filled with engaging stories, heart-wrenching realities, and hope for identity reclamation, Robertson's book encourages the pursuit of understanding one's identity, specifically for Indigenous individuals. Robertson emphasizes the importance and interconnectedness of language, education, and learning about family legacy while individuals embark on the journey of understanding their identity. Furthermore, Robertson's book provides education about colonialism in an easily accessible format while also providing hope for intergenerational healing. Understanding one's identity and healing intergeneration trauma requires "purposefully working towards healing through the connections we choose to foster [and] the things we seek to learn" (p. 248). In telling his story about reconnecting with his father and culture, Robertson is telling a story of hope and pushing against the negative stereotypes that shape many people's views of Indigenous communities and culture.

Robertson's intention in writing the book was to pass down stories and Indigenous ways of knowing through the written word. Robertson stated that "I want to document these things for

myself so that when I forget, when memories break down over time, I can come here and renew them. And I want them for my family. " (p. 242). Additionally, Robertson acknowledges that there is "value in our stories for others," and the way he structured and wrote the book has created a story that would be engaging and educational for all Canadians and people around the world. Robertson's book is a hopeful story for Indigenous readers who are reconnecting with their identity and family and an educational read for individuals interested in learning about Indigenous culture. Disciplines such as social work, sociology, psychology, and education are a few of the additional professions that could benefit from Robertsons vulnerable and authentic sharing of knowledge.

Throughout the book, Robertson is clear that the opinions and experiences within the book are personal to him and his family and that he can not and does not speak for all Indigenous people and populations. I identify this as a strength within Robertson's book because colonialism continues to put Indigenous identity and culture in a tiny box even though there are hundreds of different Indigenous cultures within Canada. Furthermore, Robertson demands an even bigger box as he chooses to not only depict his Indigenous history for the pain and loss that occurred but also recounts Indigenous stories of strength and love, demanding a perception of Indigenous people that is more than their pain. I found "Black Water: Family, Legacy and Blood Memory" to be an engaging read that provided powerful insight into the multifaceted concepts of Indigeneity, family and identity. I recommend it to anyone wanting to learn more about the reconnection and reclamation of Indigenous identity in Canada and those who still hold firmly to colonial stereotypes.