

## FROM THE INSTRUCTOR

Romil's essay was written in the middle of the semester in WR 112 for the comparative analysis paper. This assignment is typically challenging for students to write, and many struggle as they try to move beyond superficial comparison ("X is similar to Y in the following ways... but also different from Y in the following ways...") to instead bring two seemingly unconnected texts together in complex and original ways. Romil accomplishes this task expertly, using one source—Pico Iyer's "Lonely Places"—more as a theory source (instructors might preview just the exhibit and theory parts of BEAM/BEAT for this assignment) to analyze another—Justin Nobel's "The Last Inuit of Quebec". Instructors could ask students to brainstorm possible connections among these two texts prior to reading Romil's paper, perhaps grouping them into "similarity" claims, "difference" claims, "similarity-yet-also-difference" claims, and "other relationship" claims, then discussing their relative strengths and the kinds of arguments that could be made in support of each claim. I typically elicit examples of "other relationship" claims that are synthesis claims ("Together Texts X + Y show us something new and interesting about the world") and also ones that are "lens" claims ("Text X shows us something new about Text Y"), to scaffold students' constructions of both kinds of claims; students could look closely at the signaling language in Romil's argument that helps anchor her essay firmly in "lens" essay territory.

Christina Michaud

WR 112: Academic Writing for ESL Students 2

## FROM THE WRITER

Being an economics student, I am an avid defender of the globalising world and its material benefits. But I am also a traveller, always venturing out to find stories from cultures around the world. It was upon reading Justin Nobel's article "The Last Inuit of Quebec" that I found the economist and the traveller within me at odds. My essay embodies this very debate, posing difficult questions to the liberals of our world. It uses a rather abstract concept of loneliness to highlight loss of minority culture as the cost of growing liberalism.

**ROMIL PANDEY** is a rising sophomore in the College of Arts and Sciences in pursuit of a major in economics and mathematics, and hopefully a minor in international relations. Though she mainly describes herself as a movie geek, her other enthusiastic passions include dancing and travelling. She prides herself on hailing from the city of Kanpur, India, and also her unapologetic brownness. She would like to thank Professor Christina Michaud for tolerating her typos and for guiding her thoughts in her writing class.

**ROMIL PANDEY**

## **IS THE INUIT TERRITORY A “BLACK EYE”? : THE LONELINESS OF JUSTIN NOBEL’S “MAGICAL” PLACE**

In his article “The Last Inuit of Quebec,” Justin Nobel gives an account of his experience with the Inuit community in northern Quebec, where he discovers manifestations of a fading culture instead of finding his “magical” place. Nobel’s fantasies of such a place are reflective of Pico Iyer’s “Lonely Places,” an essay which explores the nature of the world’s “misfit” places that are self-sufficient in their loneliness. Did Nobel actually find such eccentricity in the arctic region of Ivujuvik? Or did he witness globalization leading to a loss of minority culture? Through Iyer’s concept of “Lonely Places,” the Inuit community in Ivujuvik can be viewed as a Lonely Place whose loneliness and cultural resilience are interdependent in the globalizing world.

Iyer defines Lonely Places as “the places that don’t fit in; the places that have no seat at our international dinner tables” (Iyer, p. 32). They are excluded from matters of global participation and intercommunity communication. The historical, cultural or geographical factors differentiate these places from the common world. Iyer elaborates on the emergence of Lonely Places: “Some are born to isolation, some have isolation thrust upon them” (Iyer, p. 33). Applying this to Nobel’s article, Ivujuvik can be classified in the first category as its geographical isolation has influenced the very foundation of the Inuit culture, the survivalist lifestyle, and hence the nature of its loneliness.

The cultural difference between the minority Inuit community and Nobel demonstrates how Lonely Places are perceived to be strange. In his yearning to find a “land where people still lived in skins, gathered around fire, and believed in magic” (Nobel, p. 38), Nobel was actually in search of a Lonely Place whose traditions were still intact in our globally interconnected community. It almost seems like the humanity in this Lonely Place is unaware of its own peculiarity. Nobel illustrates the strangeness of this place through the characterization of its people; he describes his encounter with the absurd “drunk woman named Saira” and the children who “pummeled a man with a hockey and golf clubs” (Nobel, p. 39). From angsty teenagers who vandalize and maul for leisure and those who are monotonized by technology to bizarre adults, the Inuit village is inhabited by strangely contrasting behaviors. Iyer writes that “Loneliness makes them stranger and their strangeness makes them lonelier” (Iyer, p. 33). The seclusion of the Inuits have made them evolve differently as a community. Nobel’s description of the people makes readers see such strange behavior as part of the Inuit culture, which it is not. Outsiders like Nobel misinterpret the dysfunction of the lonely Inuit community in response to the modernizing world as the strangeness of their culture. This shows how the Inuits are getting alienated from their own traditions over time. The cultural resilience of Ivujuvik is threatened as the cultural difference is considered strange, and therefore “a black eye” (Nobel, p. 42) by the modern world.

Despite its loneliness, the Inuit community has not been left unaffected by globalization. Nobel’s attempt to find a magical place in Ivujuvik was not quite successful; what he found instead was the “annihilation of their culture” (Nobel, p. 42). Not only did the locals not remember how to steer a kayak, they “had to order kayaks from southern Quebec and hire an outside guide to train

locals” (Nobel, p. 43). Nobel did not find adventure where one would expect to. Globalization has increased the dependency of Lonely Places, destroying their self-sufficiency, harming their ability to continue on their own. Reliance on external factors harms them both economically and culturally. Nobel presents tourism as a possible solution to this: “rather than destroying tradition, it could bring it back” (Nobel, p. 43). Nobel hints at an idea to counter the vulnerability of Lonely Places: promoting traditional practices through tourism with specific needs of each Lonely Place instead of a laissez-faire globalization that threatens cultural resilience.

Nobel’s recount shows that since Lonely Places are unfamiliar with external communication, they are unaware of their own susceptibility to foreign intervention. Iyer encompasses this by stating that “Lonely places are so far from the music of the world that they do not realize how distant they are” (Iyer, p. 33). Therefore, there are ramifications to the inability of Lonely Places to comprehend their own loneliness. It makes them vulnerable to intervention by the majority:

Some Inuit youth were shipped to southern schools against their will. The government’s aim was to quell poverty and spur development, which to them meant providing Inuit with Western educations and eliminating sick dogs. But to many Inuit, these actions appeared to be part of a much sinister agenda. (Nobel, p. 42)

Nobel’s desire to discover something original in the Inuit territory is unfortunately met by the realization of cultural homogenization. He describes the intervention as “sinister” which reflects the resistance of the locals who don’t welcome external parties. Nobel mentions how tourism money is invested in “construction, shipping, tanning, air travel” and “Inuit-run businesses” (Nobel, p. 42). Tourism facilitates growth in a way that strengthens cultural resilience. The vulnerability of a Lonely Place will decrease if its inhabitants are consciously involved and considered in any change by foreign intervention.

The impact of multiculturalism on cultural resilience is indefinite. It may or may not promote preservation of minority cultures depending on how it settles in with the Lonely Place. Iyer claims that the “feverish cross-communication that is turning the world into a single polyglot multiculturalism is producing new kinds of Lonely Places as fast as it eliminates the old” (Iyer, p. 36). This brings up the question of whether the loneliness of the Inuit community will decrease with the homogenization of its culture or increase with the external disruption of its traditions. Is destroying minority cultures and traditions the only way to eliminate their loneliness? If so, would a Lonely Place rather be lonely than experience the death of its own culture? Iyer suggests that loneliness may become extinct as the world condenses into a single culture. Even if multiculturalism is successful in doing so by extensive intercommunication and inclusion in global affairs, it will only end physical isolation. Loneliness as “a state of mind” can never be eradicated since “Everyone at times, is a continent of one” (Iyer 34, 35). For instance, Nobel himself exhibits this trait: he starts living in a tent in the backyard after moving in with his parents as he feels uncomfortable sleeping in his room even though he had the comfort of family. Nobel prefers to be lonely despite of having company. Nobel’s loneliness shows its inevitability in fundamental human nature.

Nobel confesses that he still imagines his magical place and that he is unsure “how long that place will last or even if it deserves to, but surely it will soon enough be gone” (Nobel, p. 47). His pessimism shows his personal take on cultural resilience of Lonely Places. He doesn’t believe the “magic” of these places can be preserved. His opinion is contrasted against the facts he only briefly mentions and the misconceptions that Canadian intervention had only had negative outcomes: “The schooling the government imposed on the Inuit helped create a generation of bright leaders” (Nobel, p. 46). This shows that though outsiders interfered with their culture, it was to the ultimate

benefit of the Inuits. So maybe there is a way to eliminate loneliness through globalization that does not yet lead to cultural destruction. The effects of globalization on Lonely Places must be regulated in a way that offers their perks while developing cultural resilience. This way the attempts to eliminate their loneliness won't result in the loss of their uniqueness. In order to do this, our perception towards Lonely Places must change. Instead of viewing them as "black eyes" of the world that need fixing, they must be seen as valuable entities that need to be preserved and nurtured.

### **WORKS CITED**

Iyer, Pico. "Lonely Places." *Globalization: A Reader for Writers*. Ed. Maria Jerskey. New York, Oxford University Press, 2014. 31–36.

Nobel, Justin. "The Last Inuit of Quebec." *Globalization: A Reader for Writers*. Ed. Maria Jerskey. New York, Oxford University Press, 2014. 38–47.