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Alienation Survivors in Sherman Alexie's Prose and Poetry

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Alienation Survivors in Sherman Alexie's Prose and Poetry

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Abstract

The dissertation states that alienation is the central theme of Sherman Alexie's prose and poetry, which express identity questions in the historical and cultural contexts of American Indian struggles with marginalization and the image of "Indians." Alienation, a feeling experienced when having deficient relationships, explains the author's overwhelming portrayal of unhappy characters or emotionally troubled speakers. Because Alexie's works are built on notions that critique the power of colonial ideologies in the lives of American Indians, looking into alienation via a post-colonial lens of literary criticism helps to analyze the challenges his characters/speakers experience when establishing and maintaining relationships. In the close reading of some selected works, it is hypothesized that creating alienated characters is the author's approach to crafting American Indian literature which escalates to the climactic point of survival.

The analyses of the selected works aim to address three basic notions. First, Alexie's plots and verses depict alienation as a phenomenon that negatively impacts the characters' engagements in the modern multicultural world of the United States. Second, the alienated characters who utilize the powers of anger and imagination to survive by certain modes, assert that mimicry is an advantageous strategy that can give them agency to subvert and challenge the colonial discourse of hegemony and domination. Therefore, each mode of survival, such as singing the blues, drawing cartoons, time-traveling, and writing poetry, is a third space where the marginalized can negotiate their culture and come to better terms to define their identity. Third, Alexie's characters become cultural translators with an agency to indigenize the mimicked artistic styles by enforcing their perspectives on their creations. Those same characters develop a post-reservation mindset and make unexpected decisions leading them to survival. Eventually, Alexie's alienation survivors are characters on a continuous quest for self-theories of identity definition that prepares them for potential future accomplishments as American Indians.

Introduction

Growing up on the Spokane reservation, Alexie has had firsthand experiences with the sense of being alienated, which disrupts his relationships with others. This is because, after contact with Anglo-American and the long history of settler colonialism, the colonial discourse of hegemony and the cutout simulations of "Indians" have dominated mainstream narratives, leaving American Indians ambivalent about their identity definition.[1] The image of "Indians," as perpetuated by "colonial non-sense," is a dehumanizing replication and constriction of the reality that American Indians encompass diverse cultural and individual characteristics influenced by modernity and industrial capitalism when seeking survival.[2] "Indians," in any colonial discourse, are a homogenous group of distinct people. By this denial of survival and the domination of settler Americans, American Indians become marginalized and subjected to racial inequalities. Furthermore, images of "Indians" develop to be part of American Indians' sense of self, impeding their resistance and deluding their prospects of identity in being a definition of who they are and how they want to be in the future. In light of this alienation phenomenon, Alexie—a realist and a postmodernist writer—creates stories and poems, where his characters/speakers face identity hardships but find a new path toward survival.

In their various representations, Alexie's works are "experimental," as James J. Donahue argues of American Indians whose works are a "set of genre-based and/or genre-breaking devices" (16). Those works of art have a "cultural value" that serves as "a political statement" rather than "an aesthetic one" (James J. Donahue 15). Accordingly, and in his special use of literary genres, Alexie's characters are representations of contemporary American Indians who, compared to old times, have undergone significant transformations due to various factors, including environmental, social, and colonial influences. They have become hybridized. Homi K. Bhabha, whose idea of cultural interactions is examined in the interpretations of Alexie's works, defines hybridity as a condition that "arises during periods of historical change" (*The Location of Culture* 2); it is a state of cultural mixedness which is highly applicable to Alexie's characters.[3] No culture is static or predetermined; cultures, after colonization, do not survive independently from outside influences.

[1] More details about the meanings and effects of simulations are discussed in section 1.1.2.
[2] Inspired by Freud's non-sense, Homi Bhabha uses the phrase "colonial non-sense" to refer to colonial narratives that create cultural meanings for the colonized (*The Location of Culture* 123).
[3] In the following, *The Location of Culture* will be abbreviated as *LC*.

Instead, human actions, behaviors, and interactions actively create, express, and shape it. However, coloniality, as a set of attitudes creating power structures like marginality or hegemony, hinders the characters' understanding of culture and identity while enforcing their status as marginalized.

Colonial discourses of the dominant exploits American Indians' definition of identity and tribal affiliations by integrating it with imagery of the vanished "Indian," or the white man's "Indian." [4] It is because "the vanishing Indian stereotype and narrative function as the rationale to cover up the reality not only of ongoing Native nations but equally of stolen land as the foundation of America; thus the fact that Indians never vanished means that America is and was always already a failure in its own values of freedom and justice for all" (Moore, *The Dream* 301). Therefore, in its racial narratives, colonial discourses display American Indians as "others" who are inferior to the superior's "self." It is through the images of "Indians," as Maureen Schwarz argues "Native Americans have traditionally stood as signs or fetishes for such contradictory concepts as primitiveness, nature, spirituality, unbridled sexuality, violence, nobility, or helplessness, depending on particular time and agenda of the presenters and the code or codes understood by various audience members" (1). Those distinctions become the mainstream norms and impose a hegemonic recognition of races and cultures which negatively impact the marginalized and leave them unhappy. Hegemonic narratives undermine marginalized people's perception of change and evolution, as well as their motivation to take action for a better future. As Alexie depicts, even though hegemony causes discrimination and cultural demoralization, some characters prefer to live in the shadow of their "Indian" stereotypes when they choose to avoid confronting them. This hesitation occurs for a variety of reasons and situations. It is what the author refers to as taking advantage of it. "If white folks assumed she was serene and spiritual and wise simply because she was an Indian, and thought she was special based on those mistaken assumptions, then Corliss saw no reason to contradict them. The world is a competitive place, and a poor Indian girl needs all the advantages she can get" (Alexie, *Blasphemy* 272-273).

Hegemonic narratives have been incorporated into the discussion of American Indian identity and culture as they gain popularity and become more widespread in mainstream narratives. Additionally, they have been utilized as the foundational elements in simulations, so eliciting a

[4] It is generally argued that the "Indian" identity has been shaped by a mix of colonial myths and historical stories, as well as political and federal choices. This concept has served as the central theme in numerous studies, such as Robert F. Berkhofer's *The White Man's Indian* (1979), Fergus M. Bordewich's *Killing the White Man's Indian* (1996), and Angela Aleiss's *Making the White Man's Indian* (2005).

sense of legitimacy even among American Indians. Furthermore, colonial discourses based on anthropological and political observation of the dominant forces in the past have created a hierarchical structure of past and present American Indians.[5] The existence of these obstacles, as Alexie usually stresses in the dialogues among characters discussing their modern versus traditional cultural identity, causes ambivalence and therefore alienation. All three reflections of the influences of colonial hegemonic narratives distort American Indians' perceptions of their own identity. They thus become essential factors in the characters' self-identification and/or how others define them. The point I demand to emphasize here is that in the narration of the alienated self-identification, it is evident that Alexie's characterization of American Indians is influenced by "Indian" images perpetuated by settler-Americans. Ambivalence over the definition of who American Indians are limits the characters' ability to argue their modernity, hybridity, interests, or history, and leaves them unrecognized within the intercultural society of the United States where they have social, political, or educational connections. Colonial narratives like those represented in American colonial literature, history, or media revolve around relations of power and observations that serve the interests of settlers. Accounts of exploitation in those texts or visuals tend to diminish the cultural heritage of the colonized population. The colonized, then, experience deprivation of agency in terms of uttering counternarratives that recognize their identities outside the limitations imposed upon them. Precisely, colonial narratives overlook the emergence of hybridity and personal interests brought about by modernity. As Arnold Krupat argues of modern American Indian literature; "there is not yet a 'post' to the colonial status of the Native Americans" (30). This fact offers the chance to read Alexie's works from their post-colonial perspectives.

In his assertion about the positive impact of his works on readers, Alexie emphasizes his significant contributions to American Indian literature: "My career has totally altered many people's ideas of what an Indian can do and can be. Especially other Indians" (qtd. in Dellinger 127). Hereafter, the question of "Indianness" is the primary notion to be argued. "The word Indian comes from a mistake," whether it was "Columbus's confusion about where he was" (Anton Treuer 7), or the other acclaim of his mispronunciation of the words "in Dios" (Alfred xxvi). [6] The

[5] The hierarchal cultural gap alienates many characters, like Thomas Builds-the-Fire and Zits. Chapters 2 and 4 will elaborate on their cases.

[6] "The area now known as 'India' was still called 'Hindustan' in the fifteenth century; the term 'Indian' as applied to Indigenous Americans is derived from Columbus's original name for the Taino people he first encountered, 'una gente in Dios', or 'Indios', meaning 'a people in God'; 'Indian' is also a legal term, and in common use among indigenous people in North America" (Alfred xxvi).

"Indian" is an image of inferiority that is found by colonial powers to prove their superiority. It is a perpetuated misrepresentation of Indigenous tribes and their existence in the New World before Colombus which continues to be a component in their identity struggles. As Donal L. Fixico clarifies:

> Being Indian in modern America is a personal experience often involving internal and external pressures. Since the late nineteenth century, outside pressures on Indians to assimilate into the American mainstream have played an important role in altering the identity of Native people from tribalness to a generic Indianness. Bureaucrats designed federal policies to colonize Native people, thereby undermining their identity. ("From Tribal to Indian" 473)

Muddled with conflicting emotions, Alexie's American Indian characters feel alienated and unhappy in their lives. By bringing these struggles to light, the author shows his ability to generate attention to identity problems by the use of several literary genres. To make his works compelling, Alexie creates resolutions that might be counted as challenging in comparison to earlier works by American Indian authors. The term "alienation survivors" is utilized to denote the conclusions of the author's portrayal of the pursuit of survival.

The experience of alienation in relationships that I discuss stems from personal interactions, so finding ways to cope with it is an individual endeavor. As a consequence, the modes of survival differ depending on the numerous locations where the character's imagination and rage cross paths. The musical mode is viewed as a linguistic vocal space in which Thomas Builds-the-Fire, in *Reservation Blues*, uses his storytelling talent to compose lyrics and perform blues on stage for an audience of Whites, New-agers, and American Indians. Thomas skillfully weaves together words, vocals, and breath control to bring stirring stories to life through his dynamic performances. The artistic mode is a visual space where the art of cartooning is used to represent linguistic and paralinguistic reflections of meanings by Arnold in *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*. Arnold's comics have annotations, captions, labels, or inscriptions that inspire emotional narratives. As well, he reflects his sense of humor within those drawings, which makes his arguments very ironic. Every aspect of the cartoons' signifiers serves as a language that complements and enhances communication, enabling Arnold to provide additional meanings, explanations, or ideas that contribute to the overall understanding, validation, and appreciation of his cartoons and, therefore, his journey toward being a survivor. The cognitive mode of time

traveling offers a linguistic virtual space of cultural negotiation, which is significant in the case of Zits in *Flight*. Due to the constraints of his living environment, Zits finds it difficult to engage with others. Accessibility limitations prevent the isolated teenager from reaching various places, participating in events, and taking part in activities that would otherwise be out of reach due to physical or geographical barriers. By traveling through time, Zits gains the ability to consider the various perspectives of American Indians across different periods of history. One aspect worth noting is the ease of learning and demonstration, as Zits, the transformed character in this scenario, interacts with narratives in a more immersive and participatory manner. The final mode is the author's use of poetic techniques reflecting his cultural perspectives and poetics in the process of writing poems. And, since the author has a lot of topics that reflect his poems' expressions of feelings, the retelling of history will be focused on within the analysis. Alexie's poetry is a free space of imagination. Thus, his poems display an extensive negotiation space involving musical, visual, cognitive, and literary poetics.[7] By employing specific poetics, the poet adds depth, emotional resonance, and argumentative appeal to the historical narrative of coloniality, creating a unique and engaging poetic interpretation of the present.

Alexie's literary works encompass many modes of survival that, albeit not aligning with the four classifications outlined in the dissertation, serve to define the American Indian character. These modes necessitate the characters' adherence to their current state of existence and consideration of all accessible circumstances that contribute to their survival process. Each mode is a space of communication where colonial narratives and counternarratives of the "Indian" culture are displayed from an American Indian perspective. The intense reflections that Alexie's plots make on the two narratives are important because comparably they show how much of that colonial narrative is capitalized to oppress the contemporary lives of American Indians offering relief and a journey to explore values, beliefs, and self-interests. A survival mission is accomplished in each mode, which represents an independent space. The modes contain a wide spectrum of resistant emotions as Alexie tries for "restorative justice" (Archuleta 60). According to Elizabeth Archuleta, the American political system has many unfair practices and it can hardly

[7] "The musicality of poetry is based upon an elementary sonority underlying the voice of the poet, a sonority sent on to the listener and always inevitably outside of the ordinary: the poet wants to transport us by means of a mode of hearing that goes beyond the habitual contexts of our language. To do so he or she uses a verse that is rhythmic" (Antomarini 355).

give American Indians a fair trial (60). However, in my opinion, another type of accomplishment is realized when an American Indian can transcend feelings of alienation..

As it is clear, in each work Alexie uses mimicking contexts of narration and representation to be his way of creating modes of survival. Each of them engages in rigorous cultural and identity negotiations untouched by colonial ideals. As a result, in every mode, Alexie establishes a third space of cultural negotiations. And, because third spaces are intended to be post-colonial narratives of liberation, the modes in Alexie's works provide tones of ideas that enable the reader to engage with the characters'/speakers' alienation, representations of culture from the marginalized perspective, and issues about settler colonialism.

To summarize the concepts for the following literature review in chapter one, it has to be noted that alienation has always been a prevalent theme in American Indian literature. "Many protagonists are mired in alienation from the modern world, from community, and from self. Identity is fragmented and the only path to balance, harmony, and identity is a return to the reservation and to connect with ritual and tradition" (Ruppert 187). To survive in a state of detachment, Alexie's characters express their sentiments of pain and try to make it comprehensive. Hereafter, instead of ignoring their desire to thrive in the modern world of the settlers because it is not related to their perceptions of self, the alienated indigenize their interests. "'Indigenizing' bent to claim as 'Indian' what appeal to his own cultural and political tastes and to deploy those appropriated elements in assertions of native cultural pride" (Herman 91). In doing so, the characters "bespeak a willingness to think, feel, affiliate, and identify beyond the nation" (Herman 91). Taking responsibility for indigenizing the world promotes Indigenous perspectives and ideas. The indigenizing process acknowledges the role of hybridity in resisting colonial hegemonic narratives while dismissing its promise to assimilate American Indians. Another point to consider is that indigenization is a decolonialized attitude toward oneself.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that terminology relating to American Indians is a sensitive subject, and the following discussions adhere to specific choices. The use of "Indian" with quotation marks throughout the dissertation indicates the inadequate monolithic colonial representation of Indigenous nations. However, it is necessary to clarify that Alexie himself refers to his characters as Indians to specifically allude to the overall acts of genocide and victimization that have been practiced against the Indigenous nations. It is his dimension of identity politics (Krupat and Elliott 167). Alexie remarks, "The white man tried to take our land, our sovereignty,

and our languages. And he gave us the word 'Indian.' Now he wants to take the word 'Indian' away from us too. Well, he can't have it" (qtd. in Anton Treuer 18). Nevertheless, the analysis uses "American Indian" to refer to the characters who are in a struggle with their "Indian" image preserved in the public narrative. "Indigenous" or "Indigenous nations" are used in a broader sense when referring to more collective reflections for the marginalized or when the argument is a discussion of early interactions between Indigenous nations and Anglo-Americans.

Chapter One

Questions of Culture and Identity in Alexie's Works

Alexie, a Spokane/Coeur d'Alene, positions himself as a skilled writer addressing the American Indian marginalization in the context of post-colonial literature by employing distinctive plot narratives that challenge coloniality and save the oppressed.[8] The author's characters find their modes of survival using the powers of their anger and imagination. Each mode produces a cultural space in which ideas of marginality and Indigeneity are central but not inextricably linked to "Otherness," evoking Bhabha's concept of a third space for negotiating and redefining cultural and identity meanings. The depictions of American Indian characters suffering misrepresentation, oppression, and racism are some of Alexie's post-colonial contexts utilizing cultural and identity negotiations.

In a study examining the values of American Indian literature, "writing," to Eric Gary Anderson, is considered, "first and foremost a way of giving back to a particular Native community and to larger, cross-tribal communities; writing helps keep the stories, the people, the communities together and going" (42). After a long time of being mainly represented as images by American authors, as an example, James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), American Indian literature situates a whole change. "An outpouring of superb new Indian writing attracted readers from coast to coast. More than a rediscovered sentiment or point of view, . . . [it] renewed a long literary tradition. It returned America's attention to primary questions, to beginnings, to first Americans," says Willis G. Regier (vii). Indicating its rise and thematic representations, which have become part of the American Indian survival tale, American Indian literature has been categorized into several segments, each addressing scholarly pursuits of literary analyses. After 1492, the era of the Anglo-American invasion of the New World, American Indian literature is considered to be the first wave, as Erika Wurth outlines (406). Literature of the first wave includes a wealth of issues affecting the life of American Indians that persist in subsequent periods.[9] However, the primary readers of the first wave were Indigenous because those works were published mostly in American Indian journals, and the authors were "under no pressure to write

[8] Alexie, as Grassian describes, "is more of an autobiographical writer than Faulkner is, for unlike the invented Yoknapatawpha County, Alexie's Spokane reservation is an actual place where he finds a virtually inexhaustible literary wellspring for his writing" (*Understanding Sherman Alexie* 6).

[9] "Identity, nature versus modernity, authenticity, reservation versus nonreservation culture, sovereignty/land issues, racism/internalized racism, cultural/tradition recovery, history, and language" are some examples listed by Wurth (406).

for a Non-Native American audience" (406). Furthermore, in terms of forms and genres, many works of the first wave were either affected by European literature or translated by Euro-Americans, both resulting in restrictions and a widespread misreading of Indigenous symbols (Wurth 406).[10] Writers in the second wave are the Native American Renaissance (Wurth 407).

Kenneth Lincoln, the first to come up with the renaissance classification for American Indian literature, uses his metaphoric phrase of "sending a voice" to describe the thematic motivation of the writers to depict untold stories of American Indians (*Native American Renaissance* 1). The primary literary work that exemplifies the renaissance or the second wave is N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn*, winner of the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1969. As the novel's plot shows, the transformation of American Indian renaissance literature is clear in its representation of "pan-Indian" issues (Wurth 407), instead of being exclusively tribal. Moreover, in a collection of essays entitled *The Native American Renaissance*, several contributions are made to expand on Lincoln's renaissance perspective by referencing different cultural, economic, and literary advancements in "Indian Country," a reference to literature that has themes and settings related to American Indian life and culture as colonized and therefore marginalized. Jace Weaver, for example, argues that when American Indians assume the responsibility of writing and developing critical ideas for reading their literature, Euro-American scholars of literary criticism become inadequate. Weaver aptly names his essay "Turning West" as an allusion to the prevailing belief among "non-Natives to continue facing East for their critical models and apparatuses" (18). The term that Weaver uses to define this movement is "American Indian literary Nationalism" (22).

By devoting his works to representing American Indian questions of culture and identity, Alan R. Velie and A. Robert Lee argue that Alexie came up with characters who are different from those of renaissance writers. The author shows passion in presenting rather than representing contemporary perspectives of American Indians. This talent is characterized as elusive among other earlier renaissance writers ("Introduction" 6). Accordingly, Alexie and other contemporary authors of the late generation of the renaissance, like Tiffany Midge, and Eric Gansworth, are identified as the third wave with their works being "detailed realism" and "an almost

[10] Unlike Wurth who focuses on American Indian literature of prolific authors, other scholars and critics see that early literature is "the result of non-native academic gathering and publishing tribal stories told to them by native 'informats'" (Cook-Lynn 35).

postmodern/self-aware" way of representation (Wurth 407). Literature of realism is "something at once familiar and unpredictable, both the thing it was once known to be yet also something unforeseen . . . realism has been a way of thinking about what is suppressed, denied, and obscured in contemporary society" (Robinette 2). While realistic, Alexie's works do not correspond to a genuine reality, but rather to perceptions that arise from the intricacy of reality. He does not offer surprise happy endings, nor does he make it effortless for his American Indian characters to resist and survive. He does not make it impossible, either. Literature of realism is valuable because it is more engaging and forceful when authors are dedicated to creating post-colonial representations of culture and identity. A post-colonial literature is that of "emancipation, critique, and transformation" (Nayar xiii), all are variables essential for cultural negotiations aiming to subvert the colonial narrative.

Given the similarities between well-known stories created by famous authors like Shakespeare and the tragic life of American Indians, Alexie prioritizes emotionally intense and captivating stories for the audience. "Every theme, every story, every tragedy that exists in literature takes place in my little community. Hamlet takes place on my reservation daily. King Lear takes place on my reservation daily. It's a powerful place. I'm never going to run out of stories" (Alexie qtd. in Grassian 6). Precisely, Alexie's works examine various aspects of the contemporary conflicts and interactions between American Indians and settler-Americans, both on and off the reservation, from individual perspectives. Because of his interest "to participate in a postracial ideology" (Gamber, "We Have Been Stuck" 199), Alexie stands apart from other early renaissance writers. The latter are those who prioritize the "resurgence of Native [cultural] pride" (Velie and Lee 3).

As Philip Heldrich notes, Alexie's focus "is not on tribal tradition or the way tribal ritual can structure daily life. For his characters, such traditions and rituals seem largely inaccessible or irrelevant, eroded by the absurdity of contemporary reservation [or urban] life" (28). Being traditional, which in a sense means being committed to centuries-old traditional principles of religion, virtues, rights, gender relations, diplomacy, identity, or others, oriented by the elders, is a notion that reflects being "homogenous" and, therefore, non-hybrid (Horn 32). Even if it appears that being traditional is hard to achieve, for some characters, identifying as traditional implies survival because it masks anxieties of invisibility in a greater heterogeneous society. The struggle between adhering to traditional beliefs and embracing modernity, "characterized by a profound

recognition of time and space" (Porter, "Progressivism" 277), results in disconnections, trust issues, confusion due to misinterpretation, and existential dilemmas, as perceived in Alexie's narratives over being traditional. To survive, American Indians are "forced to rapidly reconcile life in a posttraditional world" (Porter, "Progressivism" 277), even if it gives them the sense of being absurd.

Alexie explores the absurdity of a marginalized life through his characters' dialogues of identity from a traditional perspective. Being an American Indian is an inescapable fact, and the discussion on any tradition or the desire to be traditional invites the readers to reconsider the definition of a traditional American Indian, thereby rethinking the complex cultural dynamics at play. Because of his disinterest in the idea of being traditional, Alexie frequently downplays his fascination with the early portrayals of American Indian characters, such as Momaday's *House Made of Dawn*. For him, Momaday's novel is a work in which the main character, Abel, is pressured to be traditional by an author who has not been traditional, in the sense of rarely settling on the reservation (Purdy and Alexie 9), which means he is ignorant of the problems of such attempts. Consequently, following the Abel archetype will make American Indian literature "stuck in place" (Purdy and Alexie 9). Not every American Indian is Abel, and not all reservations and traditions can help resolve modern struggles of identity definition.

In his introduction to *Native American literature*, Sean Teuton argues, "for Native writers the impossible literary challenge lies in having to write for two often competing audience, one wishing to understand and heal an often troubled social world, another often desiring to consume negative stereotypes to satisfy the colonial narrative of providential indigenous demise" (81). In contrast, Alexie embarks on a new route with characters who keep his stories from being "wish fulfillment books, they're writing books about reality" (Purdy and Alexie 8-9). To that purpose, he delves into what I take to be the underlying tension in the construction of his characters' identities, specifically when their search for personal interests and desires extends beyond the confines of colonized minds and idealized reservations and becomes a part of their understanding of identity. literature depicting American Indians has long been hesitant to openly admit the significant cultural loss due to the extensive history of colonialism or proudly identify the various modern strategies employed by American Indians for survival.

In broad terms, Alexie's portrayal of alienated characters can be divided into two categories: those who cannot conquer their alienation, and others who are unable to do so through

the power of their imagination. The failure of the first group is attributed to their incapacity to navigate their way into modernity, leading to their refusal to acknowledge the sustainability of cultural contacts and the comprehensibility of hybridization. They have excessively colonized minds and imaginations rather than being realistic in negotiating their difficulties and wishes of getting the benefits of the modern multicultural world. In his short story "War Dances," Alexie writes: "an elderly Indian woman, a Sioux writer and scholar and charlatan, had come to orate on Indian sovereignty and literature. She kept arguing for some kind of separate indigenous literary identity, which was ironic considering that she was speaking English to a room full of white professors" (*War Dances* 33). Through the representation of the professor, Alexie's objective seems not so much to critique the use of the English language, but rather to challenge the notion that American Indians are still playing the role that has been imagined about them.[11] They are still the "Indians" who seek a separate identity; meanwhile, their English language proves their hybridity. As Alexie comments, the professor, "was dying for nostalgia" (*War Dances* 33) and, therefore, she is one of those who cannot survive alienation. Requesting separation that the professor suggests, as Alexie depicts, assures the absence of imagination as far as every American Indian has become part of an intercultural diversity of the American nation-state. In contrast to the nostalgic professor's perspective advocating for separation, Alexie's characters within the second group exhibit a propensity for navigating their interests and constructing distinct identities based on a contemporary feeling of affiliation with the United States of America.[12] The survival of those characters is pursued through a distinctive combination of anger and imagination. Each effort is situated within the narrative framework of survival stories, as elaborated upon in the analytical chapters 2, 3, 4, and 5.

In the previous introductory paragraphs, basic notions regarding Alexie's representations of unhappy American Indians and his interest in representing survival stories are pointed out. The rest of the present chapter is structured into two distinct sections along with some subsections. The

[11] English "has been the linear tongue of the colonial discoveries, racial cruelties, invented names, the simulation of tribal cultures, manifest manners, and the unheard literature of dominance in tribal communities" (Vizenor, *Manifest Manners* 105). However, this same language becomes the mother tongue of paracolonialisim generations of American Indians who use it creatively in their literary productions. Literature of American Indians is basically composed for liberation and it carries those spirits of the old days and so "the shadows and language of tribal poets and novelists could be the new ghost dance literature" (Vizenor, *Manifest Manners* 106).

[12] "As a Spokane Indian, I've always felt that my Spokane-ness and its culture, theology, and philosophy kept me separate from the United States . . . But, when I first started traveling internationally, I quickly learned that I'm very American . . . Yeah, I'm absolutely an American citizen and am approximately 73% happy about it" (Alexie, *Instagram*).

first, "Alienation: 'Deficiency' in American Indian Relationships**,**" defines alienation as a state of defective relationships and contextualizes it in modern American Indian writings. Alienated characters are those who go through struggles in different social encounters, stemming from prescribed interpretations of their "Indianness." Those deficient relationships are the outcome of the intersection of two versions of the Indigenous identity: the one constructed by colonial hegemonic narratives and the real, likely hybrid, identity. Alexie's theories of survival are outlined and discussed too. The second section, "A Mediated Reading of American Indian Literature: Bhabha's 'Third Space,'" is a review of Bhabha's "third space" idea, as well as an investigation of three key concepts he employs in developing his hypothesis. The argument for the contextualization of third spaces is developed by Alexie's creation of means of survival for his characters.

1.1 Alienation: "Deficiency" in American Indian Relationships

As an increasingly prevalent problem in literary representations of relationships, several interpretations have examined works of fiction through the lens of alienation, as shown in *Bloom's Literary Themes: Alienation*. Alienation, in its minimal recognition by literary critics, is a phenomenon that causes emotions of loneliness and detachment, as it is reflected in the critical analyses of Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* and Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*. Although this comprehension of alienation is generally correct, I necessitated a specific definition that uncovers its true essence and, therefore, can adequately interpret Alexie's depiction of alienated American Indians. For this objective, Rahel Jaeggie's *Alienation* has proven to be significant. Jaeggie provides an understanding of this feeling to be a consequence of experiencing a deficient relationship rather than being a reflective feeling of ultimate separation. The other main source to explain alienation as a theme in modern American Indian literature is a study by Paula Gunn Allen, an American Indian critic and poet. Allen emphasizes the relationship between the alienated characters and their affiliation as American Indians to be at odds. In addition to these discussions, I explore Gerald Vizenor's concept of "indian simulations" as a prominent factor playing a role in the alienation relationships experienced by Alexie's American Indian characters. Furthermore, a review of identity politics will shed light on the relevance of Alexie's concept of crossing reservation borders and defeating simulations.

1.1.1 Alienation in American Indian Literature

For Jaeggie, alienation is a perplexing phenomenon that has to be defined within a broader philosophical viewpoint of social relationships. "Alienation is a specific form of relation, not a nonrelation or the mere absence of a relation. Alienation describes not the absence but the *quality* of a relation. Formulated paradoxically, alienation is *a relation of relationlessness*" (Jaeggie 25). Jaeggie's explanation emphasizes that not having strong and qualified personal connections doesn't always mean the end of relationships. "Alienation does not indicate the absence of a relation but is *itself a relation*, if *a deficient one*" (Jaeggie 1; emphasis added). Alienation, then, results in manifesting other feelings, such as, "a sense of meaninglessness or estrangement, [and] loss of power in relation to self and world" (Jaeggie xii). The alienated, according to Jaeggie, feel devalued and disadvantageous by their relationship partners. She challenges the assumption that alienation presupposes a complete lack of connection and, instead, focuses on a specific kind of contact that is deficient. Alienation can be described as a feeling of detachment from a particular organization, individual, or social environment. It is, however, always accompanied by a particular mode of participation. These conflicting feelings and actions make it challenging to determine acceptable reactions. The alienated are those who feel unsure about the terms under which they approach their relationships. Jaeggie suggests that the powerless would always feel subjugated unless the relationship changes to become "a relation of appropriation" (1), where the alienated develop autonomy and figure out how to respond to the relation deficiency. "Autonomy . . . depends on the capacity to evaluate critically and reflect on one's desires as well as on taking the responsibility for them that corresponds to this reflection" (Jaeggie 203). Overall, Jaeggie's concept of "a relation of appropriation" offers a possible resolution on how individuals can overcome alienated relationships with an attitude that appropriation "reacts to the 'fact of connectedness' just as it creates it" (219). In her elaboration on finding ways to overcome alienation, Jaeggie emphasizes the importance of being an "active participant" (60) capable of transforming the relationship for the better.

Alienation, with its profound meaning of being a deficiency in human relationships, has a powerful implication as a theme in modern American Indian literature. In her two-part study entitled, "A Stranger in My Own Life: Alienation in American Indian Prose and Poetry," Allen contrasts traditional and modern American Indian literature showing how and why this theme has evolved to reflect the characterization of American Indians. Traditional literature of American

Indians, for Allen, is more interested in the idea of "wholeness" and "belonging" when it comes to American Indian characters and the depiction of an alienated indicates a depiction of strangers who "come from another people," who are not a "central concern" ("A Stranger I" 1).[13] Similar to their old oral forms of stories, traditional American Indian authors represent characters who have a "sense of collective identity in relation to origins, welfare, and destiny" (Ramsey, *Reading the Fire* 6). In modern American Indian literature, however, "the tribal person is [depicted as] the stranger," the alienated (Allen, "A Stranger I" 1). [14]

The alienated American Indian characters are those who experience an identity crisis when confronted with tribal affiliation politics. A tribe might exclude some individuals from the public recognition to be members, even if they self-identify as American Indians. As a result, the excluded become alienated in their relationships with the tribe, with whom they could be living. It is necessary to recognize that seeking recognition from a tribe represents a kind of seeking agency. "Tribe means an earth sense of self, . . . ancestral history, . . . spiritual balance . . . And given four hundred sad years of Indian dispossession, tribe often means nonwhite inversions of the American mainstream, a contrary ethnicity and dark pride, even to a people's disadvantage" (Lincoln, *Native American Renaissance* 8). In her reference to characters being "tribal" and "strangers," Allen creates the same paradoxical meaning that Jaeggie does in her emphasis on the existence of a relationship within alienation. The tribal stranger is an alienated American Indian.

The central issue at the heart of the cultural identity challenges experienced by tribal individuals, as depicted in modern American Indian literature, involves the continually changing nature of existence, which brings out a new generation of unrecognized American Indians. This is linked to existing modern facts of cultural contacts, resulting in the portrayal of American Indians who have distinct features in their physical looks, tribal affiliations, and racial heritage, to name a few. Those characters are the un-archived generation of American Indians whose existence is a fact of survival but instead is treated as odd. The characters being un-archived contradicts

[13] In this sense, traditional American Indian literature, which Allen examines in its written manuscripts, is an inscribed narration of Indigenous creation and origin myths "*Myths are sacred traditional stories whose shaping function is to tell the people who know them who they are; how, through what origins and transformations, they have come to possess their particular world; and how they should live in that world, and with each other*" (Ramsey, *Reading the Fire* 6).

[14] The phrase "tribal person" is essential because many people, some of whom become authors, claim to be American Indians and write stories where their characters are supposed to be read as representations of American Indians. However, they are nothing but the representation of the white man's "Indians," or cultural appropriators. Alexie frequently names them "Pretendians" in interviews or Instagram posts. So, Allen specifies that the people she is referring to are tribe members even though their membership is denied or questioned.

Foucault's notion of the archive in his study of discourses constructing history. For Foucault, an archive is "the general system of the formation and transformation of statements" (148).[15] Based on this theory, the colonial discourse that impacts the mainstream narrative of history has defined the American Indian tribal affiliation with a minimalistic interest in reflecting racial and cultural evolutions. Consequently, the portrayal of these characters focuses on depicting their sense of not belonging. They are breeds, as Allen describes. "The breed is an Indian who is not an Indian. Breeds are a bit of both worlds" (Allen, "A Stranger I" 3). Using Silko's *Ceremony* (1977), Allen references the character of Tayo, a mixed-blood American Indian with green eyes who lives as an alien on the reservation.

Because of the disparity between public norms and actual situations of hybridity, the norms appear hazy to hybrids and leave them unable to define their identity. "Tribal people['s]" sense of belonging is "precariously dependent on vague norms [represented by] others, or on clear (but unmeetable) standards declared by tribes, individuals, or the United States government" (Allen, "A Stranger I," 4). In her assessment of the power of colonial narratives that reflect the misery of alienated characters like Tayo, Allen explains that tribal people are alienated because the colonial narrative powers have created "an Indian world-that-is-*not*" what it is (Allen, "A Stranger I" 2; emphasis added). The uncertainty in interpreting the constant transformation in the appearance and behavior of American Indians, along with the desire to maintain a connection with their ancestral heritage, poses a dilemma of culture and identity to some American Indians. This is due to the force of mainstream stories about American Indian identity, which deny them the opportunity to negotiate and so accept their modern reality.

Understanding Jaeggie's theory of deficient relationships, together with Allen's perspective of tribal people who are depicted as strangers in modern American Indian literature, Alexie's characterization of alienated characters becomes apparent. In all of his works, Alexie's main characters are American Indians, despite the difficulties they experience in obtaining official recognition, such as federal citizenship certificates or acceptance by their tribal group. However, he incorporates individuals from diverse ethnic origins into his stories. The purpose of their involvement is to emphasize the perspectives of American Indians and foster thoughtful

[15] The "archive," as Foucault defines, is "the set of discourses actually pronounced; and this set of discourses is envisaged not only as a set of events which would have taken place once and for all and which would remain in abeyance, in the limbo or purgatory of history, but also as a set that continues to function, to be transformed through history, and to provide the possibility of appearing in other discourses" (qtd. in Lawlor and Nale 20).

consideration of their apprehensive efforts to sustain interpersonal connections. “My white people often end up being sort of ‘cardboardy’? which is thematically all right? but it isn’t necessarily my original purpose. I just get uncomfortable writing about them,” says the author (Fraser and Alexie 61). In having American Indians as the majority of his characters, Alexie’s writings focus on how they experience and react to alienation. Even when alienation occurs in relationships between races, Alexie demonstrates that it is most important to portray the scenario from the American Indian perspective. It is because they are the people who are unhappy and deluded, and their ways of searching for assistance are giving value to his works.

In “The Only Traffic Signal on the Reservation Doesn’t Flash Red Anymore,” where the setting and dialogue echo Becket’s *Waiting for Godot*, the author lists key reasons behind his characters’ experience of alienation. “Indians can easily survive the big stuff. Mass murder, loss of language and land rights, It’s the small things that hurt the most. The white waitress who wouldn’t take an order, Tonto, the Washington Redskins” *(*Alexie*, The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* 42).[16] Tonto is the American Indian character in *The Lone Ranger*, a TV comic presentation in the 1930s that has been followed by many adaptations. He becomes a stereotype that symbolizes American Indians’ look and manner of being passive and a follower of the white Lone Ranger. Accordingly, Alexie uses the character’s name in his stories indicating resistance to that image but also its influence on their lives.[17] As the excerpt illustrates, in the contemporary lives of American Indians, Tonto and, similarly, the use of an “Indian” image as mascots are unbearable; metaphorically speaking, they are killing them. However, as a tragicomedy, this story shows that a character who has been traumatized by a vision, like Tonto, is extremely vulnerable. Tonto’s image is not powerful enough to be held responsible for causing grief and disgrace, especially when in comparison, the character’s forefathers survived genocide.

Even if distorted images and stereotypes have an impact on American Indian cultural identity, they have distinctive methods of describing it. In her discussion of Indigenous identity, Hilary N. Weaver says that “various scales have been developed to assess Indigenous people’s cultural identity a traditional, to integrated/bicultural, to assimilated” (248). Besides the confusion that those scales create in different scenarios or temporals, Weaver, like other Indigenous people, does not consider the identification of race or the announcement of an ethnic affiliation “an

[16] In the following, *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* will be abbreviated as *TLR*.
[17] Tonto as a character in many American Indian works is used to criticize the colonial image of the “Indian”

adequate indicator of culture" (248). The identification of American Indians and their cultures, as she displays, will be impossible if the only way to do so is a measure of acculturation. "Attachment to another and multiple cultural identifications are not only possible but potentially healthy" (Hilary N. Weaver, 249). In her essay, Weaver contends that the investigation of identity is difficult to conclude because of its intricate structure as a construct of multiple variables. Nevertheless, in most of the conversations among Alexie's characters, the scale of being traditional is the main measure used to evaluate a person's perceived American Indianness.

From an Indigenous cultural perspective, negotiations over an identity definition in being more or less traditional—more or less Indigenous— pertain to the beliefs, manners, customs, and rituals peculiar to each tribe. These elements distinguish them from other groups and contribute to the formation of their cultural identities. In his discussion of the diverse range of Indigenous cultures and their associated traditions, Jack Utter says: "before first European contact, the answer to 'Who is an Indian?' was easy. Nobody was. 'Indian' is a European-derived word and concept. Prior to contact, indigenous people were not Indians but were members of their own socio-political and cultural groups—Lakota, Makah, Yurok, Tlingit, or Chugach, for example or sub-groups thereof" (25). Each indigenous culture knew its traditions, and no scales were needed to measure them. However, discussions of such issues become prominent after contact. It is a fact, as Indigenous intellectuals posit, that American Indians place value on traditions as much as they do on biological relatedness; "our traditions make us who we are, not just our biology" (Marks and Shelton). For others, traditions are methods followed to "counter the legacy of historical trauma . . . to strengthen tribal coherence through time" (Hannel 69). The challenge of adhering to traditional customs in the modern lives of American Indians lies in its inherent difficulty, necessitating its negotiation within current standards. Being traditional means being surrounded by people who teach and practice cultural things. As a result, being traditional necessitates an important factor: a homeland where new generations learn from the past and where memories are shared. "Artfully deployed within Indigenous communities, traditions are a reinvestment in a shared ancient imaginary of self and a distancing strategy from the West. Tradition as resistance has served Indigenous people well as a response to contact and as a reworking of colonial narratives of the Americas" (Rickard 83). Following the aforementioned argument rooted in tradition-based thinking, it can be argued that despite the initial establishment of reservations to eradicate indigenous cultures, these sites have managed to safeguard the traditions of many

nations. “Paradoxically, isolation helped maintain aboriginal languages and many other traditional practices” (McMaster, qtd. in Raheja 150). However, the utilization of ancient skills and traditions to define the contemporary identities of American Indians is susceptible to the pitfalls of popular misrepresentations, alongside the inexorable forces of mobility and urbanization. The portrayal of the traditional thought of an American Indian cultural identity in Alexie’s works mostly serves as an irony. To be traditional while being an American Indian is impossible considering the large number of those who have never been on the reservation and, considering their lifestyles, they can hardly be in contact with anything traditional. Also, American Indian traditions have to be questioned as long as there has been cultural contact with other races. Being traditional, similar to the old times, demands expertise and knowledge. The majority of the American Indians are not as traditional as they previously were in pre-contact eras.

In a reflection on the complexity of claiming a cultural identity of being traditional, Alexie says, “traditional Spokanes believe in rules of conduct that aren’t collected into any book and have been forgotten by most of the tribe. For thousands of years, the Spokanes feasted, danced, conducted conversations, and courted each other in certain ways. Most Indians don’t follow those rules anymore, but Thomas made the attempt” (Alexie, *Reservation Blues* 5).[18] In the excerpt, Alexie illustrates the complicated struggle of adhering to tradition, showcasing the potential of the attempt and the substantial challenge it presents. Consequently, the method of being traditional the power and factors necessary to describe contemporary American Indian cultural identity. And, while alienation cannot be traced completely to the collision of traditional and modern cultures among American Indians, Alexie does reflect on it extensively.

In his edited collection of essays on the theme of alienation, Harold Bloom suggests that the use of alienation in literature “demanded a self-wounding act” (*Alienation* xvi). Accordingly, as he states, the comedies of Beckett and Kafka are “comic grotesque” because alienation is present. While comedies by Proust and Joyce are “warmer” and “more commodious” (Bloom, *Alienation* xvi) as far as alienation is absent. In a similar understanding of the negative power of alienation, Allen conceptualizes “pain” to be a “primary message” of alienation stories (“A Stranger I” 7). Allen suggests destructive resolutions for the stories of alienation. The alienated come to two destructive conclusions in regard to their takes on their culture: suicidal and homicidal. Depression for being unfit as an American causes suicide, while revenge from any

[18] In the following, *Reservation Blues* will be abbreviated *RB.*

settler-American as an antagonist causes homicidal murders ("A Stranger II" 16). And, while both are destructive acts, only the second is labeled as violent by Allen, not only because it is a personal decision that hurts others, but also because it is "other directed" ("A Stranger II" 16). They are acts of violence against both the victim and the perpetrator, as far as the latter is persuaded by another force.

Similar to the aforementioned opinions on alienation being destructive, in several of his stories, Alexie portrays violent resolutions. John Smith, in *Indian Killer*, kills himself after a lengthy period of loneliness and suffering of being a white family's adopted child, infused with public hints against him being the "Indian" killer. Harlan Atwater, a character from "The Search Engine" in *Blasphemy*, decides to abandon his passion for poetry and become lost in Seattle because he feels betrayed as an author who symbolizes "Indians" and believes that his poems are insensitive to culture. In *Flight*, Zits's father becomes homeless, intoxicated, and pathetic because he feels the pain of not being able to hunt like his nomadic ancestors.

Despite such examples of self-destruction and failure to overcome alienation, Alexie writes stories or poetry on survival. To withstand the harmful effects of alienation caused by misrepresentations of colonial narratives, alternative narratives of culture and identity must arise to assist the characters in reconciling with their modern American Indian identities. The production of new narratives presents a significant challenge and necessitates using some methods that appear effective from the alienated perspective. For this, I devise an analytical method that investigates Alexie's motive of believing in the survival of his protagonists, even if alienation appears to be an unbeatable emotion.

Jaeggie proposes the establishment of relations of appropriation as a means to address feelings of alienation, whereas Alexie depicts the characters' involvement in cultural negotiation as a method to cultivate survivors of alienation. Jaeggie argues that the concept of the "relation of appropriation" involves a change in both ends of the relationship, which is challenging to reconcile with Alexie's emphasis on American Indian characters. In other words, the potential reorientation that could take place for the settler-Americans, who are on the other side of the conflict, is not a deliberate pursuit for Alexie. The resolution that I emphasize is the transformation of the alienated American Indian characters into survivors of alienation. To achieve such conclusions, Alexie creates different modes that indulge his characters' sense of anger and motivate their imagination, which will be elaborated on in 1.2.1.

1.1.2 American Indian Simulations

Simulations of "Indians" in popular cultures and literary narratives, such as those found in mascots; movies, and other virtual streams of artificial realities; novels, and other types of writing; and in photography; all are methods that colonize viewers' minds. Simulations contribute to exhibiting and constructing an archive of otherness based on hegemonic understandings of being, making them seem irreplaceable. Based on this idea, the simulation approach enforces incorrect beliefs about identity on American Indians, empowered by the popularity of its representation media. Simulations, with their inherent implications of inferiority and racism, end up increasing American Indians' sense of uncertainty and alienation. This confusion is exemplified by Bhabha's conceptualization of the need for a third space to negotiate, from a post-colonial perspective, the construction of an identity in relation to hybridity.[19] Although it is not my primary area of research, it has to be pointed out that simulations of "Indians" have also had an impact on how other races throughout the world perceive American Indians. In this regard, American Indians are marginalized globally.

In *Playing Indian*, Philip Deloria explores significant facets of the creation of the "Indian" identity. In the early years of contact, "Indian 'Others' have been constructed at the intersection of real and imagined Indians. Settlers (mis)perceived real Indian people through a variety of European cultural lenses. Religion, gender relations, subsistence, technology—these and many other perceptions defined and distorted the ways Europeans saw Indians" (20). The complex and often wrong ways in which Anglo-Americans perceived and constructed their understanding of Indigenous nations, influenced by both direct contact and their cultural preconceptions, resulted in the formation of broad implications of American Indians being inferior and the need to be conscious of the existence of opposing binaries. Indigenous nations are collectively recognized as an ethnic group by European settlers. "The very word 'Indian' is a conflation of hundreds of tribes, languages, and cultures into one emblematic figure: the Other, the Alien, the generalized Non-European" (Macdonald et al. xi). Opposing binaries of cultures primarily generate a contradiction between the settlers' identification of themselves as "civilized" and the representation of the Indigenous as "savages" who happen to be living on the territories that the settlers "discovered."

[19] Anibal Quijano and Immanuel Wallerstein argue that, "even when formal colonial status would end. Coloniality would not" (550).

As a result, the utilization of "Indians" has justified numerous degrading actions perpetrated against Indigenous nations. Given such claims, and in his examination of D. H. Lawrance's book of literary criticism, *Studies in Classic American Literature* on classic nineteenth-century authors, Philip Deloria concludes that "savage Indians served Americans as oppositional figures against whom one might imagine a civilized national Self" (3). Therefore, in the texts identified as colonial literature, binaries are stressed because otherwise, the settler-American identity will end up being "'unfinished' and incomplete" (Philip Deloria 3). The existence of the "Indian" helped to define the settlers "as something new and non-British" (Philip Deloria 22). The idea of being superior to Indigenous nations of America allows settler-Americans to create the United States' national identity and history that is separate from the background of the early Anglo-American immigrants.

Philip Deloria's views on the development of the "Indian" are consistent with various studies investigating colonial attitudes on displaying the cultural identity of the colonized. C. Richard King, for example, maintains that the process of eliminating Indigenous identities did not end at the time of early contact. The perception of the colonialist's dominion over "Indians" and their entitlement to categorize them as the "others" has persisted in historical chronicles, evolving into an established portrayal. King posits:

> A common belief in the contemporary United States, often unspoken and unconscious, implies that everyone has a right to use Indians as they see fit; everyone owns them. Indianness is a national heritage; it is a fount for commercial enterprise; it is a costume one can put on for a party, a youth activity, or a sporting event. This sense of entitlement, this expression of white privilege, has a long history, manifesting itself in national narratives, popular entertainments, marketing schemes, sporting worlds, and self-improvement regimes. (*Redskins* 100)

The recognition of the aforementioned practices in assuming the identities of American Indians serves to underscore the enduring influence of imperial ideology and methods that continue to subjugate and suppress marginalized American Indians, while also exploiting their cultural heritage. By retaining a continuous and haughty attitude toward such hegemonic thoughts, colonial literature demonstrates no willingness to acknowledge the passage of time. In the North American media, for example, "Indians" are typically portrayed as a "homogenous group 'frozen in time,'" (Leavitt et al. 43), a portrayal that fails to provide an accurate depiction of reality. The American Indian population, who had experienced the traumatic events of colonial killings, is currently

engaged in an ongoing process of identity and cultural evolution and transformation. However, the recognition of their contemporary cultural identities is restricted because not enough argument of counternarratives disconnects them from the colonial concept of "Indian."

To address the main cause of the colonial narrative extension and the formation of an identity dilemma among American Indians, I utilize Anton Treuer's elaboration on the question "Why are Indians so often imagined rather than understood?" (146). Treuer states: "American Indians are a very small percentage of the global population and even a small percentage of the U.S. population" (146). In this population number, it is the settler-American majority "who controls the story" (Anton Treuer 146). Treuer is not the only one who discusses the matter of unequal proportions in published narratives; other American Indian intellectuals have made similar observations. Joseph Bruchac wrote, "Even now, despite the fact that we have a highly talented and prolific new generation of American Indian authors writing their own books, the vast majority of new 'American Indian' books appearing in print each year are written by white people" (38). Popular cultures present "Indians" to the world in mythological and hypothetical ways and in stories that often depict them as familiar figures with limited identifications, such as lovers, warriors, princes/sses, or captives, among other stereotypes.

In the given context, it is evident that American Indians encounter a feeling of alienation in several engagements with settler-Americans, such as those interracial, intercultural, and intersocial relationships. Moreover, even though American Indians were granted US citizenship in 1924, they continued to experience racism, lack of support, neglect, limited employment and education opportunities, court injustices, and various other forms of discriminatory practices. In studies of different disciplines, American Indian writers show that the act of marginalizing causes cognitive blindness, which limits their consciousness and ability to speak out for personal freedom. "No one in English-speaking society can escape being influenced by 'the Indian' of popular culture" (Macdonald et al. xv). The constructed identity of the "Indian" is inextricably intersected with American Indians' self-perceptions. Consequently, a prevalent theme in post-colonial American Indian literature is the struggle to distinguish the "Indian" from the "American Indian." By stressing this notion, the writers seek to challenge power dynamics, aiming to undermine "the

potential of the Other" and "destroy the claim to superior truth of historical narratives" (Breinig 45-46).[20]

The constant references to overlapping elements of identification reinforce the fact that many American Indians are still influenced by colonial narratives, suggesting how depicting American Indians who have entirely transcended their intersecting identity is impractical since it can hardly exist. Essentially, some characters in American Indian literature maintain their "Indian" identity for various reasons, while others struggle to move past it. In this context, it is obvious that the literature of American Indians frequently examines historical themes and the consequences of physical and visual colonial exploitation of the colonized. Vine Deloria's works, for instance, describe American Indians as

> presenting a reflective statement of what it means and has meant to live in a present which is continually overwhelmed by the fantasies of others of the meaning of past events. . . Indeed, any discussion of literary representation of history in the Americas finds it center in the notion of possession, not merely physical possession of the land and its resources, but ideological possession, because to a large degree the two have gone hand in hand: those who control the land, have controlled the story (the his-story) of the land and its people. (qtd. in Breinig 46)

This picture of inquisitive American Indians is illustrated not by non-Native authors but by writers from Indigenous backgrounds who depict individuals straining to distinguish between their image of being Indigenous and that of being "Indian."

Vizenor, an American Indian critic and author, mostly described as a postmodern thinker, conceptualized his thesis of reflecting on the constructed "Indian" in a colonial narrative as nothing like "a connection to the real, a sense of presence, or crease of natural reason" (*Fugitive Poses* 146). The "*indian* is a cued simulation, a native absence that becomes a logocentric presence" (*Fugitive Poses* 34). The emphasis on logocentrism highlights the role of language in authorizing simulations in the mainstream consciousness, often obscuring actual reality. This proposition

[20] In addition to literary works like those of Silko, Alexie, and LongSoldier, to name a few, several American Indian historians whose works have created a radical change in the understanding of American history, like as Elizabeth Cook-Lynn and Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, have made a significant contribution to readers understanding of American history. Dunbar-Ortiz's *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States* (2014), *New York Times* bestseller, is a presentation where the author questioned the foundational fabric of the American society with no fears or concerns in showing the bloody background of the settlers (Peck xi).

upholds a longstanding pattern in which logocentric language, characterized by its apparent dominance, prioritizes the aspirations of settlers while marginalizing the existence and entitlements of Indigenous nations. “The presence of the indian is the absence of the native, the more of the one, is the decline of the other” (*Fugitive Poses* 165). Vizenor describes simulations as reflections of “fugitive *indian* poses” (*Fugitive Poses* 155). The use of a lower case “i” in “indian” reflects Vizenor’s disregard for the character images behind those simulations to have anything related to reality. “The causal histories of indians are analogies not identities” (*Fugitive Poses* 31). To elucidate the complexity of the “Indian” simulation, Vizenor makes a profound connection between the art of photography and his simulation theory. Photography is a key factor in capturing fugitive poses because, to be professional, the poses are set and planned. The description of the prepared “Indian” to reflect a “fugitive pose” is used symbolically to spell out their powerlessness in the hands of authorized photographers, who are restricted to creating an image of a fugitive. In a mocking tone, Vizenor posits, “Native resistance was abstracted as fugitive pose in national history,” says Vizenor (*Fugitive Poses* 45). Fugitive poses are offender poses, those who are deemed unwelcome or excluded from the community. The “Indian” representations, then, “are simulations of severance, not the pictures or stories of native survivance” (Vizenor, *Fugitive Poses* 154). In his profound argument of simulations, Vizenor unmasks the “‘invented Indian’ as a political pose” (Blaeser, “Gerald Vizenor” 261). Simulations are depictions of conquered Indigenous nations. They emphasize themes of romantic misery, tragedy, and nostalgia rather than the presence of dynamic communities with the potential of seeking survival.

Over time, the “Indian” image has become increasingly inaccurate as new representations have been based on previous, flawed depictions, as described by Vizenor in his “interimage” hypothesis. In photography, the “interimage” process degrades the quality of image colors across multiple layers. Similarly, through successive simulations, the portrayal of “Indian” figures gradually loses its authentic features. The “interimages,” as described by Vizenor, particularly in the digital manipulation of photographic representations, bear a resemblance to earlier engravings derived from drawings (Vizenor, *Fugitive Poses* 147). The initial drawings were pioneers in capturing representations with a semblance of accuracy. Subsequently, the engraved figures, stemming from these initial drawings, laid the groundwork for the first “interimage” simulations because they became the source. Over time, this process has spawned numerous “interimages” all

originating from the foundational simulation and creating new ones (Vizenor, *Fugitive Poses* 151). Vizenor's conceptualization of "interimages" sheds light on the persistence and influence of these simulated depictions in shaping contemporary misconceptions of the American Indian identity.

Simulations significantly influence fundamental factors contributing to alienation, which I will analyze in my close readings of Alexie's works. The intersected images of "Indians" and American Indians, because of simulation, are one main reason behind many conflicts that disturb the relations depicted by Alexie, and, therefore, they become alienated. By emphasizing the intersection of identity narratives, I am not merely stating that American Indians struggle with describing themselves because others have preconceived notions about them. The real concern is that the individuals are themselves conflicted about their identity. In other words, simulations help create illusions that lock people in the past. Like in Treuer's argument, colonial narratives and, therefore, the performed simulations do not get their power from their truthfulness but due to their amount compared to anything published by American Indians as counternarratives. Thus, contemporary American Indian literature may actually be reclaiming the narrative of American Indian identity and challenging colonial hegemony rather than being a mere victim of it. Literature by American Indians are "stories that mediate and undermine the literature of dominance" (Vizenor, *Manifest Manners* 12) by generating characters capable of separating themselves from simulations. Works by American Indian authors challenge the conventional image of the "Indian" as colonized and subjugated by giving their protagonists a platform to reflect on their survival experiences and allowing their voices to be heard.

Hegemonic narratives serve as the primary underpinning perceptions in all simulations. They, thus, have a significant role in shaping viewpoints about the notions of modernity and cultural interaction among surviving American Indians, specifically in the context of hybridization. So, for those who adhere to hegemonic differences of race and cultural binaries, hybridization is seen as a process of assimilation. It is so because hybridity is not a concept that has been discussed in mainstream cultural representations of American Indians. This claim reveals the notion of "fixity" that Bhabha and Fanon argue when discussing coloniality. In the decolonized narratives of American Indian identities, fixity is never a fact but "fluidity and diversity," are, as Leanne Simpson argues (71-72). To start an actual investigation of identity, colonized minds must process liberty. To liberate a lionized mindset, Alexie suggests crossing the reservation borders. This notion will be elaborated on in the next section (1.1.3).

1.1.3 Breaking through the Reservation of the Mind

In *Identity Politics*, Peter Burke and Jan Stets argue that: "identities are meanings, and individuals act to maintain these identity meanings" (85). Maintaining meaning for identity is a process that implies making modifications in response to changing conditions that interfere with the life of humans. However, for American Indians, the definition of identity cannot be that simple or autonomous. It is more complicated. In terms of the social-cognitive model, Michael D. Berzonsky defines the notion of identity in a frame of being a personal consciousness of individual needs along with social effects.

> Identity is conceptualized as a cognitive structure or self-theory, which provides a personal frame of reference for interpreting self-relevant information, solving problems, and making decisions. Identity is also viewed as a process that governs and regulates the social-cognitive strategies used to construct, maintain, and/or reconstruct a sense of personal identity. (55)

This model is effective for American Indians because they are influenced by personal, societal, and cultural variables in their definitions of identity. Due to marginality, however, American Indians, mainly youth, have low self-esteem. They, also, are victims of a pre-constructed colonial image of being "Indians." Moreover, their identities cannot escape the fact that they are culturally constructed identities and that their cultures have been mostly lost or misinterpreted after the arrival of Anglo-Americans to their lands.

> In the wake of this massive and deliberately created cultural disarray, where many people no longer speak the language that would have impacted their cultural knowledge, there is no clear consensus about what makes a person Indigenous in many Indigenous communities. In these circumstances, it has been easy for hegemonic considerations of Indigenous identity to take priority—so that increasing numbers of Native people only know themselves as Indian through their status card. (Lawrance 74)

It is challenging, then, to outline the politics of identity for American Indians, due to the diverse experiences and perspectives affecting their marginalized communities. Accordingly, articles discussing the development of American Indian identity have different views focusing on the influence of culture and coloniality.

In a critical reference to the extensive history of ethnic cleansing and political efforts aimed at demolishing the American Indian cultural identity, Hilary N. Weaver explains that

struggles for self-identification develop when personal perceptions and the perceptions of others create inconsistencies (243). It is so because the "Indian" identity, in its colonial presentation, plays a role in manipulating the manifestation of American Indians as groups and individuals. Hereafter, the understanding of the American Indian identity becomes a "box of possibilities, and to try to address them all would mean doing justice to none" (Hilary N. Weaver 240). Reading Alexie's works reveals that the construction of American Indian characters is built on those intersecting personal, cultural, and political disputes. Nevertheless, the author does not aim at writing fictitious answers to the question of the American Indian identity as it seems impossible. He writes survival plots. Identity, for him, might be interpreted as all that enables the characters to escape becoming victims. The identity of the survivors values their interests and emotions over arguments based on colonial myths designed to secure Indigenous extinction.

The process of overcoming alienation is usually inspired by the characters' pursuit of better life circumstances and public recognition that can take them out of the marginality perceptions. So, varied conclusions emerge in every story of American Indians; each is affected by its distinctive setting and landscape, which in turn determines the perceptions of the characters' identity politics. Alexie's survival stories exhibit two fundamental characteristics: firstly, they solely showcase characters who transform their mindset to transcend narratives of marginality, and secondly, they underscore the significance of acknowledging a multi-tribal identity that is defined based on their survival needs, or their interests. The following paragraphs explore the connection between the two principles and their practical implementation in the analysis.

Adrian Louis, an American Indian poet, inspires Alexie to adopt the concept of mental liberation from all kinds of physical and metaphorical confinements of the reservation. Louis's "I am in the reservation of my mind" (147) is a metaphor used in his elegy poem to represent mental captivity. However, this line of poetry served as an epiphany for Alexie. The author writes: "My tribe tried to murder me . . . / And if you study what separates me, / the survivor, from the dead and car-wrecked, / then you'll learn that my literacy/ saved my ass" (Alexie, *Face* 80). Understanding that form of colonization is Alexie's reasoning for his survival and becoming a writer. Alienation survivors, then, are characters who embrace and eventually internalize, a post-reservation mindset. Alexie writes: "There is a reservation for every prisoner/ willing to accept their four walls and window" (*Old Shirts and New Skins* 75).[21] The reservation, in its symbolic

[21] In the following, *Old Shirts and New Skins* will be abbreviated as *OSNS.*

significance of deprivation of freedom and restriction on human and land rights, is used to indicate "an internalization of colonial oppression and alienation" (Berglund xii) in Alexie's works. The reservation is a mental prison where dreamers hesitate to express their aspirations. Whereas, a post-reservation mindset is an emancipation of thoughts and emotions. Survival, then, is an act of achievement for the characters who are in the process of being detached from the colonized mentality. It is symbolically juxtaposed with the concept of the reservation borders representing the coloniality of power over the marginalized.

As a counter-narrative, in depicting his recurrent theme of colonized minds and imaginations and the possibility of survival beyond the reservation borders, Alexie does not overlook the portrayal of the Spokane reservation as a setting in many of his works. Despite the primary goal of creating reservations to exploit Indigenous nations, the people who live there see them as their homes. Reservations have substantial contributions to the survival and preservation of cultural and ceremonial traditions. It is not that these ceremonies or traditions will not be found elsewhere, but rather because reservations offer a distinctive social experience that is difficult to replicate elsewhere. "Reservations and the Indians on them are not simply victims of the white juggernaut. And what one finds on reservations is more than scars, tears, blood, and noble sentiment. There is beauty in Indian life, as well as meaning and a long history of interaction. We love our reservations" says David Treuer (*Rez Life* 13). Other than practicing traditional ceremonies that can help cultures survive, reservations also help the establishment of sovereignty. According to Vine Deloria, "in 1934 the Indian Reorganization Act was passed. Under the provisions of this act reservation people were enabled to organize for purposes of self-government" (*Custer Died for Your Sins* 16).[22]

In Alexie's works, the modification to a post-reservation mindset presents a significant challenge, largely because there is scant community or educational dialogue about its importance and benefits. This obscurity creates a significant obstacle and, essentially, a reluctance to face the potential drawbacks of the intentions. However, Alexie finely implies his characters' inclination towards this kind of transformation by the use of epiphany. The characters get sudden insights or realizations that lead to immediate and profound changes in their behavior or ambitions. This evolution becomes significant by the conclusions, as the main characters show no regret in venturing onto new paths. In contrast, they seem to look forward to getting a better result in the

[22] In the following, *Custer Died for Your Sins* will be abbreviated *CD.*

near future. A post-reservation mindset is depicted as the main force that propels the fireworks into the sky, as described by Alexie's comparison of imagination to bottle rockets, an image I will elaborate on in the next subsection (1.1.4).

Jaeggie's concept of autonomy, which involves expressing personal goals and overcoming the alienation phenomenon, corresponds with Alexie's idea of developing characters who possess "multi-tribal" identities. In an interview, Alexie describes his surviving characters by stating that they are those who develop a "multi-tribal" identity. "My two strongest tribal affiliations are not racially based," Alexie says, "my strongest tribes are book nerds and basketball players, and those tribes are as racially, culturally, economically, and spiritually diverse. . . . I also belong to a hundred other tribes, based on the things I love to read, watch, do" (qtd. in Davis and Stevenson 190). To be multi-tribal, then, is the author's answer to the question of his characters' identities and the politics he follows in creating them. The use of the term "tribe" extends beyond its association with family and social divisions into being an affiliation with personal interests. Thus, his creation of "multi-tribal" characters reflects their needs to achieve a self-recognition that does not have a lot to do with the colonial profile of American Indians. In "Flight Patterns," the author validates his character's multi-tribal identity: "Sure, [William] was an enrolled member of the Spokane Indian tribe, but he was also a fully recognized member of the notebook-computer tribe and the security-checkpoint tribe and the rental-car tribe and the hotel-shuttle-bus tribe and the cell-phone-roaming-charge tribe" (Alexie, *Ten Little Indians* 119). Precisely, the author reads questions of identity from an individual perspective and defies "the idea of defining Indian identity as a collective in opposition to whiteness" (Schmid 197). As William, the character in the example, could find a tribal identification that is not only ethnic-related but interest-related, other American Indian characters find similar conclusions to their identity dilemma.

It is crucial to reassert that Alexie depicts characters who are easily recognizable in real life: "I don't try to mythologize myself, which is what some seem to want, . . . [by] trying to create these 'authentic, traditional' Indians. We don't live our lives that way," he says (qtd. in Marx 20). Alexie has aversions to showing characters who reflect stereotypical notions of Indigenous people. His characters are revolutionary depictions if compared to many representations of the white man's "Indian." They are daring, young, modern, hybrid, and educated. They are in danger, according to Alexie, since they base their American Indian identity on Hollywood's twentieth-century worldview (*TLR* 99), which continues to rely on colonial tales of the "Indian" culture. So, given

the hardships of living in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, Alexie finds it absurd to represent American Indian individuals who still value themselves based on pre-given assumptions of identity and end up alienated. To challenge such kinds of representations, the alienated get into the process of uncovering media manipulations using a strategy of mimicry to find out means for cultural and identity negotiation. By personalizing those who are in survival situations, Alexie confronts his American Indian readers with the notion that if they choose to suffer, it is not because they are "guileless victims" (Marx 20), but because they lack imagination. Embracing a post-reservation mindset is an emancipation of imagination.

In his prose and poetry, Alexie employs two theories to assist shape his portrayal of American Indian survival. They are characters who are outraged but free to imagine a solution. Furthermore, Alexie's beliefs show that every American Indian poem can contain both anger and imagination.

1.1.4 Alexie's Survival Theory

According to the hypothesis of this dissertation, Alexie has made significant contributions to American Indian survival narratives by masterfully integrating the notions of alienation relationships, ethnic identity, and the hybridity of cultures. The three concepts are linked because alienation originates from the underlying issue of simulations that ignore hybridity and cultural survival for the marginalized. However, it is important to notice that Alexie never explores hybridity in an attempt to prevent his characters from being outraged about the invasion of their homelands and the loss of their culture. The images and memories of genocide are present in the majority of his works. So, as Norman Wilson observes, "Alexie presents a comprehensive view of life in contemporary America that is at once multicultural and Indigenous" (xi). This belief is reflected in the writer's explicit statement to construct characters actively engaged in plots intended for their survival.

In "Imagining the Reservation," Alexie articulates his literary representation of survival stories. The conceptualization of survival is the equation: "Survival = Anger x Imagination" (Alexie, *TLR* 98). Anger and imagination are essential factors for dealing with the challenges of being an American Indian. From a psychological perspective, anger is defined as "*a negative, phenomenological (or internal) feeling state associated with specific cognitive and perceptual distortions and deficiencies . . . subjective labeling, physiological changes, and action tendencies to engage in socially constructed and reinforced organized behavioral scripts*" (Kassinove and

Sukhodoisky 7). Anger, then, in the context of representing devastated American Indian characters, perpetuates a sequence of cause and effect. Moreover, imagination is a force activated for controlling, decolonizing, and empowering angry people. The collaboration between the two variables is necessary for the maintenance of existence because both can process coloniality, which articulates its control in "the imposition of a racial/ethnic classification of the world's population as the cornerstone of that matrix of power" (Quijano 95). However, it is important to acknowledge that both variables possess distinct limitations: anger constrains imagination, while imagination dulls the edge of anger. It is a mechanism in the form of a controlled reaction.

By pointing at the amount of anger usually present in Alexie's works, Jeff Berglund attributes the causes to economic, social, and political injustices. This anger is a destructive force (Berglund xxix). The anger felt by the marginalized has the potential to result in fatalities. So, when a literary narrative reaches a distressing resolution, it is attributed to the excessive and irrational display of anger. Nevertheless, Alexie posits that his character's anger has some specific manifestations: "Anger without hope, anger without love, or anger without compassion are all-consuming. That's not my kind of anger. Mine is very specific and directed" (qtd. in McFarland 253). Even with those idealized limits that require anger to be accompanied by hope, love, and compassion, it is impossible to see it as always controlled and constructive. Nonetheless, Alexie tries to grasp how it helps in his survival preparations. He believes that a wave of destructive anger is closer to violence, which ruins imagination; "when you resort to violence to prove a point, you've just experienced a profound failure of imagination" (Alexie, *The Toughest Indian in the World* 138).[23]

"Anger" is a reaction to racism, neglect, and betrayal that is not satisfying but long-lasting emotion in the daily lives of the marginalized. In answer to the challenge of not getting angry, Alexie says: "The richest black man in the country still has a hard time getting a taxi in New York at midnight" (Fraser and Alexie 70). This emotional conflict, in turn, can motivate the marginalized to take proactive measures and develop creative approaches when confronted with identity challenges. The deliberate expression of anger, controlled by the desire to have a better life, generates an increased level of imagination for survival. Thus, Alexie's inclusion of imagination in his survival equation is best realized as a feeling that illustrates the powerful force of the mind to enable people to go beyond the limitations imposed by prevailing societal narratives. According

[23] In the following, *The Toughest Indian in the World* will be abbreviated *TTI.*

to this review, the distinction between imagination and anger is that the former is the result of reasoning, while the latter is the result of emotions.

Imagination, in its cognitive potential, enables creative thinking and innovation. "Imagination is the politics of dreams; imagination turns every word into a bottle rocket. . . . Imagine an escape. Imagine that your own shadow on the wall is a perfect door. Imagine a song stronger than penicillin. Imagine a spring with water that mends broken bones," says Alexie (*TLR* 99). A "bottle rocket" is a symbol that has the whole meaning behind Alexie's depiction of imagination and survival. A bottle rocket is a reference to fireworks that are shot into the sky with a lot of force, shine and explode, and then fizzle out and fall back to earth. The author underlines the necessity of rising and considering what increases a person's worth, even if only temporarily. Just like a bottle rocket shot into the sky, exceeding its original confines, imagination enables people to overcome their challenges and limitations. The power of imagination is infinite, allowing the characters to overcome challenges and see the world from a higher, more emancipated perspective. Also, imagination enables the characters to explore new ideas and solutions that do not have to be restricted by facts. Everything is a possibility with a good use of imagination. The journey that begins with a flame and ascends to great heights has done much not only for itself but also for those who witness it, bringing delight to their hearts. The view of the bottle rocket demonstrates that imagination is temporary, but it is powerful enough to shine beautifully and be where few others can be at least once, which is valuable. Imagination is a free-dreaming political act interconnected with the freedom of humanity. The power of imagination can be used to overcome challenges such as captivity, pain, injuries, broken relationships, financial difficulty, and a lack of opportunity to succeed, as Alexie lists.

The emphasis on imagination, in James Cox's interpretation of Alexie's works, "suggests that imagining alternatives to the dominant culture's narratives of conquest . . . is a powerful weapon. Imagining alternative histories might not change the present . . . but conceiving of other possibilities, revisioning a history in which Native Americans write Native Americans back into the landscape, will influence the future" ("Muting White Noise" 58). In my analyses of Alexie's works, I interpret every act of imagination as survival, not with certainty in its ability to prove itself right, but within the frame of being a transmission of power, a creation of reality, a transition with a virtual journey, and an international transaction in a historical story that help the alienated get agency to pursue their goals. Alexie's alienated characters multiply their anger towards its

causality with imagination through which they can subvert mainstream narratives and reinscribe the truth of their being, their presence. From this perspective, survival is a display of adventurous personal talents that make a difference within past, present, and future frames rather than an immediate win, wealth, success, or any other form of recognized achievement.

Alexie proposes an additional equation that expresses his theory of survival, it explains his inspiration for composing poems. Even though the two equations appear to be similar, when compared, poetry emerges as very powerful in questions of survival. "Poetry = Anger x Imagination" (Alexie, *OSNS 2*). To explain the equation, it is important to ascertain that Alexie's poetry exhibits an obsessive display of anger, just like his prose. Therefore, he has been described as a poet "in a way, at war" (McFarland 253). Furthermore, Alexie's poetics show the power of his imagination in inventing poems reclaiming the American Indian voice of survival. In his study "Reverse Assimilation: Native Appropriations of Euro-American Conventions," Kenneth M. Roemer demonstrates that it is in the way of gathering and transforming mainstream literature that American Indian authors find their authenticity. Gathering and transforming mainstream conventions is an effort of imagination and poetics. "The best storytelling and writing by Native Americans will continue to counter static concepts of Indian authenticity and purity with dynamic reinventions of the enemy's words" (Roemer 399). In her analysis of Indigenous poetry, prose, and theater, Susan Berry Brill de Ramirez highlights: "Native writers in the United States and Canada have worked to resist . . . colonialist strictures and divisions by producing richly complex, intricately inclusive, rhetorically innovative, and radically indigenous literary work" ("The Historical" 338). As a result, poetry and survival are synonymous for Alexie; poetry = survival. This declaration implies that each piece of poetry by an American Indian is a recounting of their ability to persist and overcome challenges to survive.

Indigenous social and cultural history, as portrayed in popular colonial narratives, shaped the public's impression of their nations as extinct or relics of the past. To alleviate this notion which creates a sense of estrangement for the surviving American Indians in a multi-ethnic society, Alexie structures many of his plots according to his methods of survival and develops characters who can overcome alienation through various experiences. Every journey is a process of acquiring awareness of cultural interactions. The primary resolutions involve the characters' capacity to delineate and fabricate their identity based on individual interests. Alexie's methods of defining identity, which I categorize as his characters'/speakers' modes of survival (1.2.1), come out in his

use of mimicry to negotiate their differences. More about Alexie's perspective of survival which is displayed in his creation of literature will be clarified in the analytical chapters 2, 3, 4, and 5. In the following section, Bhabha's theory of third space is utilized along with its basic approaches and the way I use it to read Alexie's works.

1.2 A Mediated Reading of American Indian Literature: Bhabha's "Third Space"

The preceding section (1.1) addressed the alienation phenomenon of contemporary American Indian characters, as well as the role that "indian simulations" play in making those experiences distressing and, somewhat, traumatic. As a result, these characters need to negotiate and reconsider their beliefs to attain new understandings of self and identity. From this position, it becomes vital to concentrate on a theory that can account for this necessity and eventually help the interpretation of Alexie's works. Hence, Bhabha's concept of the third space emerges as highly significant.

In theorizing his notion of post-colonial cultural negotiations, Bhabha reviews the colonial exercise of power which has produced an ambivalence in the marginalized understanding of identity and culture. To him, colonial discourse is "a form of discourse crucial to the binding of a range of differences and discriminations that informs the discursive and political practices of racial and cultural hierarchization" (*LC* 67). However, the theorist does not argue for the revelation of colonial ideologies but for the re-inscription of its signs which produced a "subject nation", an "Other," who is "entirely knowable and visible" in colonial narratives (Bhabha, *LC* 70) but ignorant and invisible to the marginalized. In the essay "The Commitment to Theory," the need to use the language of a theoretical inquiry to challenge and disturb dominant modes of thinking that produce narratives of binaries is stressed.[24] Using theoretical language in writing or critique, a political power system, such as colonialism, can be questioned alongside the entire colonial ideology of marginalization.[25] Furthermore, being committed to theory, like having a politics of cultural negotiations, can create alternative visions of the future. For the marginalized, like American Indian authors and their characters, who are in search of cultural meanings and locations, having a theoretical language of discourse means specifying temporal and spatial contexts of coloniality, and so becoming responsive to modern cultural changes. As Bhabha posits, "the

[24] Philosophers engage in theoretical inquiry to explore abstract questions about existence, knowledge, ethics, and the nature of reality. In that sense, the marginalized can explore the foundational reasons for their struggles.

[25] To Bhabha, the assumption among the minorities that is mostly damaging and self-destruction is that theory is "the elite language," which makes them "socially and culturally privileged" (*LC* 19).

language of critique is effective not because it keeps forever separate the terms of the master and the slave, . . . but to the extent to which it overcomes the given grounds of opposition and opens up a space of translation" (*LC* 25). The effectiveness of critique relies on its ability to create a non-Eurocentric language of recognition that better represents marginalized attitudes. In literature, storytelling and plots become a linguistic medium through which messages are communicated and received.

The notion of a different past in comparison to the present is the core idea behind the discussions of marginality presented in post-colonial arguments of power. "Although fixed identities may seem to offer stability and certainty, in fact they merely produce an idealization with which [the marginalized] can never be identical, and so in fact they introduce alienation into [their] sense of self" (Huddart 20). The notion of "cultural fixity," observed in colonial narratives, posits that cultures are immutable, static entities that resist modification or evolution over time. "The stereotype," as an example, "is not a simplification because it is a false representation of a given reality. It is a simplification because it is an arrested, fixated form of representation" (Bhabha, *LC* 75). Fixity, then, suggests that cultures are rigid and unyielding, maintaining their consistency and durability across successive generations.

In defense of postcolonial cultures of the marginalized, the "contra-modernity" communities, Bhabha suggests that postcolonial cultures, while being influenced by and often opposing modernity, use their hybrid identities to redefine both the dominant modern culture and their cultural narratives. They resist assimilation while simultaneously reshaping the broader cultural and social landscapes (*LC* 6). The concepts in this ontology closely align with the understandings of Indigenous intellectuals. Taiaiake Alfred, for example, notices that "it is with indigenous notions of power . . . that contemporary Native nationalism seeks to replace the dividing, alienating, and exploitive notions, based on fear, that derive politics inside and outside Native communities today" (53). The shift from fear-based silence to a more equitable distribution of power is a significant step with the potential to address and heal historical injustices. This change can help foster true community cohesion by building trust and collaboration among diverse groups, and can also serve as a form of resistance against the persistent and damaging effects of coloniality.[26]

[26] As the textual analysis will interpret it, the marginalized uses of power to authorize a negotiation will prompt the need for diverse ethnic groups to work together to address issues of survival and existence.

Conflicts between cultures persist after colonization as a result of "the *effect* of discriminatory practices" (Bhabha, *LC* 85). This assumption tolerates the ongoing ideology of opposing binaries that define the superiority of the colonizers based on the inferiority of the colonized in rhetorical narratives, literature, and media, leading the marginalized to resist it because it harms their image and rights. It is unlikely to admit that this hegemonic distinction of cultures will be drastically abolished in an era that can never be postcolonial in the case of Native Americans. Coloniality is more of a power use than an occupation of a land. To identify the location of culture and empower the marginalized, Bhabha posits the "third space" or "the split-space of enunciation" (Bhabha, *LC* 38) to disregard cultural subversion but not cultural difference.

In his article "Cultural Diversity and Cultural Differences," Bhabha clarifies the significance of "the identity of culture." Some cultures have been identified as disadvantageous due to colonial struggle, which inspires Bhabha to specify two key aspects of cultures: diversity and difference. Diversity refers to the philosophical comprehension of comparing cultures based on empirical or comparative experiences, such as those of anthropologists. Cultural differences refer to the distinct characteristics and practices that exist within a particular culture. The key component of this remark is that cultures typically emerge as national entities when colonized because people fear losing their identity as a result of colonization. For Bhabha, this use of cultural enunciation cannot be true. The negotiation over cultural differences recognizes the events that have occurred over time and, consequently, challenges "the historical identity of culture as a homogenizing, unifying force, authenticated by the originary Past, kept alive in the national tradition of the People" ("Cultural Diversity" 208). It is important for the colonized, in Bhabha's opinion, to note that the power responsible for perceptions of "the originary Past," is colonial.

Cultural negotiations mean having voices of liberation, wherein "the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity" (Bhabha "Cultural Diversity" 208). The third space is essential because it brings together things that have not before been examined. These subjects are undoubtedly connected within discussions over colonial dominance. The third space, referred to as an "alien territory," assists the negotiator or translator in understanding and conceptualizing an "*inter*national culture" that transcends cultural hegemonic divides (Bhabha "Cultural Diversity" 209). Third spaces "open the way to conceptualizing an *inter*national culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the *diversity* of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of

culture's *hybridity*" (Bhabha, *LC* 38).[27] The emphasize made by the use of italics indicates that the national culture of a society, such as the United States, is a product of internationalism, making it essentially hybrid. Therefore, the negotiator or a translator of culture has to direct their attention towards the "inter" aspect, namely the hybrid component. In this effort, the negotiator "begins envisaging national, antinationalist, histories" of their "people" who are willing to identify the location of their culture (Bhabha "Cultural Diversity" 209). The third space is a "precondition" for any enunciation of cultural differences simply because the marginalized themselves may still be in denial of their ability to utter the new understanding of their differences. It is a territory that provides a mental liberation from the power and assertions of the colonialists. Including the marginalized in transparent cultural enunciation spaces, in Nederveen Pieterse's opinion, allows them to consider how they can have ancestral and multiracial relatedness while using their hybridity to "problematize. . . boundaries" (220) through fresh and modernized insights on coloniality. I say modern context because Alexie's stories have their distinctive structure that incorporates variable settings of modern lives. His characters watch TV, travel by plane, dream of being singers, have interests in cartooning, or are nomads who find the city a better place to live in instead of an isolated reservation. As Bhabha argues, "the value of culture as an object of study, and the value of any analytic activity that is considered cultural, lie in a capacity to produce a cross-referential, generalizable unity that signifies a progression or evolution of ideas-in-time, as well as a critical self-reflection" (*LC* 36-37).

In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha articulates the basic requirements for his theory of the "third space" to be operational. It is third because the marginalized negotiators of the location of culture have to think beyond the two "us" and "them" distinctions of cultures which makes them in need of a special agency. In stating this point, a refrence to Jaeggie's notion of an active participant who strives to eradicate the sensation of being disconnected or alienated has to be made. However, Bhabha specify the marginalized with this activity. These binary distinctions between cultures are not real in themselves and, therefore, they have to be disregarded. The third space of cultural negotiations, on the other hand, is a manifestation of reality. However, that reality cannot be independent, which Bhabha refers to as the state of "in-betweenness" that reasons ambivalence.

[27] Multiculturalism, in Bhabha's understanding of Will Kymlicka's *Multicultural Citizenship*, "is not primarily the freedom to go beyond one's language or history, but rather the freedom to move around within one's societal culture" (qtd. in "On Writing Rights" 167).

"Ambivalence in the structure of identification . . . occurs precisely in the elliptical in-between, where the shadow of the other falls upon the self" (Bhabha, *LC* 60). The understanding of conflicting feelings and attitudes towards the self and modernity hinges on post-colonial examinations. Therefore, the theory of the third space can be seen as an initial step towards embracing an alternative perspective that has the potential to move beyond the binary opposition of marginalization and pave the way for negotiating cultural politics.

Hybridization, a main concept in post-colonial writings, is the comprehensive meaning of cultural identities in any post-colonial era. It "refers to the fact that cultures are not discrete phenomena; instead, they are always in contact with one another, and this contact leads to cultural mixed-ness" (Huddart 4). In his observation of hybridity, Matthew Liebmann posits: "hybridity is about the difference of things in relation to one another, not about purity in isolation" (326). The problem, however, is that hybridity is misunderstood as the creation of a new disenfranchised group with values that are distinct from the originating cultures. Hybridity is not recognized as an element of everyone's cultural evolution. As a result, it alienates people from their cultures because hybrids struggle to find acceptance within their ethnic or racial norms. To Nederveen Pieterse, the hybrid present, from a colonial standpoint, "does not form part of national identity" (232) because the colonial narrative "represents the impossibility of cross-cultural identity" (Bhabha, *LC* 130) in terms of multicultural nations or cultural adaptation. Hybrids are those who are subjugated, silenced, and marginalized by the coloniality of power. This kind of exclusion raises a lot of emergencies, including alienation.

Bhabha's theory of a third space to negotiate cultural identities contains a lot of details that can be used to challenge the political ideologies of othering. "By negotiation," he says, "I attempt to draw attention to the structure of iteration which informs political movements that attempt to articulate antagonistic and oppositional elements without the redemptive rationality of sublation or transcendence" (Bhabha, *LC* 26). As long as it is going to be, politics generate judgments and definitions that need to be contested. To negotiate gender and class politics, as examples provided by Bhabha, intersecting points must be discovered. Intersectionality here refers to a hybrid perspective that resists the overarching politics. In other words, hybridity is the process of bringing together two subjects to debate their relationships. "The transformational value of change lies in the rearticulation, or translation, of elements that are neither the *One* (unitary working class) *nor the Other* (the politics of gender) *but something else besides,* which contests the terms and

territories of both" (Bhabha, *LC* 28). The reference to "neither . . . nor" indicates that hybridity involves a synthesis or combination that goes beyond the traditional categories or boundaries associated with each subject.

Mimicry is another concept to introduce as a major approach to Bhabha's third space negotiations. Mimicry for the marginalized does not mean blending in with a clear, pure surrounding but rather, as Jacques Lacan defines, "harmonizing . . . against a mottled background" (qtd. in Bhabha, *LC* 85) giving it a sense of "warfare camouflage" (Bhabha, *LC* 85). In this symbolic representation of warfare and methods for avoiding detection and attacks, mimicry suggests that 1) the concept of cultural purity is flawed because cultures tend to imitate one another upon contact, especially if such imitation aids in their survival, and 2) if marginalized groups can imitate those in power, then what was once perceived as superior or advanced loses its validity. The native, who is powerful enough to negotiate, has to occupy "the master's place" while keeping their anger, as it is a method to identify the self (Bhabha, *LC* 44).[28] Mimicking makes contradictions seem harmonious until, at this point, the marginalized add their twist. This is because "colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other" (Bhabha, *LC* 86). The desire for recognition through imitations weakens the binaries and empowers the marginalized to show their ways of making things their own. "Too often it is the slippage of signification that is celebrated in the articulation of difference" (*LC* 164). A Slippage, as conceptualized by Bhabha, denotes the unforeseen or overlooked cultural differentiation.

As Bhabha argues in his essay "On Writing Rights," writing by the marginalized, like works of fiction and poetry, incorporates the contextualization of cultural differences and therefore is a "third space" of negotiation.[29] Writing, away from the influence of dominant ideologies of recognition, promotes the exploration of different modes for imagining political tensions and conflicts. Those methods resist the simplistic categorization of "binary polarization of identities" and signify the survival of partial cultures (Bhabha "On Writing Rights" 174). Bhabha's description of the right to write, and, therefore, creating a narrative of difference, is a metaphorical reference to ethics protecting human rights. He relies on the comparison because humanity can be

[28] Bhabha's argument of this notion reflects on Fanon's use of "Black skins, White masks" which, to him, is not a neat division but an image of being the two at the same time (*LC* 44).
[29] Bhabha refers to the marginalized as the "partial cultural milieux" ("On Writing Rights" 165).

read and understood in multiple ways, and it signifies a continuous or transitional state rather than a rigid or definitive one (182).[30] As examples,

> the right to narrate might inhabit a hesitant brush stroke, be glimpsed in a gesture that fixes a dance movement, become visible in a camera angle that stops your heart . . . and in that process you understand something profound about yourself, your historical moment, and what gives value to a life lived in a particular town, at a particular time, in particular social and political conditions. ("On Writing Rights" 180)

Therefore, when an American Indian author, such as Alexie, publishes his works in whatever theme and setting he chooses to portray specific oppressed groups, his narration techniques expand into third spaces of cultural negotiation. Through a post-colonial lens, marginalized individuals are not simply victims of oppression, but rather they actively participate in reframing pre-existing notions that define their cultural identity. They are negotiators who are willing to assert and find their cultural differences from others, so gaining the ability to redefine their identity. On the fringes, however, cultural negotiations have veiled expectations of a tolerant world.

The primary benefit of using Bhabha's perspective of third space is because it elucidates Alexie's plots and, consequently, enriches the interpretation. Elvira Pulitano's work, *Toward a Native American Critical Theory*, discusses the complexities of American Indian literature and how to put together a critical theory that meets their interpretations. She says that following non-native theorists might be risky since they may be inefficient or unable to demonstrate the difference that the authors are attempting to make. However, the search for a "separatist form of discourse" (Pulitano 6), or a "'Nativist' approach" (Pulitano 6), can be as well ineffective because American Indian literature is written in English and therefore it is "heteroglot by nature" (Pulitano 8). According to Vizenor, American Indian writing blends patterns and methods from the oral storytelling tradition into a Western form, which he refers to as "the traces of oral stories" (*Fugitive Poses* 62). Thus, American Indian literature expresses a composite worldview. So, my analyses mediate the principles of two theories: one involves reading Alexie's writings through the lens of Bhabha's third space, giving a general look at his works as cultural negotiations, and the other

[30] According to Bhabha, protecting these narrative rights enables the worldwide community to recognize that it cannot be defined by multiculturalism, but rather by interculturalism. Multiculturalism refers to the coexistence of multiple distinct cultures within a global world, where each culture is recognized and respected. Intercultural, on the other hand, acknowledges the presence of such distinct cultures within the national identification of any culture.

through Alexie's survival theory, which limits and values the readings as they seek a survival point.

1.2.1 Modes of Survival

For Pulitano, it is essential to consider hybridization and cultural translation in American Indian critical theory. The critic emphasizes that identities are "significantly shaped by these intersecting trajectories [of hybridity and cultural translation] could never be conceived as monolithic and fixed but, instead, must be recognized in their plural, complex, and socially constructed nature" (61). In the provision of Pulitano's proposition and to elucidate the concepts of hybridization and cultural translation in the post-colonial interpretation of the theme of alienation, I draw on Bhabha's "third space" theory as a strong theoretical foundation for Alexie's portrayal of survival. In this theoretical comparison, I contend that Alexie provides substantial material for the proposal of American Indian critical theory. Alexie's works offer valuable plots of cultural negotiation, which enable his American Indian characters to develop a survival identity. Through the power of imagination, these people are granted freedom to transcend temporal limitations and be placed in a more favorable position, where they negotiate their hybridity and translate their culture, if only for a while. Each chapter focuses on one imagination potential for survival that arises from an essential conflict and several historical and contemporary challenges concerning the "Indian" misrepresentation. As a result, each chapter has its third space argument.

By stating his equations of survival, Alexie situates his plots in the framework of Indigenous resurgence theorists, as outlined by Kirby Brown. Brown underscores a major distinction in resurgence discussions in twenty-first-century Native American literary studies.

> Indigenous resurgence theorists understand settler-colonialism not as a historical event of a regrettable colonialist past, but as an ongoing structure of relations predicated upon the perpetual elimination of indigenous life and land. From this critical position, they externally critique any and all attempts at reconciliation, resolution, and healing from within state-mandated parameters that leave the legitimacy of settler nations intact, while internally engaging in efforts to decolonize colonialist understandings of social and political relations that have found their way into tribal communities' social, legal, and political structures. (Brown 293)

Accordingly, Alexie creates characters who undergo a transformative journey, progressively shedding colonial influences and manifesting their own cultural identities, values, and

perspectives. This decolonization process is marked by increasing self-awareness, empowerment, and a reclamation of their heritage, leading to a profound sense of personal and collective mental liberation to choose proper paths in life that can add other layers to their identity, those which make them multi-tribal.

Each work encompasses a mode that serves to alleviate the distress caused by feelings of alienation. Each, as well, is distinct from acts of violence and is intricately linked to the character's ability to control feelings of rage through the power of imagination. To define, modes of survival are strategies of mimicry the alienated characters use to pursue their interests and goals. They are means that are far away from being oppressed by imperialist desires to keep the marginalized depressed and alienated to being creative and cooperating relationships. As Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o states, cultural imperialism "undermine[s] peoples' believe in themselves"(43*).* Inasmuch, the act of engaging in each mode establishes a space suitable for achieving survival, a concept that Allen failed to consider in her examination of alienation. In each of my analytical chapters, I identify and interpret the character's mode of survival. As mentioned before, the equation of survival involves the interaction of two primary variables: anger and imagination. The primary factor powering this objective is the author's affirmation of his characters' capacity to go beyond a colonized mindset and provide pathways for negotiating culture and identity.

Alexie's modes of survival indicate freedom from dominant and constraining narratives. They are, as narratives of post-conciliar literature, Alexie's means of incorporating many issues about the challenges of being alienated due to a cultural struggle. They also serve as reflections of where those who are alienated take their initial attempts toward survival, driven by a decolonized mindset, which I refer to as a post-reservation mindset. Modes of survival, in particular, can be used to negotiate identity and culture. As a result, I study the acts taken by characters in various chapters to discover how they employ to live, as demonstrated by the chapter titles. The chapters detail how those activities mirror the characters' new experiences with self-identification.

By utilizing their imagination, the alienated characters can employ the constructive potential of their anger, rather than allowing it to become destructive. Anger is felt after pain, and, "the smallest pain/can change the world" (Alexie, *OSNS* 49). Anger and imagination then create modes, which in themselves are methods of transformation and redirection of the power of anger. Alexie's characters exhibit varying degrees of rage due to different reasons of alienation, but they are all impacted by a singular conflict generated by colonial discourses of marginality. Ultimately,

the vividness of each character's imagination varies, contributing to the complex diversity of their personas. Therefore, Alexie's survival modes are discussed in four different representational plots: musical, as in singing; artistic, as in drawing cartoons; cognitive, as in time traveling; and poetic, as in poetry.

Each mode utilizes a third space for the character who is involved in its creation. They represent different conceptualizations of Alexie's survival equation, enabling the exploration of ideas, emotions, and concepts where the negotiator feels safe to challenge the power of devastating colonial narratives. As it will be elaborated in the following sections, when the human natural trait of imagination is set free of censorship or romanticized struggling scenarios, it can evolve into a skill, appropriately ensuring the survival of the alienated and inspiring a decolonized reconstructed self-identification. Using one's imaginative powers means finding answers to the problem of being oppressed and lessening one's anger. Eventually, imagination works as a generator of powers where composure and emotional balance are secured. Because simulations and mainstream narratives pose a continual challenge to the reality depicted in the texts, each mode bears the burden of ambivalence. In any text where survival is achieved, Alexie explores new contexts of challenging coloniality and finds new ways to empower the next generation of American Indians. Alexie's works reflect the resilience and strength of indigenous communities in the face of historical injustices, and they serve as a powerful testament to the endurance and spirit of American Indian identity.

While Alexie's works serve as a means for cultural negotiation, the four texts I have chosen for my chapters specifically examine survival plots. My goal is to identify feelings of alienation and emphasize the negotiations within these plots, thereby highlighting their impact on the characters' lives. Highlighting survivors who are striving to overcome the influence of mainstream narratives does not mean that they have power over the majority, or that they need to confront settler-colonialists through violent means to suppress their injustice. Alexie's plots involve using the potential of imagination to assist the isolated characters in affirming the challenges that they seek to conquer. The modes exhibit a revolutionary quality by deviating from the normal traits observed in the author's characters. These are contemporary elements embraced due to the presence of hybridity.

Insofar as late renaissance American Indian literature is independent enough to present stories that confront coloniality, it also undervalues the settler American impact on American

Indian literature in terms of genre modifications. As a result, literary discourses of post-colonial narratives, such as Alexie's writings, are becoming accessible spaces for images and stories of indigenous viewpoints on identity and culture, making the discipline of post-colonial literary criticism an ideal approach to reading them. Furthermore, by embracing a post-colonial reading of American Indian literature, the analyses become more adaptable to a variety of critical methodologies and notions.

Despite their limited perspectives on alienation and their focus on assumed wholeness, traditional American Indian literature has always had its spaces of cultural negotiation. Over time, as awareness of the significance of utilizing literary writing for cultural and identity discussions, as well as the advancement of employing new writing styles to challenge colonial ideologies, the narrative politics of these negotiations gradually become more critical as well as helpful for the negotiators. The efficacy of Bhabha's concept of third space in elucidating the marginalized negotiation as a position of power is what renders it applicable to my comprehension of Alexie. Moreover, when I analyze Alexie's modes of survival, I go into the process by which his characters acquire power. Additionally, occupying the third space implies an explicit challenge to the colonial notions of binary classifications. This claim is relevant to every mode analyzed in the chapters. Another important issue to highlight is that according to Bhabha, cultural negotiators live in a state of ambivalence, which justifies Alexie's hesitant focus on his characters' conclusion as a definitive achievement.

Bhabha contends that cultures are located in a hybrid environment whereby negotiation is required to highlight their differences. He does not build his idea of third space negotiations based on any belief that present and past cultures are the same. An existing culture is an old one in progress. Cultures do not die out; rather, ambivalence about their location is produced as a result of colonization and public narratives. So, the negotiation carried out by the marginalized challenges and negates hegemonic narratives that control the definition of marginalized cultures. Negotiation facilitates the dissolution of the conflicting dichotomies of the self and the other, the majority and the minority, the old and the present, and the traditional monocultural tribal society and the intercultural urban society. Similarly, Alexie's characterization of American Indians has always been a reflection of Indigenous cultures even while there have been noticeable changes attributed to the natural evolution of cultures inspired by modern technological advancements and

the necessary adaptations resulting from colonization. Those changes are explained as hybridity and acculturation.

Bhabha's concept of "third space" offers an analytical foundation for the interpretation of Alexie's survival theory and advocates for a broader approach to examining his works. Alienation among Alexie's characters, followed by a survival experience in which cultural negotiations are manifested, is an articulation of Bhabha's main concepts of hybridity due to cultural contacts, ambivalence towards an identity construction for the reasons of simulations and mainstream narratives, and the use of mimicry to argue differences. Bhabha's argument of agency within such negotiations is evident when the characters challenge their representations in colonial narratives and get themselves a way out. Likewise, the third space theory helps define the idea of survival as a process rather than an absolute end. It also validates the techniques that the characters use. To modify an alienated self-identification, Alexie demonstrates a deconstruction of mainstream narratives and simulations to argue their negative influence on the lives of his characters. It is "a disclosure of [the] *rules of recognition,* as Bhabha says (*LC* 110). Those contextualized arguments develop and give alternative accounts of cultures. In doing so Alexie facilitates reconciliation with the true self. "The narratorial voice articulates the narcissistic, colonialist demand that it should be addressed directly, that the Other should authorize the self, recognize its priority, fulfill its outlines, replete, indeed repeat, its references and still its fractured gaze" (Bhabha, *LC* 98). Through this process, the characters gain negotiating autonomy. Whereas Allen focuses mainly on the articulation of alienation in literature, Alexie's characters challenge that feeling and bring in notions of survival.

After identifying the three main points discussed in this chapter (alienation, the development of a survival mode using imagination and mimicry, and the articulation of post-colonial cultural negotiation) in the works under consideration, I eventually focus my interpretations by emphasizing the main survival insights generated by the alienated characters. As a result, the concept of the alienation survivor is employed to characterize the new outcomes of identity descriptions, which are apparent by the end of Alexie's works. Certainly, the concept of survival manifests itself in a multitude of ways, each serving as an aesthetic aspect that elevates Alexie's works. Those who are alienated yet survive are those who work harder to achieve their own social and economic objectives. Survival means fulfillment.

Thomas Builds-the-Fire is the first character to be analyzed as an example of alienation survivors in Alexie's *Reservation Blues*. The stories of Thomas, a recurring character and a storyteller on the Spokane reservation, have been known and appreciated by numerous readers because each of his depictions is unique to bring in more ideas about those unnoticed struggles of the marginalized in American society. *Reservation Blues* is selected because, like all of the other texts I study, it contains the main element listed in my previously stated theory of analysis, which focuses on the character's creation of a third space via a mode of survival that allows him to identify the location of the contemporary American Indian cultures. Thomas suffers alienation due to delusions that disturb his understanding of the old storytelling culture of indigenous nations. In the development of his character to be a survivor, the protagonist recognizes himself as a person capable of transforming his attitude and identity to create a musical band. This desire empowered by his imagination and anger becomes his motive to adopt a post-reservation mindset. As a lead singer, Thomas grasps the opportunity to create a distinct style of American Indian blues—a genre he refers to as reservation blues— that helps him get money and recognition of his art. Through its on/off-reservation performances, the band makes its songs inventive and rich owing to the hybridity of styles where genres and techniques of performances from different cultures incorporate. Nevertheless, in the process of writing musical lyrics, Thomas is represented as a cultural negotiator, confronting the persistent colonial influence on the American Indian daily life experiences.

Chapter Two

Verbalizing the Blues: The Stories of Thomas Builds-the-Fire in *Reservation Blues*

In her reflection on Stuart Hall's idea of the cultural identity of colonized nations, Maria Moss states that "cultures that have undergone (colonial) transformation and now attempt to regain what they consider their 'lost identity' will fail to do so because the concept of a 'true' or 'national' identity is itself a falsehood" (180). This notion of being nostalgic dominates not only the novel *Reservation Blues* (1995) but also all of Alexie's works. Thomas Builds-the-Fire, the main character, is a modern storyteller living on the Spokane reservation. Thomas's themes, strategies, and styles differ from those used by traditional storytellers which make them unsatisfying for the audience, or even for himself. The evolution of storytelling, as Thomas represents, which can be linked to temporal shifts in external factors, such as social, cultural, and environmental transformations that affect how American Indians live and interact, introduces a challenge to the assumed fixed old genre of storytelling. Therefore, when evaluating his stories, Thomas and his audience struggle to comprehend such cultural developments.

Reservation Blues unfolds in the temporal context of "the one hundred and eleven years since the creation of the Spokane Indian Reservation in 1881" (Alexie, *RB 7*). Even though the identification of time in this manner appears to be a literary device for aesthetic purposes, later in the novel, readers receive the impression that people on the Spokane reservation are still living in the past, with their minds seeking their traditional culture. This attitude is emphasized when they identify Thomas as a misfit storyteller. The charge leads to the assumption of a hierarchical difference between traditional and modern storytellers, making the latter distrustful of their storytelling skills. This conclusion is supported by the lack of significant connections between Thomas's narration of sorrowful tales, such as genocide, poverty, family loss, and similar other themes of pain, and the failure to survive, as opposed to the public portrayal of simulated old storytellers in charge of being spiritual healers with profound insights on a variety of subjects, such as explaining natural phenomena, the creation of the world, or telling stories of past events. Moreover, the bad situation of people living on the reservation becomes evidence that the reservations are symbols of geographical marginality that have been used for marginalization. Living in such conditions and being ambivalent about how he should react to his identification, Thomas feels alienated from his ancestors and, therefore, from the other Spokane who want him

to be a healer like old-day storytellers. Moreover, he faces a personal struggle with poverty, for which the reservation offers limited financial and emotional assistance.

As clarified in 1.1.4, for Alexie, the idea of survival is attributed to the synergistic interplay between the emotional state of rage and the cognitive process of imagining. In outrage over all of his misery, along with the horrific experiences of the other Spokane, all of which result from a long history of settler colonialism, Thomas decides to use his skills to create stories that work as lyrics to perform an American Indian version of African American blues. This creation is the process I call "verbalizing the blues." Regarding his vocal abilities, Thomas lacks the characteristics of a skilled vocalist. The main emphasis lies in his proficiency in transforming spoken narratives into musical compositions, which he names "reservation blues." Accordingly, the musical mode becomes his way to survive and to get some of his interests, like money. Thomas's turning point, as explained in "Breaking through the Reservation of the Mind," happens when he decides to try something new with his skills. He decides to be a singer on the road with the magical guitar. After the transformation into becoming a lead singer who prefers singing the blues, Thomas's performances facilitate the transmission of the blues from venues primarily occupied by Americans and African Americans to those tavern stages in some American Indian reservations in Seattle. The lyrics, however, come out as sad as his stories are. In becoming popular, Thomas gains an increased passion to bring forth cultural negotiations contemplating the survival of American Indians or exposing atrocities of colonialism, marginality, stereotypes, injustice, death, and death. The musical display of Thomas's stories is his third space. I do not want to say that the stories, when Thomas merely narrates them in their oral presentation, are not also third spaces of cultural negotiation because they are. I emphasize the musical mode because it leads to the character's survival. Thomas's musical endeavor is discernibly rooted in a pursuit of emotional catharsis. As in Silko's *Ceremony*, where she symbolizes the idea that ceremonies transform as they cannot remain unchanged across multiple temporal contexts, yet still persist as integral components of American Indian traditions, Alexie's representation of Thomas is an articulation that storytelling may operate as songs that verbalize the reservation sad blues in 1992. In their lyrical structure, Thomas's stories get more attention. They, therefore, help him to survive by getting money and have a better opportunity to make new decisions. These notions will be elaborated in the chapter.

The chapter is divided into three sections to argue the transformation of Thomas's identity. In "Storytelling: Old and Modern Cultural Acts," I explain how the divide produced by the hierarchical split of American Indian cultures makes Thomas feel alienated. Among the Spokane, Thomas's stories are not seen as an ongoing heritage, and therefore, they cannot be identified as a transformation of a cultural act into a modern hybrid method of expressing an indigenous perspective. Thomas is described as a misfit, and he lives in an ambivalent state of identity. Luckily, he chooses the musical mode of the blues to be the motive for his imagination and an outlet for his anger. The second section, "Indigenizing the Blues," elaborates on Thomas's recognition that music can reflect sadness in the stories of his people. This recognition gives him a sense of power over his audience. It also explains how a hybridized popular genre, like the blues, can be "Indigenized." As a contemporary American Indian singer on stage, Thomas controls a third space of cultural negotiations. The third section, "Coyote as a Cultural Symbol," focuses on Thomas's use of a cultural figure as the name of his band. Thomas's interests in getting money and attention are also specified as the motives for survival. The transition of stories into musical compositions garners Thomas's recognition of himself as a modern kind of storyteller. Moreover, in becoming a lead singer, he gets economic benefits and self-development in matters of identity construction.

2.1 Storytelling: Old and Modern Cultural Acts[31]

Alexie demonstrates new visionary approaches in depicting the cultural heritage of storytelling in his literary compositions, leading to the emergence of representations that have been missing before. This involves components derived from traditional Indigenous storytelling practices and modern literary structures, using influences from multiple cultural productions of artistic trends. In her introduction to the 2012 edition of *Storyteller* (1981), Leslie Marmon Silko argues that almost all significant communication involves narration or story. To her, storytelling has no limitation in finding a means of expression. "When we explain ourselves or our reasoning in a situation when we describe what we remember of an experience, we organize the experience into a narrative structure to communicate the information" (Silko xvii). In this context, storytelling is described as adaptable and open to development. It is an art of survival rather than a tradition

[31] "Old" and "Modern" are used to establish a temporal comparison.

from the past.[32] The thought of storytelling being old or traditional does not inherently indicate a state of permanence or a dearth of adaptability. It should be noted that modern literary productions like autobiographies, diaries, lyrics, or poetry are all productions of that same art of storytelling, as Silko clarifies. Storytelling is the act of presenting stories, and stories are works of imagination that can take whatever form or theme the storyteller chooses.

According to Bruchac, "stories have always been at the heart of all . . . Native cultures," regardless of their categorization as myths and legends, or in being simply identified as oral traditions by the mainstream (35). "Stories were never 'just a story,' in the sense of being merely entertainment. They were and remain a powerful tool for teaching. Lesson stories were used by every American Indian nation as a way of socializing the young and strengthening the values of their tribal nation for both young and old" (Bruchac 35). Bruchac adds that Indigenous stories have certain classes, themes, and, sometimes, specific time zones designated for their narration and that each culture has its way of categorizing these aspects. So, storytelling is a practice involving both: the sharing of feelings and experiences and the transmission of knowledge from one generation to the next. However, this cultural practice has been abused, not just by mainstream narratives that idealize and limit indigenous ancient ways and habits, but also by other mediums such as the film industry (Bruchac 38). From a similar attitude, Alexie aims to depict the detrimental impact of misconceptions of storytelling in *Reservation Blues*. Thomas's ability to imagine stories puts him at odds with traditional storytellers of the past. Within this frame of scenes, Alexie confronts a hierarchical division that is designed to favor the ancient and reject the modern.

The understanding of the features of storytellers among the Spokane people is influenced by mainstream representations of the "Indian" storyteller in simulations. It is so because, as Vizenor argues, non-Native actors who played those roles of the Indigenous could make it very convincing to be real. "Movie actors used the coincidence of their native countenance, and some were more believable in the movies than real natives at universities" (Vizenor, *Fugitive Poses* 89). In *Smoke Signals*, Alexie brings this idea to light when Victor suggests that Thomas is faking his storytelling abilities. He could have been inspired by movies and adapted parts of their visions and simulations of storytellers, resulting in him being an artificial storyteller. On the bus to Phoenix,

[32] As Brill de Ramirez states "Silko explicitly experiments with different forms of literary craft in one coherent volume that articulates the voice of a storyteller in oral, poetic, prose, and even pictorial form" ("The Historical and Literary Role of Folklore" 333).

Victor confronts Thomas: "You're always trying to sound like some damn medicine man or something. I mean, how many times have you seen *Dances With Wolves*? A hundred, maybe two hundred times?" (qtd. in Cox "This is What it Means" 81). Due to that, Thomas's identity as a storyteller intersects with movie simulations. Simulations of "Indian" storytellers associate their performance with ideals of spirituality, purity, tradition, and powerful narratives that can always answer questions and solve problems.

Thomas's intersecting image of old and modern storytellers, along with the popular idea of "Indian" society as hierarchical, prevents him and the Spokane from understanding his account of stories. Alexie's portrayal of Big Mom, on the other hand, inspires Thomas. Big Mom is a storyteller, and while she is described as being comparable to traditional storytellers, she admires Thomas' talent and sees modern storytelling as part of a continuum of cultural practices that demonstrate survival and adaptation. Yet, Big Mom is just one person, all other characters see Thomas as unfit. Alexie demonstrates the common existence of blind reliance on simulations that ignore the revolutionary progress brought about by modernity where books, science, and technology take the role of explaining natural phenomena and recoding history. The desire to hold onto the past and resist the present mostly stems from the influence of limitations of a colonized mindset imposed by imperialist ideologies, which magnify disparities and treat them as factual. Modern stories, to the majority of Alexie's characters, cannot employ the same methodological procedures as older ones, leaving Thomas alienated. Big Mom has little chance to be like Thomas and suffers from alienation because she is more of a legendary character of an immortal who enjoys her solitary life rather than seeking survival. She tries to inspire Thomas, and other Spokane, to have their path in the hybrid modernity of their world.

The case of Thomas elucidates the state of in-betweenness that has been posited by Bhabha. "What is implicit in . . . the subaltern [claim to presence or autonomy] . . . is a strategy of ambivalence in the structure of identification that occurs precisely in the elliptical *in-between*, where the shadow of the other falls upon the self" (Bhabha, *LC* 59-60). Bhabha's approach accurately anticipates the perplexity experienced by American Indians, "especially when [their] own stories and traditions, [their] family structures, and even [their] original languages have been denied to [them]" (Bruchac 34). Modern storytellers, like Thomas, find it challenging to acknowledge that cultures exhibit continuity rather than mere dissolution, as argued by Bhabha in the context of ambivalence. This experience recalls Neal McLeod distinction of ideological

diaspora among indigenous groups where they experience "alienation from collective memories as found in tribal stories" (Shackleton 69). The marginalized reality is always compared to their past; the two images intersect and disrupt identity definition because the old image is articulated to emphasize failure to live up to the authenticity of their forefathers. This dilemma leads to the rejection of current accomplishments, which frequently occur in response to ambiguity or misrepresentations.

In his description of traditional storytellers, Daniel Grassian states that "traditionally Native cultures regard the storyteller as invested with special powers, in 'Special Delivery'" (*Understanding Sherman Alexie* 18). Both of those features are ironically reflected in Alexie's characterization of Thomas. Usually, Alexie refrains from providing a detailed description of the characters. The author, however, concentrates on distinct characteristics through which he represents a concept or a theme to the readers. Thomas's creation in his mother's womb is explained to underline that the act of making stories in its contemporary manifestation of American Indian lives and perspectives is simply an immense burden on the individual, as they are laden with grief. "He'd caught some disease in the womb that forced him to tell stories. The weight of those stories bowed his legs and bent his spine a bit" (Alexie, *RB* 10). In this description, Alexie establishes the idea that Thomas's skills of being a storyteller are endowed during creation; they are genetic. However, Thomas's modern visions are distinguished from those of previous eras. They have a physical weight which represents the emotional and psychological burden carried by the American Indians born with similar devastating circumstances of life on the reservation as those depicted in the novel. The bending of Thomas's legs and spine suggests that the weight of the stories has taken a toll on his well-being and emotional state. Stories are creations of the mind, and Thomas's imagination will always involve a sorrowful narrative centered around American Indians.

Sorrow, feelings of defeat, and uncertainty which are exhibited in Thomas's stories make them different from the anticipated old wisdom that typically facilitates emotional regeneration for both the speaker and the audience. The delivery of old storytellers is special as they provide answers, but Thomas's stories lack a sense of optimism. Moreover, his presentations miss the same level of organization in terms of subjects and themes as storytellers did in the past. As a result, Thomas does not get his people's attention, so, when no one is there to listen "Thomas shared his stories with pine trees" (Alexie, *RB* 31). Thomas's stories bring back sad scenes where Indigenous

peoples are victimized, such as the church's role in their ethnic cleansing, the slaughtered Ghost Dancers, and tribal stories of dead children. Thomas also tells stories of African slaves with the details of sweat, blood, and cotton. As those stories articulate, the enduring hostile effects of colonialism on American Indians find their way into Thomas's memory. Thomas's audiences are frequently irritated by those memories because it makes them feel powerless to change or resist in comparison to their brave forefathers, who are mostly simulated as warriors who have their ways of being champions. Even though stories of the past are nothing less than tragedies of genocide, it is those modern themes that justify the unhappy audiences. Thomas's stories reflect on contemporary issues like the tragic realities on the reservation, such as the stories he tells about Victor's dead father and his own father's drunk habits. "Thomas was a storyteller that nobody wanted to listen to. That's like being a dentist in a town where everybody has false teeth" (Alexie, *Blasphemy* 64). Alexie uses this simile to stress that everyone feels pain, but the point is that there is no longer any hope of getting better. In other words, having a doctor around is no longer a help. Thomas's audiences strive to escape reality by embracing forgetfulness or closing their ears to these narratives. They even try to repress Thomas's stories at times because "those stories hung in [their] clothes and hair like smoke, and no amount of laundry soap or shampoo washed them out" (Alexie, *RB* 19). To stop him, Victor and Junior engage in the recurring act of beating Thomas, or they use the offer of a drink. These two characters represent the collective hardship experienced by American Indians. They, including other characters from the Spokane reservation, acknowledge Thomas's ability for storytelling. However, they disdain to engage in conversations centered around his devastating reflections or serving as audience. This is due to a sense of helplessness that individuals experience in the face of the hardships of life, which is often portrayed in Thomas's narratives. Consequently, Thomas's audiences perceive that American Indian storytelling is an outdated practice.

The shift from traditional cultural standards in the context of storytelling highlights the impact of modernity on cultural traditions, which the Spokane community perceives as an unpleasant break from traditional healing methods. Despite what is stated in the genetic description of Thomas's fate of becoming a storyteller, a seamless and enchanting part of his communication, his narrations remain "unheard and misconstrued" (Archuleta 46). He is identified as "the misfit storyteller of the Spokane Tribe" (Alexie, *RB* 10). Not only do the Spokane alienate Thomas, but he also experiences the same sentiment when stories fail to assist him. "[Thomas] wanted a story

to heal the wounds, but he knew that his stories never healed anything" (Alexie, *RB* 11). In this case of being depressed and alienated, and like his poor reservation, Thomas's stories are the result of a "starved" imagination (Grassian, *Understanding Sherman Alexie*19). They are products of a mind that has been exhausted, and, as a result, their healing power is decreasing.

As it has been clarified in the previous discussion, alienation in *Reservation Blues* is attributed to mainstream narratives and simulations that reinforce hierarchical structures in modern American Indian communities, like that of old storytellers versus modern storytellers. Those narratives create barriers to the advancement of any proposal that embraces cultural hybridization, continuity, and, thus, survival. In mainstream accounts, storytellers are shown as having idealized attributes and a total devotion to spiritual practices and manifestations, which contrasts with Thomas's actions. Despite missing the conventional traits of a traditional storyteller, Thomas persists in the role, motivated not by the mastery of the trade but by the consolation it brings to his solitude. Storytelling becomes a companion, filling his sense of loneliness and occupying his spare time with images that, although not fitting with the old images of storytellers, serve as a personal refuge.

Thomas is a figure of a storyteller who shows up a lot in Alexie's works. Through this method of characterization, the author creates a complex and changing image of the character, which helps the plot develop in a way that makes the readers feel the character's alienation in different representations. Likewise, Thomas's frequent appearances in Alexie's works shows different ways that the power to imagine stories can be used to survive. It is done so to deepen the contextual circumstance associated with modern storytellers. Thus, my interpretation makes cross-referencing between these works, offering an understanding of overarching themes maintained throughout the author's body of work. In different texts, Thomas is attributed either heroic or wretched qualities, depending upon the specific episodes and audience. In "The Trial of Thomas Builds-the-Fire," for example, Thomas is identified as "a storytelling fetish" and "dangerous" and once he gets placed in a cell because he announces that he can change the tribal vision (Alexie, *TLR* 68). In this scene, Thomas disturbs or opposes the current order, leading to some type of political struggle against blaming and categorizing those who are disadvantaged.[33] The prevailing concern in mainstream discourse regarding discussions pertaining to marginalized individuals

[33] Thomas, in this story, "engages in a process of storytelling, challenging so-called Indian crimes and providing evidence for Euro-American crimes silenced in official Washington state histories" (Archuleta 44).

modifying their perspective arises from an underlying presumption that these individuals are regarded as subject to distortions and lacking the ability to perceive a decolonized reality. Hence, the author undertakes the effort to free his characters from preconceived notions pertaining to their respective nations. It is therefore critical that, in *Reservation Blues*, Thomas alters his delivery of the stories in order to assist his audience in changing their perception. This is a key step toward developing a mindset that goes beyond the concept of reservation, as I assert in my reading of Alexie's categorization of survival.

According to Marie-Laure Ryan's description of transmedia storytelling, storytellers can modify common texts to narrate different stories about a given storyworld. Like the Greek myths and the biblical stories, each of them is disturbed in multiple modes of art and media, stories can evolve and pass from one media to another (Ryan 362). "This kind of multimedia treatment is typically reserved for those narratives that are considered foundational for the identity of a group" (Ryan 362). Accordingly, in taking those stories from their oral nature to be lyrics for blues, Thomas is giving those stories value. A "transmedial storytelling . . . operates across many different media" (Ryan 366). Even in the absence of acknowledgment, Thomas keeps his stories alive with his personal admiration to the talent as something that gives him a relation with ancestors. The stories are derived from a fusion of his affective state of anger and his creative imagination. Prior to crafting a tale, Thomas habitually engages in the practice of closing his eyes, thereby facilitating the visualization of various scenes and enhancing the energy of his imaginative powers. Due to the thematic presence of oppression and injustice in these scenes, Thomas's imaginative capacity is imbued with a profound sense of anger that emanates from a resistance-driven sentiment, effectively conveying the particular circumstances, triggers, and underlying causes at play. The plots of the stories are introspective and have the ability to promote an improved awareness of what has been going on, although the majority of them are horrific and terrible. However, in a strategic shift in the mindset, empowered with the realization that storytelling can help him improve his circumstances if he can transform their media to that of music, Thomas makes a pragmatic decision to write songs. This shift allows him to hybridize his storytelling skills but also opened new performance avenues on different stages inside and outside the Spokane reservation. Instead of delivering his stories to a limited audience on the Spokane reservation that are not paying him, Thomas decides to sing his lyrics and get compensated reaching out to many other reservations.

Thomas, due to the absence of his mother, the sad condition of his drunk father, poverty, and the ability to tell stories, has too much anger and imagination. As argued in 1.3, these two variables are enough to help Thomas survive when they come out of a post-reservation mindset. To transcend a detrimental and subjugated mentality and survive within the occupation of a modern American Indian storyteller, Alexie affords Thomas the opportunity to engage in an endeavor involving the utilization of his stories in the context of the blues musical genre. Thomas "longs for a traditional magic that is endangered, crushed under hundreds of years of bad faith and bad luck and bad management" (Busch n.p.). Following a dialogue with Robert Johnson, a mythical figure of an African American blues singer who displays indications of emotional distress, Thomas becomes the recipient of Johnson's musical device, a magical guitar that can play the blues as well as other music genres.[34] In her discussion of the use of Johnson's character in novel, Patricia R. Schroeder states that he "personifies a different ideal: the value of crossing cultural boundaries" (113). The aforementioned guitar is accompanied by a paranormal voice attribute, referred to as the Gentleman. The Gentleman possesses the capability to bestow humans with the capacity to utilize power or discover inspiration in their musical renditions. The Gentleman engages in a discourse with Thomas, who afterward elects to partake in musical performances alongside Victor and Junior, perceiving it as a means to attain a future characterized by wealth and general well-being. Throughout the course of making this decision, Thomas recognizes the profound influence of blues music in eliciting recollections of his mother's harmonious vocalizations, so he gains a comprehensive, generally humorous, understanding of the inherent importance of music in his own existence. "Thomas heard music in everything, even in money" (Alexie, *RB* 27). As Alexie theorizes in his survival equations, the key to point out the characters' survival is to recognize their constructive hope of changing a bad situation. It is a mode of survival. In the present circumstances that Thomas lives in, storytelling can only be what it is: an oral narration in which too much agony and pain are expressed. Yet, Thomas makes the decision to overcome his nostalgia of becoming a model of an old storyteller and modernize his skills into writing songs. To be on stage as a singer entertaining the sad audience, he gets attention not only

[34] Real blues vocalist Robert Johnson (1911–1938) immediately comes to mind. Johnson, a blues singer and guitarist, often performed on the large cotton estates outside of town, which were the real core of the Delta's wealth and power and employed tens of thousands of black tenant farmers and day laborers. He sang about being pursued by wicked hounds and Muddy Waters, who gave the Delta blues a rock-and-roll beat and gave it new life. (Palmer)

from the Spokane but from others as well. Attention becomes a thing that satisfy Thomas's interests and therefore he becomes more involved into this career to direct his anger and imagination towards it.

Thomas's journey of transforming his stories into lyrics and then performing those lyrics on stage makes him feel the power of making efforts to be heard and that hybridizing the storytelling tradition is not a bad idea. The blues music environment, therefore, conceptualizes Thomas's third space of cultural negotiation. Those stories that become lyrics are expressions of his anger and imagination, and thus they relate stories about American Indians in places where "Indians" cannot be found. Such a survival experience helps Thomas to negotiate his identity from within a hybrid reflection of culture. It then aids him in surviving, an objective perceived in him communicating personal interests and possible economic advances. Through this musical mode, Thomas engages in cultural dialogues, seeking liberty from oppressive racial dichotomies and cultural hierarchies.

2.2 Transformation: Indigenizing the Blues

Reservation Blues makes frequent references to the musical genre of the blues, with a particular emphasis on celebrated vocalists from both American and African American origins. In this emphasis on its hybridity, Alexie utilizes the blues genre as a concept to portray the profound grief endured by marginalized American Indians, while also emphasizing the idea that the merging of cultures or hybridization does not diminish cultural differences.[35] Thomas's stories, serving as the inspiration for his lyrics, primarily explore the sad realities experienced by American Indians. In addition, the lyrics, resembling the blues genre, exemplify Bhabha's concept of hybridization as the natural evolution of a culture, which inherently maintains its distinctive features. Consequently, Thomas's choice to sing the blues does not undermine his identity as an American Indian storyteller. Thomas's blues are his third space of cultural negotiation.

In *The Blues*, Elijah Wald discusses the correlation between the blues musical phenomenon and the historical backdrop of African American slaves who sang while carrying out hard labor on plantations. Wald asserts that the vocal textures of the slaves' singing surpassed mere spoken words, instead resembling hollers or moans (12). The sad voice patterns have been modified for

[35] On November 22-23,2003, a symposium was offered under the title of "Boarding School Blues: Revisiting the American Indian Boarding School Experireances," sonsered by the University of California, Riverside, and the Sherman Indian School Museum. The main themes discussed were about boarding schools and the way they gave the American Indians the blues due to illness and death. All articles are published in Boarding School Blues, 2006.

musical performances and complemented by lyrical compositions, becoming more favored by African American singers for their entertainment value and financial benefits. Accordingly,

> The blues is [described] as a movement away from abstraction that helps us stay in *sentient relationship with ourselves and others* as well as in *relationship to the events and experiences of* our *lives*. The blues is about maintaining a close relationship to one's emotional life; becoming intimately acquainted with one's emotions and embracing what is painful, but also embracing what is ultimately enriching and meaningful. Blues music helps make life more bearable, often under unbearable circumstances. It creates and *tells stories*, *builds community*, and functionally *provides a bridge* between the poles of relatedness and alienation. (Winborn 108; emphasis added)

The remark mentioned above highlights phrases that precisely explain the third space theory in the context of blues performances. So, the performance venues function as physical environments that enable the expression of emotions, identities, and cultures. While this genre provides a refuge from the binaries that marginalized slaves, it also allows them to challenge and critique the harsh conditions resulting from slavery. When performed by African Americans, many blues songs tell stories of hardship, struggle, and resilience, reflecting the experiences of slavery and marginalization. Because of the sad tune of the performances, they became known as "the blues," a phrase coined by Ma Rainey.[36] Consequently, blues performances have become known for their gloomy mood, regardless of the thematic content. And because slavery may be absent from the history of other racial/ethnic groups who wish to imitate the African-American blues, they stress the notion that it is a performance of a tragic lyrical story.

It is necessary to acknowledge that the significant rise in the popularity of the blues has been attributed to the African American tendency to integrate techniques from diverse musical cultures. Therefore, the blues become an example of musical hybridity.[37] Another key factor to be noted in the context regarding the hybridity of the blues is the link between the process of recording and the widespread appeal of this genre; "It was records, though, that made blues a dominant force in the African American entertainment business" (Wald 21).

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[36]Ma Rainey, whose full name was Gertrude Pridgett Rainey, was a pioneering American blues singer and one of the earliest African American women to become a professional recording artist. She was born on April 26, 1886, in Columbus, Georgia, and died on December 22, 1939, in Rome, Georgia. Ma Rainey is often referred to as the "Mother of the Blues" due to her significant contributions to the genre (Lieb).

[37] This musical genre is notable for its hybrid nature, with African American singers using Western music in its creation.

In his analysis of the historical origins of blues music, Wald emphasizes its lasting cultural association with African American heritage, despite its active incorporation of diverse musical traditions and its emergence as a hybrid cultural phenomenon. The popularity of the blues songs and minstrelsy shows "clearly drew on older African American rural traditions" (Wald 20). The combination and progression of musical styles used within the blues have also functioned as a paradigm for subsequent genres, such as rock music, and have been adopted by a wide range of white performers, leading to a transcultural impact. Notably, the collaboration between African Americans and Americans gave rise to the African American blues genre, as well as the rise of professional American blues singers. This survival experience is both modern and hybrid. Ultimately, as Wald states, "black customers would be happy to hear their favorite songs performed by white superstars like Sophie Tucker" (22).

In line with my proposal, Thomas transforms his stories into lyrical compositions seeking the chance to expose a world that transcends his struggle with hierarchical allusions to storytellers and to get himself involved in modern representations of the American Indian stories, such as those works produced in Silko's *Storyteller*. Thomas, however, decides to try the blues. "Those blues created memories for the Spokanes, but they refused to claim them. Those blues lit up a new road, but the Spokanes pulled out their old maps. Those blues churned up generations of anger and pain: car wrecks, suicides, murders. Those blues were ancient, aboriginal, indigenous" (Alexie, *RB* 161). Alexie asserts, in this metaphorical contemplation, that the blues represent narratives that are plentiful, sad, and modern, serving as reminders of the history of American Indians. From the author's perspective, the Spokanes are unable to find the right direction because they keep using old maps. An old map is something like a persistence to have a 20th-century storyteller in a parallel delivery of his ancestors 500 years ago. When trying to write his first song, Thomas "turned on the television and watched The Sound of Music on channel four. Julie Andrews put him to sleep for the seventy-sixth time, and neither story nor song came in his dreams" (Alexie, *RB* 46). To be a good singer, as Big Mom once proposed, Thomas has to use his own instruments. Thomas finds inspiration in his experience of poverty; "as his growling stomach provided the rhythm, Thomas sat again with his bass guitar, wrote the first song, and called it "Reservation Blues" (Alexie, *RB* 47). "Reservation Blues" shows that Thomas does not perform traditional African American blues music. Instead, he creates his unique style of music that addresses the experiences of living on a reservation. This signifies his ability to create a sense of identity through the medium of blues.

Thomas's music is a piece of reservation music that reflects that same thematic scope of the African American blues. Thomas's discourse in each song, which will be discussed a little more in the following subsection, aligns with my post-colonial analytical framework. In essence, Thomas's songs and performances both question and represent the consequences of cultural contact.

Alexie's depiction of Thomas's mode of survival as musical highlights the concept that cultural contact in vocal arts is essential for survival and that American Indians, as survivors, have encountered this phenomenon in the past. In his new role of being a lead singer, Thomas takes artistic responsibility for developing a modern method of passing cultural stories and demonstrating survival through the process of singing the blues. The songs effectively convey themes that address relevant modern concerns, including but not limited to alienation, racism, poverty, and the historical betrayal experienced by Indigenous nations due to colonialism. Thomas is not the first person who represents a generation of American Indian singers interested in modernizing their performances; his mother had already been engaged in such a transformation years ago. "Thomas remembered how she used to hold him late at night, rocking him into sleep with stories and songs. Sometimes she sang traditional Spokane Indian songs. Other times, she sang Broadway show tunes or Catholic hymns, which were quite similar" (Alexie, *RB* 26). The mother's act of lulling Thomas to sleep with a blend of popular musical cultures helps and empowers him to understand that modernity and hybridity are cultural. The fusion of the mother's lulls has shaped Thomas's identity and serves as a vivid representation of the joy and aesthetics that are felt while the performer indigenizes those arts and drags their common ground to add a contribution that enriches their cultural heritage. However, Alexie explains that all three styles sounded similar. They do because the singer is the same person. In other words, in all kinds of mimicries, the person who performs is the one who controls the presentation and makes it his/her own. It is impossible to assume that all three mentioned genres are the same but Thomas's mother added her cultural perspective, "slippages," which make all three performances sound similar.[38] In the context of post-colonialism, cultures are often perceived as distinct, even though people frequently integrate new cultural elements into their lives while maintaining a connection to their roots.

[38] Slippages will be clarified more in the next section.

In his journey with the musical performances, Thomas makes cultural arguments which I will discuss in the following section. However, in the remainder of this section, I want to make references to other cultural insights highlighted in the novel's narration that are not related directly to Thomas's scope of dialogue. When Coyote Springs becomes famous, Spokane Tribal Council Chairman David WalksAlong writes a letter that comes out in the Wellpinit Rawhide Press, highlighting a number of important issues that Alexie usually cites in his description of causes of failure among his American Indian characters. First, WalksAlong emphasizes the expectation that band members should be "representative of the Spokane tribe" (Alexie, *RB* 162). Second, he expresses his respect for other indigenous tribes, such as the Flatheads, but questions the presence of their representatives in the assumed Spokane band. Third, he raises concerns about how well the Spokane members are representing the tribe. "Do we really want other people to think we are like this band? Do we really want people to think that the Spokanes are a crazy storyteller, a couple of irresponsible drunks, a pair of Flathead Indians, and two white women? I don't think so" (Alexie, *RB* 162). WalksAlong is simply jealous of the band's attention, and his statements demonstrate his inability to recognize optimism or appreciation for anyone working to better themselves. The message of WalksAlong is a clear representation of a desperate attempt to be traditional, which confines American Indians to the roles of sober warriors or storytellers who usually express prejudice toward the entire white race. WalksAlong's opinions, which mirror the widespread thought among Spokane residents and indicate mistrust against development, are therefore not blamed but rather examined critically. White Hawk, a Spokane saxophone musician, for example, failed in his career because no one, not even Big Mom, could persuade him that he was not destined to fight as a simulated warrior.

The argument over cultural conceptions of identity becomes more complex when other reservation residents declare their disapproval of the band as new and inappropriate, using colonial imposed ideas as the reason. As it is narrated in the novel, an elderly Spokane woman despises Coyote Springs because she, as a Christian, believes music is a harmful act. "The Christians don't like your devil's music. The traditional don't like your white man's music. The Tribal Council don't like you're more famous than they are," said the old woman (Alexie, *RB* 166). Christianity was not an American Indian religion, neither Thomas is Christian. While being unaware of its inclusive implications, the tribe exhibits reluctance to fully embrace hybridity as a reality of cultural continuity, even though they are all hybrid generations of cultural contacts. Alexie wants

to underline that people are highly selective in accepting the effect of modernity, therefore Thomas' pursuit of success and economic benefits is resisted. Consequently, continuous "fights broke out between the supporters and enemies of Coyote Springs" (Alexie, *RB* 172). Due to those announcements, Thomas's experience of ambivalence and in-betweenness continues; he "felt the weight of God, the reservation, and all the stories between" (Alexie, *RB* 166). The reservation is intended to relate to traditions, as God or Christianity are thought to be symbols of modernity. Internal conflict between the two manifests as questions and conflicts of identity passed down through generations of American Indians as a result of pressures to adhere to either side.

According to Bhabha's theory of cultural negotiations, the relevance of the third space is demonstrated on an individual level, as in the example of Thomas, but its advantages can lead to broader positive effects. Despite many concerns raised by the Spokane, many others become fans of Coyote Springs. "But the reservation was there, had always been there, and would still be there, waiting for Coyote Springs's return from New York City. Every Indian, every leaf of grass, and every animal and insect waited collectively" (Alexie, *RB* 201). Thomas's quest for survival is hard yet necessary as it involves tearing down colonial ideologies and subsequently decolonizing of the mind. Elizabeth Archuleta examines the way Thomas effortlessly modifies his stories based on his interactions with others in her analysis of "The Trial of Thomas Builds-the-Fire." Archuleta suggests that "narrative is interactive, allowing the storyteller to respond to the audience" (56). Alexie's focus on this aspect emphasizes the fact that communication serves as a means for storytellers to actively participate and construct their identity, and bring about change. After narrating a story of dead ponies "Thomas opened his eyes and found that most of the Indians in the courtroom wept and wanted to admit defeat. He then closed his eyes and continued the story: "but I was not going to submit without a struggle. I would continue the war" (Alexie, *TLR* 70). Within this scene, Thomas's alteration of his story appears to be a natural and instinctive process, implying that through communication, storytellers may be refining their storytelling skills, deepening their understanding of their own narratives, and accordingly evolve as active and inspiring individuals to keep an entire community from falling apart.

Reservation Blues has a colonial binary context that Alexie consistently highlights: the relationship between his characters residing on reservations and the settler-Americans residing beyond the reservations. When Coyote Springs is given the chance to produce an audio CD in New York City with the assistance of Cavalry Records, their performance falls below the expected level

of ability, prompting the company representatives to break their contract. This situation echoes the countless broken treaties between indigenous nations and settler-Americans. In this particular moment, Alexie directs his anger against both parties, resulting in a complex search for a settlement. Victor and Junior undergo intense emotional pain and engage in harmful behavior when they expect to be rejected. This behavior has been linked to the stereotype of savagery associated with American Indians. Based on Alexie's survival hypothesis, Victor and Junior are unsuccessful in achieving their goal to survive due to their intense and uncontrolled anger. Moreover, the studio episode mirrors what WalksAlong predicted for Coyote Springs' future: "My grandfather always told me you can take a boy off the reservation, but you cannot take the reservation off the boy" (Alexie, *RB* 207). WalksAlong, who displays himself as traditional, is deceived into believing that the reservation and its poor facilities are a true representation of his heritage and that leaving it is an impossible task. However, Victor and Junior fail to anticipate that the Cavalry Records are not the 7th Cavalry forces that have been used by Anglo-American to seize the land and kill Indigenous nations, thereby making WalksAlong's words come true. The recording company which is looking for talented people of American Indian ancestry is Alexie's representation of survival opportunities to be used. The root cause of the failure is not attributed to a deficiency in talent, but rather to Victor and Junior's impatience in sustaining their negotiations. Before breaking the treaty, the band was provided with support for their trip, hotel arrangements, and the possibility of organizing a rehearsal session may have been discussed under different conditions.

It is relevant to note that the episodes with the members of Cavalry Records do not escape Alexie's smart implementation of his critical examination of history, culture, and identity. It is his space to represent the legacy of injustices towards the Indigenous nations and point at the traumatic memory his characters will forever be representing. Cavalry Records is absolutely a symbolic name to indicate the 7th Cavalry forces. The three characters who work in the company also make symbolic references in their names. The CEO of Cavalry Records, Mr. Armstrong is an image of George Armstrong Custer, a Lieutenant Colonel who acted violently against numerous Indigenous nations and lead many massacres, only to lose his life in the Battle of the Little Bighorn in 1876. Sheridan, the assistance in the company, is an image of Major General Philip Sheridan who had a role in attacking the Indigenous in the village of Cheyenne Chief, Black Kettle, in 1868. Philip Sheridan "one of the foremost Indian fighters in the U.S. army, viewed the slaughter of the buffalo

as a weapon" (Johansen and Pritzker 349). Moreover, he believed in war as a reflection of power. "In his view, the key to victory was destruction of the enemy's homeland" ("Philip Sheridan" n.p.). He is also known for his statement "The only good Indian is a dead Indian" (Mieder 38).[39] Wright, the other assistant, is an image of Colonel George Wright. George Wright won a war against the Spokane by slaughtering their horses and causing an economic collapse (Nilsoon n.p.) and it has been for ever a scene in Alexie's works. While these short reflections may not cover the full of these people' criminal deeds and injustices, they do illustrate the way all kinds of relationships between settler-Americans and American Indians are conducted. When narrating the first meeting with Cavalry Records, Alexie intends to uses those names to predict Thomas, Victor, and Junior's reactions towards the opportunity. The three characters may not have taken the opportunity seriously because they have already anticipated failure and a broken treaty. This kind of thinking is the exact definition of a colonized mind. As a result, it is reasonable to believe that Alexie is criticizing those perspectives because they are not assisting the characters in their survival journey.

Within his complex representation of Cavalry Records, Alexie asserts that the hegemony and power of the colonial narratives that have broken down the American Indian cultures are still present somewhere in 1992 and will always ruin those American Indians who do not stand up for themselves. After the failure with Coyote Springs, Sheridan and Wright make a decision to employ Betty and Veronica, two white women, for the purpose of producing audio recordings in which they address the audience as being themselves American Indians. Alexie then seems like in agreement with Waubageshig words "Yes, the only good Indian is still a dead one. Not dead physically, but dead spiritually, mentally, economically and socially" (vi). To explain their motivation for choosing the two women for the representation of an American Indian band, Sheridan says:

> I mean, they had some grandmothers or something that were Indian. Really. We can still sell that Indian idea. We don't need any goddamn just-off the-reservation Indians. We can use these women. They've been on the reservations. They even played a few gigs with Coyote Springs. Don't you see? These women have got the Indian experience down. They really understand what it means to be Indian. They've been there. (Alexie, *RB* 245)

[39] In his study of proverbial stereotypes, Wolfgang Mieder states, "the word 'dead' meaning both literal death and, for those who survived the mass killings, a figurative death that is, a restricted life on the reservation with little freedom to continue traditional life-style" (39).

Armstrong, Sheridan, and Wright are all duped by public perceptions of the American Indian cultures. Even in their early decision to use real American Indians (Thomas, Chess, Victor, Junior), Sheridan expresses his intention to bring out their "Indian" features by dressing them up with war paint and feathers. in my use of the word "Indian" as a representation of a simulated stereotypical picture of the Indigenous nations that, as Vizenor usually argues, the choice of Betty and Veronica makes it clear that there is little to be American Indian in popular narratives but instead, it is almost all "Indian."

In his discussion of the principle for which Euromericans and Europeans began writing records of the spoken words of American Indians starting from the 1600s, William M. Clements indicates that the attempt ultimately proved unsuccessful. This is because "stereotypical 'Indian' terminology" was added and imposed on such writings (3). From a similar understanding, Alexie criticizes American Indians' clichéd phrases, asserting that they embody a colonial imposition that should be excluded from any depiction. "Non-Indian writers usually say 'Great Spirit,' 'Mother Earth,' 'Two-Legged,' 'Four-Legged, and 'Winged,'" according to Alexie, but American Indian writers usually say "'God,' 'Mother Earth,' 'Human Being, Dog, and Bird'" (Alexie, "The Unauthorized Autobiography of Me"). Alexie brings up this topic critically for two reasons. First, as Clement says, these statements are predicated on the idea that the speaker is a "savage," and that the words stem from perspectives that show a "direct antithesis to civilization" (4), which makes them sound primitive. Second, Alexie emphasizes the difficulties in preserving a personal perspective in a culture filled with narratives and simulations that dictate how an American Indian should express himself/herself. When Betty and Veronica decide to leave the Spokane reservation because they get involved in a fight with White Hawk where Victor and Junior suffer from bangs on the head causing concussion, an experience they did not expect to see among American Indians, Chess confronts Betty and Veronica with an inconceivable truth to those who seek only the beautiful things known about "Indians": "Well, a concussion is just as traditional as a sweatlodge" (Alexie, *RB* 170). Chess concludes that Betty and Veronica will depart because the people on the reservation are "too Indian for them" (Alexie, *RB* 176), inferring a scale for measuring identity set by colonialists rather than American Indians.

To illustrate the widespread use of simulations, Alexie thoroughly describes the effect of listening to Betty and Veronica's first song recorded in Caverly Records studio. "Thomas heard a vaguely Indian drum, then a cedar flute, and a warrior's trill, all the standard Indian soundtrack

stuff" (Alexie, *RB* 269). This reflection is followed by the song's lyrics, which, ironically, contain a line in which the two ladies remark, "I am Indian in my bones" (Alexie, *RB* 269). The song purposefully incorporates all of the stereotypes mentioned above that Alexie believes exist in non-American Indian texts. After listening, Thomas gathers all of his family's souvenirs because he is afraid that "someone was going to steal them next" (Alexie, *RB* 269-270). Thomas discerns the ease with which one can appropriate another's culture without detection, and recognizes his duty to safeguard what he possesses.

2.3 Coyote as a Cultural Symbol

Alexie's depiction of Thomas's journey of becoming an alienation survivor within the musical mode is examined through two elements: the band's moniker, Coyote Springs, and the songs that Thomas creates, which mimic the blues songs. It is survival because Thomas has a chance to communicate his own perspectives and receive something in exchange—love and money, unlike the ordeal of his previous struggles to be a poor misfit storyteller. The change in Thomas's experience with the audience displays the fact that in a contemporary hybrid American Indian environment, the use of musical instruments alongside the dance setting, and the presence of alcohol serve as greater sources of inspiration to motivate American Indians to listen to Thomas.

Thomas's recommendation of the name "Coyote Springs" for the band indicates his goal to employ something cultural as a symbol of identity when he enters the mainstream music scene.[40] It is even more significant because the difference must have a signifier, given that the blues are widely recognized as an African American singing heritage. Thomas wants to Indigenize the blues. "Coyote stories detailed tribal origins; they emphasized a world view thought to be a correct one . . . To participate in these stories . . . was to renew one's sense of identity. For youngesters, the stories were a reminder of the right way to do things—so often, of course, not coyote way" (Lopez xvi- xvii). The character of Coyote is often displayed as a wicked trickster carrying negative connotations of foolishness, which may manifest in behaviors that are impolite and offensive. Nevertheless, in its most favorable interpretation, the figure of Coyote, in having an animal shape and features, is associated with the ability to survive. Nevertheless, "Coyote Springs" does not sound a necessity for Victor or Junior, the two other band members, who decide to refrain from

[40] "Coyote is a big part of classic Native American stories from Oregon and the rest of the West. Coyote is a very well-known character who plays the part of a cunning, self-seeking trickster who causes trouble, tests and breaks moral rules" (Ramsey "Coyote").

assigning to this inappropriate reference in their modern world. Coyote is "too damn Indian," in Junior's opinion" (Alexie, *RB* 45). In the scene of the Coyote dispute, Alexie clarifies that Thomas is capable of controlling his anger in response to his friend's scorn for the excessive use of the Coyote cultural symbol. However, the selection is an outcome of Thomas's imagination to strategize future initiatives for the band's recognition. Coyote is a mythical and shapeshifting figure personified in stories. Due to its use among many tribes of American Indians, Coyote can be a pan-Indian symbol and, therefore, it can help the band be admired by all American Indians. Victor and Junior, in deciding to be in a musical band, do not see the point of approaching a cultural symbol that is seen as a "second class figure . . . 'falsely invented' and somehow limited in his being" by some tribes (Radin 176), while they are in their way of acculturation into the entertainment business of music. The two see that they will emphasize on the line of opposing binaries and since they make the decision to step out of their zone, they feel that they do not need anything to be taken with them. Coyote presents a formidable challenge. Once they turned down the humiliating name "Coyote," Victor and Junior suggest the name "Bloodthirsty Savages" (Alexie, *RB* 44) as their preferred choice to reflect their cultural identity. However, it is important to note that this name evokes a colonial stereotype and an opposing binary as well that was historically used to justify genocidal acts committed by settlers, and it does not accurately represent their cultural heritage. Victor and Junior select "Bloodthirsty Savages" because, according to mainstream narratives, being referred to as a savage implied posing a danger to the settlers. This notion of power was perceived by the two individuals as necessary in order to engage with the world of music which is basically run by settler-Americans. According to Bhabha's perspective on the influence of the colonial narrative, Victor and Junior might be seen as individuals who passively accept the fundamental rationale behind the conflicting cultural ideas of colonialism (Bhabha, *LC* 24). However, reflecting on Alexie's perspective on such behaviors, the two characters are taking advantage of the "Indian" traits.

Despite my contention to interpret the difference between Thomas and his friends, it is undeniable that all three Spokane men are victims of colonialism and its prevailing narratives which comes out in the narrative of those "new encounters of racial marginalization" (Gamber. "Native American Novels" 450). Victor is filled with despair and anger because "a job was hard to come by on the reservation, even harder to keep" (Alexie, *RB* 17). Junior, despite being employed and receiving a salary, is impoverished because "he didn't know much beyond that"

(Alexie, *RB* 22). Thomas is lonely because "he didn't pretend to be some twentieth-century warrior" (Alexie, *RB* 5). Each of the three characters confronts the difficulties of their existence, which stem from a prolonged history of colonization and discrimination. Internally, they all possess a desire to challenge their status as victims, although they are unsure of the precise strategies to accomplish this. In a short period of time, Junior simply gives up his resistance to Coyote Springs.

Coyote is a figure whose basic features are mockery, flattery, and imitation of tricks or behaviors he does not imagine yet, if he feels that the trick has a potential benefit. Coyote "liked to imitate people. He thought that he could do anything that other persons did, and he pretended to know everything" (Dove 18). Coyote might be lucky in the new manners and get an opportunity to survive. He can be good or evil. In a similar vein, Thomas seeks to employ the symbol of Coyote as a representation of his endeavors to emulate musical performances within the framework of his cultural identity. The practice of imitation, shown by bands like Coyote Springs that frequently perform cover songs, is widely acknowledged as a significant method for keeping up with current music trends. However, Thomas begins his path as a lead singer who writes his own songs for Coyote Springs by focusing on exceeding mere mimicry, ultimately expressing his own survival. Alexie's motivation for doing so, as I posit, stems from his premise that the disparity between the traditional and modern is not intended to destroy the traditional, but rather to comprehend the needs of the modern.

Thomas's suggestion for the band name represents his effort to establish and preserve the cultural significance of American Indian heritage. Thomas thinks that Coyote Springs can be interpreted in more than one way, like in Vizenor's notion of the trickster's "hermeneutics" ("Trickster Discourse" 188). The adoption of a trickster's character is like having a "trickster pose" which is argued to be "the antidote to the postmodern threat of meaninglessness" (Blaeser, *Gerald Vizenor* 143). In his journal, Thomas writes his thoughts and understanding of the band name:

> Coyote: A small canid (Canis latrans) native to western North America that is closely related to the American wolf and whose cry has often been compared to that of Sippie Wallace and Janis Joplin, among others.
>
> Coyote: A traditional figure in Native American mythology, alternately responsible for the creation of the earth and for some of the more ignorant acts after the fact.

> Coyote: A trickster whose bag of tricks contains permutations of love, hate, weather, chance, laughter, and tears, e.g., Lucille Ball.
> Spring: An ultimate source of supply, especially a source of water issuing from the ground.
> Spring: To issue with speed and force, as in a raging guitar solo.
> Spring: To make a leap or series of leaps, e.g., from stage to waiting arms of Indian and non-Indian fans. (Alexie, *RB* 48)

Thomas is willing to fail the recognition of Coyote's traditional portrayal in American Indian trickster tales and get himself closer to reality. Coyote's typical vocalizations of a howl are similar to the distinctive styles exhibited by Sippie Wallace and Janis Joplin, popular musicians of the rock and blues genres.[41] Thomas also observes that Coyote has the ability to shape the world and bring about changes. Third, Coyote's tricks and talents of entertainment are similar to Lucille Ball, a famous American comedian in the twentieth century.[42] "Spring," in Thomas's context of music, represents the burst of creative energy that musicians draw upon. It symbolizes the rapid emergence of artists into the spotlight, akin to water springing forth. Additionally, it serves as a metaphor for the bold leaps and risks artists take on their journey to fame. In each entry of the six definitions, Thomas makes a progressive elaboration that exposes a variety of his interests expressed in those layered explanations. By including individuals of different races and musical talents in the first three definitions he shows the possibility of social validation of skills. In other words, art is accessible and valued across different racial groups, it can never be reduced to racial hegemony. Hybrid arts like the blues break down barriers that might have historically favored one dominant group. To align with current trends or popular styles means to increase their chances of being accepted and appreciated. In the second part of the three springs definitions, he expands the symbolic meaning of springs from being a water supply to leaping on stage. Thus, the affiliation that Coyote has in identifying the American Indian identity of Thomas's band becomes important in a hybrid community of music and fans. It gives a signification that the band will have its own

[41] Sippie Wallace and Janis Joplin were both influential female musicians in the world of blues and rock, each making significant contributions to their respective genres.
[42] Lucille Ball (1911-1989) was an American actress, singer, comedian, model, and film-studio executive. In her time, she became one of the most beloved and influential figures in the history of American entertainment (Pollack and Belviso).

way of modifying whatever genre they imitate, but, at the same time, be part of the popular culture of blues music.

From a contemporary standpoint to the use of Coyote in literature, Allen views Coyote as a symbol representing the concept of survival. Coyote "has been taken . . . as a metaphor for all the foolishness and the anger that have characterized American Indian life in the centuries since invasion. . . . Because of [his] irreverence for everything—sex, family bonding, sacred things, even life itself—Coyote survives" ("Answering the Deer"146). Thus, modern storytellers, like Thomas, are depicted to be modern tricksters. Coyote Springs, while containing major cultural symbolism in its name, indicates that their songs are distinctly individual, bearing the imprint of Thomas's unique perspective and, as a result, they become inherently cultural expressions of hybridization. Like Coyote's tricks, the band has its own way of performing that precisely becomes able to overcome the opposing binaries of cultures and becomes part of the liminal space of cultural negotiations. After many concerts and successful cross-reservation concert tours, the number of people who are interested in listening to Coyote Springs increased. They gather, specifically, to listen to Thomas's songs, which have earned him much acclaim. Thomas starts feeling the power and rightfulness of his decision to think with a post-reservation mindset.

Alexie organizes the lyrics of the songs into ten chapters, with each chapter titled after a different song and exploring various themes related to contemporary experiences of American Indians, mostly focusing on the hybrid nature of their cultures. This arrangement offers a unique perspective on Thomas's struggle for survival.[43] They also serve as a prelude to each chapter of the novel and present a mix of modern themes with the old traditions of American Indian storytelling. The ten songs are Thomas's media of verbalizing the American Indian blues. They tell, *in words*, sad stories of the American Indians' feelings toward their past, present, and future. Together with the stage on which Coyote Springs performs, the songs are Thomas's third space of cultural negotiation. The stage provides a valuable opportunity to articulate those ideas and receive recognition. Recognition, even from a personal experience, holds significance because it provides support and increases power. Each song has those intense cultural reflections that can easily be figured out as "slippage of difference and desire" (Bhabha, *LC* 90). With regard to Bhabha's perspective, slippages are always there, and they will constantly uphold the distinction between different cultures throughout history.

[43] The soundtracks of all ten lyrics were recorded by Jim Boyd and Sherman Alexie in 1995.

"Reservation Blues" is Thomas's first song and so his initial deviation from traditional norms of storytelling. It is a melancholic portrayal of American Indians, performed by an American Indian artist, therefore making it an American Indian blues song. It is a sad presentation of poverty and loneliness felt on the reservation. "DANCING ALL ALONE, FEELING nothing, good/ It's been so long since someone understood" (Alexie, *RB* 7). More stories become songs and in chapter 6, "Falling Down and Falling Apart," Thomas sings of a woman who is firmly rooted in her cultural background "Full-blood in her heart" (Alexie, *RB* 159). The woman, who is proficient in powwow dancing, skilled in making fry bread, and guided by spiritual convictions, does not desire a "brave" lover. The one who asserts his identity in such a manner is the one who succumbs to the negative effects of preconceived notions and artificial representations. For Thomas, this woman has to be provided with an American Indian sign of power, a "feather" (Alexie, *RB* 159). She is an illustration of a mindset that has been liberated from the mainstream and simulations. One more example of Thomas's songs of hybridity is "Urban Indian Blues," written after his first trip to Seattle. This song conveys the complexities of the American Indian experience in urban areas.[44] "I'm working in cheap old shoes, I've got the Urban Indian blues" (Alexie, *RB* 202). In this song, Thomas points out the hurdles faced by metropolitan American Indians, such as their forced relocation, challenging employment, and feelings of loneliness.

Thomas's journeys to various locations to sing his reservation blues highlight music's transforming power in creating bridges between distinct cultures. Music bridges cultural divides, challenges stereotypes, and investigates the complex interactions between societies. Music offers a space for nuanced perspectives on cultures achieved through hybridizing the mimicked genre. Mimicry, in its performances, "is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other*, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*" (Bhabha, *LC* 86). The blues, as I have explained before, are not an American Indian culture, but Coyote Springs are so good in their performances that makes them nothing but American Indian blues. The difference is noticed when the narrator demonstrates the advancement that the band starts to make in comparison to those by other races. "Coyote Springs created a tribal music that scared and excited the white people in the audience. That music might have chased away the pilgrims five hundred years ago. But if they were forced, Indians would have adopted the ancestors of a few whites, like Janis Joplin's great-great-great-great grandparents, and let them stay in the Americas" (Alexie, *RB* 76). The audience's fear is an

[44] Urbanization and its problem of raising alienation will be the focus of chapter 4.

expected response from the mainstream watching American Indians. Thomas's focus on this specific reaction stems from his sense of being able to break up that image of the "Indian" and replace it with something else that is more real to him. American Indians can sing; they are not all warriors or spiritual storytellers. Thomas seizes the opportunity to provide his thoughts on colonialism. Coyote Springs' confidence and power destabilize the hegemonic ideology and bewilder the listeners. In talking about fear, Alexie does not mean the band's career is at risk. Showing power is necessary. It is an opportunity that can lead to the discovery of new genres, styles, and artists.

"Wake" is the last song and the resolution of the novel's plot. In narrating different sad stories that happen on the reservation, the chapter awakens powerful depictions of sorrow and death, themes that are typical and prevalent in the author's literary representations of American Indians. The chapter also has its substantial infusion of irony. The irony arises from the disparity between the reader's expectations based on Thomas's survival experience and the actual outcome. Junior commits suicide, but his wake and burial ceremonies are both Christian and traditional in spirit. Neither of the two holds greater authority than the other, and neither is intended to represent Junior's religious beliefs. No one showed up because "the reservation didn't really care" (Alexie, *RB* 251). No gifts are given but FallsApart gives away three of his dogs to Thomas. Victor lies about Junior in his final remarks because there is nothing to say about him and he wants to offer something positive about his friend. The aforementioned circumstances surrounding Junior's death challenge the impression of the reservation as a community of American Indians who collectively care and prioritize their public image, as suggested in WalksAlong's initial letter advocating for people to come together against Coyote Springs to protect their traditional heritage. Ironically, it is on this same reservation where Thomas lives, penniless and lonely, and Junior kills himself.

The reservation, as a setting and a concept of home, is always present through Alexie's works. Victor, in "Indian Education," says that students do not need a single reunion party on the reservation; "My graduating class has a reunion every weekend at the Powwow Tavern" (Alexie, *Blasphem*y 219). Concerning this pride and sense of connection, life on the reservation is challenging. In "Native American Novels: Homing In," William Bevis argues that the average American Indian novel is "incentric" (582), because their plots are based on the theme of returning home. Bevis claims that authors who raced to make their texts more American Indian took this strategy. They want to set themselves apart from great American novels like *Moby Dick*, *The Great*

Gatsby, *Huckerby Finn*, and others, whose plots "tell of leaving home to find one's fate" (581). Conversely, Alexie finds inspiration in these remarkable works and endeavors to imitate their approach of crafting characters with the autonomy to choose their place of residence. However, as previously said, Alexie lived both lives as a reservation boy and an urban resident, and both played a role in his life and continue to do so. As a result, the examination has evolved into a very complex picture, making remarks on his approach impossible. According to Gamber, Alexie is one of the authors of post-renaissance that blur the idea of homing plots, as he "demonstrate[s] the potential for healthy native communities in cities or away from one's reservation" ("Native American Novels" 451). However, I believe that Alexie's reservation is depicted to be suitable for living as long as it facilitates the characters in obtaining their desired objectives. Chapters 3 and 4 will also discuss the notion of the reservation, exploring its significance and impact on the lives of American Indians, which becomes increasingly intricate in each portrayal. The reservation, as depicted in *Reservation Blues*, is a hypocritical community. The values it stands for should not be exaggerated when they contradict personal interests that may lead to survival. After all, the reservation is a colonial establishment.

"Wake," the last chapter of *Reservation Blues*, abandons its sorrowful thoughts in favor of the topic of survival. The song concludes with four repetitions of two phrases: "I think it's time for us to find a way" and "to wake alive" (Alexie, *RB* 251). It is here that Thomas articulates the transformed recognition of his identity based on personal interests and motivated by a post-reservation attitude. "Wake alive" appears to be a possible solution or reaction to "find a way." Those phrases, express the final thoughts of Thomas's cultural negotiation. Despite the fact that Thomas has been embracing a post-reservation mindset since deciding to start singing, this idea takes on a more concrete connotation near the end of the story. Thomas, joined by Chess and Checkers, decides to leave the reservation and live in Spokane, a town that is a few miles away. Departing is actually a recurrent motif in Alexie's works. It is an act that always implies that there is more to challenge in a larger environment outside the reservation; however, Alexie will always find the morals to justify it. For Thomas, the decision is more than a simple change of location. "They all held their breath as they drove over the reservation border. Nothing happened. No locks clicked shut behind them. No voices spoke, although the wind moved through the pine trees. It was dark. There were shadows. Those shadows took shape, became horses running alongside the van" (Alexie, *RB* 278). It is those feelings that demonstrate a kind of ambivalence of leaving the

reservation, leaving home. In their pursuit of new possibilities, the three characters leave behind a significant part of their life, relationships, memories, or a sense of belonging. Even though it may sound very ironic, despite the reservation's careless response to Junior's death, leaving it as a place—a home, entails stepping out of the comfort zone, because the outside world is filled with uncertainty. The symbols of horses, which dominate Thomas's stories and others narrated by Big Mom, shift from being sad images of dead ponies into running horses coming out of scary shadows and overcoming fears. The sight of rushing horses, then, is symbolically linked with the concept of freedom. The change in the symbol indicates that the characters have broken free from constraints, whether they are physical, emotional, or symbolic, and are now moving forward with a sense of liberation.

Alexie's recurrent portrayal of Thomas, the storyteller, illustrates his thoughts that storytelling in American Indian cultures does not have to be oral literature rooted in spiritual visions. Storytelling has to be understood as a fundamental element of human society that evolves in response to changes in social and cultural circumstances. Early in the novel, Thomas is identified as an unfit storyteller. While at the beginning of the novel, this adjective seems to reflect his inability to imitate old storytellers. However, by recognizing the attention he gets for writing and singing the blues, unfit indicates his inability to fit his talent within the new environment and situation. Later, in making the story's song, he gets all the attention. What I mean is that storytelling has its own aspects, such as manners, topics, and even times, and thus it is not a permanent capability. Even though this does not appear to be a belief for some of Alexie's characters which makes the storytellers as being at a disadvantage; the point of transforming this skill into other forms is very clear. Thomas's tales of singing the blues draw on historical and modern events and issues in the life of American Indians after their contact with settler-Americans, like reservation misfortunes, genocide, treaties, urbanization, love, and colonial atrocities.

The development of Thomas' character, as well as his use of stories, unveils a colonial narrative that forces the marginalized history to be hierarchical between old and new. In her discussion of Alexie's notions of culture, Jelena Šesnić argues that "identification [to a culture in a static form] in effect colonizes" the characters. However, the intention to emerge into a transcultural identification becomes "an ongoing trial in complicity with other discourses reinforcing [their] colonized position—not just a temporary effect of the subjectivation process but a continuous historical condition" (159). The role associated with Thomas as a lead singer,

then, serves as an opportunity for showcasing cultural evolutions and hybridity and smoothing the experience of alienation. Thomas's transformation, as one case of Alexie's survivors, and his quest for attention and money in a world full of possibilities, benefits from art mimicry. Singing the blues fulfills an economic and social desire, but it also aspires to Thomas's skill of indigenizing it. The story of *Reservation Blues* resembles many other stories with similar passions and potentials. *Te Ata*, a movie from 2016, depicts a young woman of Chickasaw descent who transforms her passion for storytelling into theatrical productions on Broadway in New York City. It is her mode of becoming a survivor. Storytelling, though not a central focus of the study's interpretation of Alexie's works, is the underlying inspiration underpinning all four modes of survival I explain in my chapters. Traditionally, storytelling has been the primary form of literature creation in Indigenous cultures, and it continues to influence the creation of American Indian literature.

The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian is the second work selected for the dissertation's examination of Alexie's alienation survivors.[45] As a depiction of a contemporary character who embraces a post-reservation mindset, Arnold is deeply drawn to the art of cartooning which offers him a modern platform to be mimicked for communication and self-expression purposes. Like Thomas's reservation blues, drawing cartoons is Alexie's modified use of storytelling. Lisel Bradner sees that comics are a legitimate form of storytelling as she quotes Antonio Chavarria, curator of ethnology, who organized the Comic Art Indigene exhibition at the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture in Santa Fe, N.M. "Comic strips were the first accessible form of mass media made available on reservations, and there was this immediate connection between native people and that type of work. There was no language barrier, and the whimsical stories were a very familiar tradition," says Chavarria (qtd. in Bradner). Due to poverty, Arnold creatively utilizes various materials such as scratch papers, envelopes, and book covers as surfaces for his projects, integrating them as fundamental components in his diary. In addition to drawing characters in the comics, Arnold incorporates humorous remarks, symbolic imagery, and figurative language, each used intentionally by the author to foster engagement and deepen readers' empathy toward the character's challenges. Moreover, because all drawings are part of a diary, each piece is presented in the context of the novel's plot, where the main character attempts to visualize his

[45] In the following, *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* will be abbreviated as *True Diary* or *TD* in in-text citations.

life difficulties, dreams, and sad moments. Hypothetically, Arnold uses drawing cartoons as a therapeutic act that helps him heal his pains. This passion is interpreted as his mode of survival.

Chapter Three

The Art of Cartooning: Arnold's Space of Imagination in *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*

In *True Diary* (2007), Alexie tells the story of Arnold's survival, drawing heavily from his own childhood experiences to highlight the theme of alienation within the context of institutional racism both on and off the Spokane reservation. The novel employs a provocative plot structure, intertwining the protagonist's diary with his drawings to illustrate an indigenous story of resistance and survival. Arnold's encounters with medical specialists and school teachers are notably deficient and result in significant challenges to his self-esteem as a 14-year-old. To construct his protagonist's survival journey, Alexie gifts Arnold with the talent of drawing. The young character imitates the genre of comics he usually finds in books and magazines using their flexibility to be indigenized and become a means of expressing his anger and imagination.[46] While he aspires to global recognition, Arnold's comics remain introspective visual depictions of the daily experiences shared by American Indians on the reservation. Cartooning, thus, serves as a third space for cultural negotiation. The themes of Arnold's comics center on post-colonial discussions about the long-standing oppression that has led to the creation of a marginalized generation of American Indians living in dire conditions on the reservation. With each cartoon, the novel represents the advance in the character's decolonized perspective, showcasing his right to pursue a better future, which ultimately empowers him to seek a better education environment beyond the reservation's confines. Therefore, Arnold's success in an all-white school serves as evidence that embracing a post-reservation mindset is crucial for becoming an alienation survivor. Success provides Arnold the power to humorously mock discrimination.

Prior to the publication of *True Diary*, the use of cartoons or sketches in American Indian literature was limited to ledger arts. Additionally, the representation of an American Indian cartoonist has not been a method for creating forms of post-colonial self-expression to subvert colonial discourses of hegemony. Regarding the nomination of *True Diary* for the National Book Award of Young Adult Literature, its plot represents a "New Realism" that produces a critical assessment of "culture's covert as well as overt assumptions," as Maia Pank Mertz notes in her

[46] *True Diary* contains a total of 60 distinct cartoons, which are distributed over its 10 chapters. To keep the form of a diary, the chapters lack number designations but are instead identified by bold titles.

dispute over the YA genre. This is because a diary is expected to be personal writing, so its narrative is inherently authentic and "absolutely true" to the character's feelings.[47]

Regarding Alexie's post-colonial perspectives and in composing his novel as a diary, the young protagonist is given the autonomy to discuss topics and themes like those of the aftermath of colonialism, identity, cultural heritage, and the struggles of growing up amid indigenous traditions and a multicultural contemporary society. This narrative structure allows the readers to have an intimate and heartfelt connection with the protagonist's thoughts, experiences, and growth, exploring the deeply personal impact of colonial history on a young individual's journey to self-discovery and belonging to the intercultural American nation.[48] Furthermore, by identifying the text as a diary, it becomes unnecessary to refine the protagonist's language and feelings, allowing him to portray some real-life circumstances and thoughts that teenagers have. As the following excerpts demonstrate, Arnold's language is not eloquent, but rather "rez talks" of a depressed American Indian.[49] The use of a teenager's language in the creation of post-colonial literature of cultural negotiations promotes the idea that fighting imperialism requires moderate linguistic abilities than most people believe. Arnold's spontaneous reactions enhance the novel's validity and efficacy for the young readers the author wishes to impress.

In this chapter, three distinct sections will be explored. The first, "Racism: Arnold's Voluntary Relocation," delves into the racial discrimination that Arnold faces due to his residence on the reservation. Following this, I analyze Arnold's decision to attend a different educational institution, along with the various challenges he experiences due to that choice and its impact on his sense of alienation. The discussion is supplemented largely by a pair of comics. In the second section, "Drawing: A Passion, a Language," the interpretation concentrates on Arnold's journey to survival, which is confirmed by the power he acquires from his cartooning, with two comics serving as major references. The final section, "Survival as an Academic Achievement," puts forth my perspective on Arnold's becoming a survivor, as attested by his academic achievements while examining his comic of a school report card.

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[47] In her book *Sherman Alexie*, Liz Sonneborn quotes Alexie's description of truthiness in *True Diary*. "The book is my story. If I were to guess at the percentage, it would be about seventy-eight percent true," says Alexie (qtd. in Sonneborn 56).

[48] Like Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* (1899) where the languages of teenagers of different ethnicities are displayed skillfully, the odd and unpredicted metaphorical language of Arnold is prevalent among poor kids living on the reservations.

[49] According to Alexie, the term "rez" refers to an informal or colloquial reference employed by his community members while addressing personal matters that are closely connected to the events occurring on the reservation.

3.1 Racism: Arnold's Voluntary Relocation

In a poem where Crazy Horse and Sitting Bull have a conversation, Alexie writes "We both saw the same thing/our futures tight and small/ an 8 × 10 dream /called the reservation" (*OSNS* 62). In any argument on the relevance of the reservation, its definition cannot avoid the fact that it is purposefully isolated.[50] This idea indicates the continuation of colonial acts under new titles, such as racism, hegemony, or neglect. According to Vizenor: "Manifest Destiny . . . cause[d] the death of millions of tribal people from massacres, diseases, and the loneliness of reservations" (*Manifest Manners* 4). Reservations were utilized as prisons or ghettos to eliminate Indigenous traditions, and their poor conditions placed them under the label of "underclass areas" (Sandefur 38). Even though some reservations are going through basic development, there are still numerous serious challenges that influence the lives of American Indians (Saffer 49). Like many of Alexie's protagonists, Arnold lives on a poor reservation. As a result, his alienation and the challenges he encounters in seeking his passions are mostly attributed to the Spokane reservation's poor amenities and poverty. He, alongside his loved ones, grapples with the relentless shadows of institutional racism, as in the comic he draws to display the unfulfilled dreams of his parents. Arnold claims that his mother would have been a community college teacher and his father would have been the best Jazz Sax player "if somebody had paid attention to their dreams" (Alexie, *TD* 14).

Alexie's reservations are significantly unhappy due to poverty regardless of thoughts about them being rich, as is the case when Arnold's white classmates think he is rich from casinos. For Alexie, even though casinos and the gaming industry are "certainly making inroads against the poverty that has historically been uniformly the state of tribal economies" (Kalt and Singer 37), they are "mismanaged and too far away from major highways" (Alexie, *TD* 135). As a result, the majority of the reservation characters are victims of failure or disappointments, including Arnold's mother, father, sister, friend Rowdy, and uncle Eugene. Nevertheless, it must be noted that despite the challenges of life on the reservation, its significance as home remains steadfast. They are landscapes where ancestral traditions can be upheld. For the characters, the reservation embodies home, traditions, cultural sustainability, and spirituality. Consequently, as Ewelina Bańka argues,

[50] Based on economic research performed regarding the business of casinos on reservations, and despite the fact they earn millions, the secluded areas of their sites maintain it as a small enterprise in comparison to others housed in cities (Linda T. Smith 156).

the reservation in Alexie's works has always had a complex spatial representation. "The Spokane Reservation is not only homeland but also a symbol of physical and mental confinement that separates Indian people from mainstream America" (Bańka 166). It is, for some of his characters, the reason behind their living in "the reservation of the mind" (Bańka 165). Due to that, particular efforts are required to obtain a specific opinion that will benefit those living on the reservation.

At the very beginning of the novel, Arnold's diary and cartoons indicate that he was born with an illness leaving his body deformed, which led to bullying and designation as a retard by other reservation children. Due to those medical issues, Arnold has direct experiences with racism in healthcare institutes. As he describes, the clinic on the reservation pulled his extra teeth with half the Novocain because the "*white* dentist believed that Indians only felt half as much pain as white people did" (Alexie, *TD* 4; emphasis added). In describing the meeting with the dentist, Arnold's words can never fail the direct reference they make to expose the doctor's biased medical decisions due to skin color and ethnic affiliation, which places American Indians in a lower position of being humans like the white race. By deliberately withholding other justifications for the possibility of the dentist's being in shortage of medical kits or not professional enough to give Arnold the right amount of Novocain, Alexie underscores the issue of pervasive racism in healthcare institutions that is practiced against all American Indians living on the reservations. Furthermore, it is important to note that Arnold's stories about Indian healthcare clinics do not confine the topic of race to an individual level, as seen in his straightforward depiction of the dentist's racist attitudes. The novel describes how Arnold's usage of thick, black plastic frames for his eyeglasses makes him look ugly. This explanation calls the reader's attention to the fact that the entire healthcare system operates in a biased manner and entirely disregards the value of the people who seek treatment there. Arnold's eyeglasses are the only style offered on the reservation and can be replaced only manually. Inflicting pain on Arnold in this manner seems an awful crime, mainly because he is very young and such matters affect his perspectives of himself and the world around him. Mostly, Arnold's diary presents him as someone with limited power to change his life and his eyeglasses are always present in his cartoons. Notwithstanding the distressing nature of Arnold's health journey, his diary does not prioritize the expression of his pain. Arnold exhibits a sense of sorrow that is particularly pronounced in its connection to racism, poverty, and mortality on the Spokane reservation. "So obviously, I looked goofy on the outside, but it was the *inside* stuff that was the worst" (Alexie, *TD* 5). So, in the display of his comics, the reader can see that

Arnold has the potential to try something different and change his assumed miserable fate. His anger at his circumstances as a poor, struggling teenager fuels his imagination, transforming his life experiences into emotional cartoons.

Alexie's deliberate restraint in portraying racism on the reservation suggests a nuanced approach that avoids sensationalism and, instead, emphasizes authenticity and depth in depicting the complexities of Indigenous experiences in such settings. Borders, like those of reservations, are examples of attributing the characteristics of being the "Other" to American Indians, and therefore, they become the initial cause of alienation. For Kathryn W. Shanley, "the radical otherness of some peoples is the very thing used as an excuse for labels that dehumanize" (37). Accordingly, the reservation, like other "racially structured institutions," has "atrocities and unequal treatments" (Seneque) practiced even at schools. In a study by Joel Spring, racism on American Indian reservations is the result of a "process of deculturalization" (44). And, despite attempts to rectify this situation, teachers from the Bureau of Indian Affairs "who represented the dominant culture was considered an important means of deculturalization" (Spring 139).

On his first day of school on the reservation, Arnold is handed his books and discovers his mother's name written on one of them. Even though he normally prefers not to respond, he becomes enraged by educational inequity, viewing it through the lens of racism. For a moment, Arnold loses control over his anger and throws the old book he received, which, accidentally hits the teacher, Mr. P. Even though the teacher is hurt by the reaction, what matters the most is that the accident will lead to Arnold's survival. The book incident serves as an indication that one of the reservation pupils has the power to do something different and transform his future, which, most probably, would be disappointing in that school. Thus, the representation of this scene is Alexie's confirmation of a long history of neglect and insufficient investment in educational opportunities for marginalized populations.

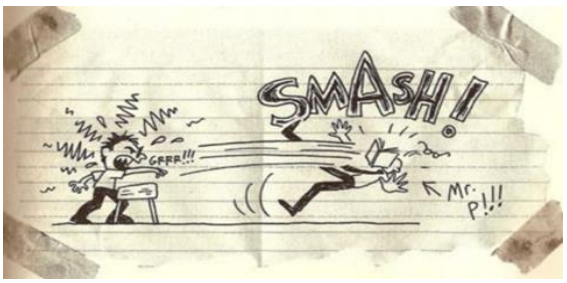

Figure 1 (Alexie, *TD* 36)

Losing control of one's anger is regarded as a failure of imagination in Alexie's survival perspective. It is the thing that can end lives as it happens to many of his characters. Therefore, Arnold's incident at school takes on a whole other interpretation. The protagonist clarifies that his goal was not to harm someone physically but to hit

something to overcome his anger. The desire to throw stuff represents the need for an immediate physical release of intense emotions that are immensely popular after an experience with racism where the marginalized lack healthier ways to cope with the situation. In Langston Hughes' autobiography, *The Big Sea*, throwing books is mentioned as a therapeutic reaction that provides agency and a sense of satisfaction. Hughes states the feeling he experienced after discarding his books: "Then I straightened up, turned my face to the wind, and took a deep breath. I was a seaman going to sea for the first time? a seaman on a big merchant ship. And I felt that nothing would ever happen to me again that I didn't want to happen. I felt grown, a man, inside and out?"(3). The portrayal depicted in both of these instances addresses race-based stress and the desire to change by having more power. The six-year age gap between Hughes and Arnold influenced their respective decisions: Hughes chooses to sail off, while Arnold utilizes his energies to create a cartoon representing the incident (see Figure 1).

As is customary with Alexie's character descriptions, the writer avoids giving them attributes that would allow critics to see them as superheroes who can defeat racism and change their miserable lives. However, the character's powers shine in their negotiations of culture and identity which help them avoid defeat. Arnold's description of the accident, in which he articulates his feelings and reactions to being subject to hegemonic discrimination at school, has a remarkable conceptual complexity. He says:

> My school and my tribe are so poor and sad that we have to study from the same dang books our parents studied from. That is absolutely the saddest thing in the world. And let me tell you, that old, old, old, *decrepit* geometry book hit my heart with the force of a nuclear bomb. My hopes and dreams floated up in a mushroom cloud. What do you do when the world has declared nuclear war on you? (Alexie, *TD* 35).

The excerpt conveys a collective sense of grief and outrage, not only for the book catastrophe but also for American Indians' long history of mistreatment in educational institutions. Furthermore, the reference to the book's worn-out state lends another layer of meaning to Arnold's negotiation of culture and identity in that moment of him being emotionally charged. The old small book is symbolically compared to a nuclear weapon having the power to destroy Arnold and his tribe. This metaphor emphasizes how even the most insignificant things may have huge, harmful consequences. Meanwhile, the metaphor might create a sense of personal fragility, meaning that Arnold's tribe is so weak or helpless that even the most minor influences can have disastrous

consequences on them. It expresses an introspective appeal to analyze one's inadequacies or flaws rather than criticizing others. Being abused does not always require a forceful abuser, but a weak person might lead to similar results. The contrast between the mainstream energy to dominate and the American Indian's preoccupation with booze in empty freezers is a recurrent idea in Alexie's depictions of self-destructive tendencies holding on to the excuse of being powerless to be sober. Arnold uses a rhetorical question to indicate that he is unsure of what to do next as he wraps up his story of that difficult school day.

Moreover, Figure 1 depicts the profound emotional impact of being a student in an outdated school. The cartoon's main themes are emotions of anger, conveyed through the use of facial and body gestures, annotations, and motion and jagged lines to express the intensity of those feelings. The oversized word "smash" is the most notable in the cartoon. It expresses Arnold's relief and appreciation for the act of throwing the book as a means of action. It is an intentional reaction in which he resists the educational system followed on the reservation. In her manifestation of a practical wisdom that can help African Americans address racism, Audre Lorde states: "*the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house*. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change" (20). Lorde's thesis is that nothing introduced by the mainstream should be considered the "only source of support" for the marginalized (20) because that will keep them stuck somewhere, and their voice will never be heard. In being able to demonstrate defiance of conventions, Arnold gains his freedom. His drawing skills help him create his techniques for coping with racism. In using the art of cartooning as a mode of survival, Arnold is not only mimicking an art found by some cultures but he transforms old Indigenous beliefs of healing through different ceremonies where emotions are expressed whether in meditation, dances, or prayers. In *Star Medicine*, the shaman Wolf Moondance illustrates his understanding of American Indian ceremonies for healing. Moondance stresses the role of emotions in each ceremony. He says: "there is much controversy in our lives and it is because of emotions. We all have our feelings; we all have our teachings. We all have been taught different things through the years of our lives. No matter how young or old we are, we have opinions, and opinions are made up of feelings, and feelings are emotions" (9). After his sister's and grandmother's death, Arnold says: "I kept making list after list of the things that made me feel joy. And I kept drawing cartoons of the things that made me angry. I keep writing and

rewriting, drawing and redrawing, and rethinking and revising and reediting. It became my grieving ceremony" (Alexie, *TD* 178).

Figure 2 (Alexie, *TD* 49)

To change Arnold's perception of himself as a victim of racism into an active seeker of hope Alexie introduces an unexpected twist in his life. Mr. P decides to talk with Arnold. He makes this effort because he views Arnold's fury and his family's talents as powerful resources capable of empowering the young adult to overcome a common fate on the Spokane reservation. Mr. P encourages Arnold to quit the reservation school. As a member of the white race, Mr. P has all the evidence that educational institutions are very much representative of racism practiced against young American Indians. Moreover, he finds himself guilty of the school's poor operation system and thus, he makes sure to inform Arnold of the challenges of staying at the reservation school. "All your friends. All the bullies. And their mothers and fathers have given up, too. And their grandparents gave up and their grandparents before them. And me and every other teacher here. We're all defeated" (Alexie, *TD* 49). To Alexie, as he displays in the words of Mr. P, a powerless mindset is a defeated one. Nobody can govern free minds. American Indians who choose to give up and perpetuate their sadness over survival, combined with white people who carry out a soft genocide on the reservation to eliminate what remains of the American Indian heritage, create a massive partnered power of destruction. "If you stay on this rez," says Mr. P, "they're going to kill you. I'm going to kill you. We're all going to kill you. You can't fight us forever" (Alexie, *TD* 50). Mr. P believes that the denial of an opportunity to resist colonial ideologies of exclusion, as it is the situation in the school of the reservation, can result in sadness or suicide. In making such reflections, Alexie refers to one of those key tragic events in the history of relationships between American Indians and settler-Americans; it is the establishment of boarding schools. Boarding schools or residential schools that were established by Captain Richard Henry Pratt in 1879 adopted the notion of "Kill the Indian, save the man"(Churchill 14). Ward Churchill emphasizes the systemic cruelty that led to the destruction of American Indian cultures. He, therefore, quotes Indian Commissioner Thomas J. Morgan's observations on poverty and humiliation as contributing factors in the tragic deaths of thousands of children at schools.

> It is of prime importance that a fervent patriotism be awakened in [the children's] minds . . . They should be taught to look upon America as their home and the United States government as their friend and benefactor. They should be made familiar with the lives of great and good men and women in American history, and be taught to feel pride in all their great achievements. They should hear little or nothing of the "wrongs [done to] the Indians," and of the injustice of the white race. If their unhappy history is alluded to it should be to contrast it with the better future that is within their grasp. (qtd. in Churchill 21)

The idea of enforcing sameness, a practice commonly found in boarding schools, is one of the methods that were used to kill indigenous cultures. Settlers have pursued a policy of cultural assimilation, evidenced by their attempts to standardize the appearance and language of all students in boarding schools. To challenge those tragic acts of exploitation, Alexie avoids creating characters who are identical to each other in their appearance, lives, or aspirations. Each character is empowered to make choices based on their interests. Although Mr. P's admission of mistreating American Indian children may seem surprising, Alexie does not deny the existence of kindness among settler-Americans. The author's central focus is on illustrating the innate equality of all people, regardless of political or historical influences. While Mr. P advises Arnold on the initial steps for survival, Arnold is accountable for his subsequent actions. The conversation with the teacher prompts Arnold to draw a cartoon that reflects the most challenging situation he has ever encountered, which resonates with all students' experiences in the reservation schools (see Figure 2).

Figure 2 contains two critical pieces of information regarding Arnold's understanding of the importance of moving outside the borders of the reservation: the reservation is designated as a "Home" in which he finds shelter and family, whereas "Hope" has to be found somewhere else. With his back to the reservation and facing hope, Arnold expresses his ambivalence about where hope might be found. Also, in comparison to the trees, houses, satellites, and domestic animals that are drawn on the "Home" side of the comic, the background of the "Hope" side is very clear. Hope has no features that a poor reservation adolescent can identify. Seeking hope at Reardan, as Mr. P suggests, encourages Arnold to walk out of the reservation school in an act of voluntary relocation; to "add [his] hope to somebody else's hope . . . to multiply hope by hope" (Alexie, *TD* 50). It is ironic that hope at Reardan, twenty-two miles away from the Spokane reservation, is

easier to pursue than striving for it to make it to the reservation. Nevertheless, Arnold's voluntary relocation, as it looks in the *True Diary*, is Alexie's reconstruction of the federal Relocation Program to validate mobility.[51] Crossing the reservation borders is a necessary exit to wander in a world full of possibilities and hope. It is also a path to mental liberation which can subvert the settler colonial narrative of "an *indian* on the reservation and an emigrant in the city" (Vizenor, *Fugitive Poses* 51) and expands the possibility of survival beyond the borders of the reservation.

Making the move to Reardan is Arnold's first iconic decision outside of what is expected on the reservation when people leave, and it is an early step on his journey to overcoming alienation. "'I want to go to Reardan,' I said again. I couldn't believe I was saying it. For me, it seemed as real as saying, 'I want to fly to the moon'" (Alexie, *TD* 54). Arnold's metaphorical description of his decision to be a "fly to the moon" indicates a sense of extreme optimism, excitement, and empowerment. It conveys a strong sense of hope and the belief that transformative change can lead to extraordinary outcomes. However, as a young reservation boy, the reference to the moon may also indicate the expected hardships of the journey which he possibly fears. It is at this moment when Alexie emphasizes the role of the family in making those steps towards survival from poverty and lack of education on the reservation. Arnold's mother uses very specific words that make him understand that he has the potential to achieve something by joining Reardan. She tells him that he is "the first one to ever leave the rez this way" (Alexie, *TD* 55). The mother does not mean the act of leaving itself because many fellow tribal members do so and her daughter who elopes with someone and then dies in a fire is an example elaborated in the diary. She indicates the intention of the departure as the first of its kind because it is a departure to challenge the coloniality of power. Arnold wants to study at a school where pupils have their rights as learners. "My sister is running away to get lost, but I am running away because I want to find something," says Arnold to rephrase his mother's notion (Alexie, *TD* 55). He articulates the dreams that his parents failed to achieve. It may seem like an honor to be the first in the family seeking a dream of being in a better school, but it requires bravery to be like Arnold who struggles to withstand yet

[51] "The United States government introduced 'Relocation' as a federal programme offered to all American Indians from 1952 to 1973. This innovative programme had two goals: to help American Indians find jobs and housing in cities, mainly in the western half of the United States; and, more importantly, to convince them to leave their homes, their reservations, and the traditional areas that they had come to love" (Fixico, "The Federal Indian Relocation Programme" 108).

another kind of institutional racism at Reardan. Racism at Reardan leaves Arnold not only alienated but almost invisible even though he is engaged in relationships.

3.2 Drawing: A Passion, a Language

In a work of alienation survivors, Arnold is portrayed as an adult with much ambition and the characteristics of an ancient Indigenous warrior motivated by a strong desire to battle. He channels his aspirations to communicate effectively with the world, nurturing dreams of fame and wealth, and investing his time in the pursuit of drawing cartoons.

> I draw all the time. I draw cartoons of my mother and father; my sister and grandmother; my best friend, Rowdy; and everybody else on the rez. I draw because words are too unpredictable. I draw because words are too limited . . . So I draw because I want to talk to the world. And I want the world to pay attention to me. I feel important with a pen in my hand. I feel like I might grow up to be somebody important. An artist. Maybe a famous artist. Maybe a rich artist. That's the only way I can become rich and famous. (Alexie, *TD* 7-8)

Arnold's desire to interact with the world through the art of cartooning stems from four major factors. The first is the shame he feels because of his stuttering. Second, while drawing, he demonstrates his power over his life ordeals. This power comes out in his use of irony and humor to trivialize something, suggest "easy" ways to get over a dilemma, or capitalize on traits that can defeat hegemony and, therefore, racism. Arnold draws his uncontrolled anger (Figure 1), his quest for hope (Figure 2), his perspective on being seen as "Indian" (Figure 3), his criticism of the coach's decision to use him as a "savage" basketball player (Figure 4), and his joy at achieving high grades in his studies (Figure 5).[52] Third, cartoons can also serve as a personal entry point into more complicated cultural and identity topics, such as religion, death rituals, domestic abuse, and the way people cope with modernity. Drawing connects the "inner and outer world in a meaningful way" (Williams 2). Fourth, as an ambitious American Indian teenager to becoming rich and famous, Arnold believes that "brown" men cannot talk to the world but through art (Alexie *TD* 8), because good work may be idealized and appreciated, and this is how artists can bring the marginalized ideas and perspectives into the mainstream discourse. Arnold's cartoons are indigenized appropriately with his representations of American Indian caricatures.

[52] All cartoons in the novel are featured by graphic artist Ellen Forney.

In reflecting on the ways public admiration is expressed towards some people in the United States, a country known for its proliferation of pop culture and media figures, Grassian makes the following observation about the possibility of making the marginalized art a medium of communication:

> Americans often hold their celebrities up to intense scrutiny. If that celebrated figure attracts a large youth following, inevitably he or she will be considered a role model, regardless of whether he or she wants to be one. Certain successful members of ethnic minorities are considered role models for the sole reasons of financial or athletic success, which purposefully serves to inspire other minorities. (*Hybrid Fictions* 119)

An example of a brown person who became known as a cartoonist is Ricardo Caté. Caté is an American Indian cartoonist who uses his drawings to convey his unique perspective on critical issues, particularly those concerning the effects of colonialism on the life of Indigenous nations and their opinions about it. Caté has a book of his comics under the title *Without Reservations*. The title is inspiring because it carries the notion of a post-reservation mindset standing behind his comics' themes. In his introduction, Caté states his desire to produce some kind of art that is read as a universal representation; "I hope that my cartoons are successful in marketing to all races and ethnicities. I like to think that this is a universal cartoon in which the characters just happen to be Native, although there are specific messages I like to get across that concern Native Americans" (4).

Based on those understandings of marginalized ways to fame, Arnold's themes of racism, poverty, hope, and love, have the chance to become popular but his responsibility lies in making them visible to spectators. Due to his limited landscape, however, Arnold utilizes cartooning to express how he sees or expects the world to be, thereby the majority of his art representations are merely representations of himself. He puts close attention to drawing his facial expressions, which are commonly perceived as angry or sad. This example of a teenager in a struggle to survive is one of many that Alexie considers in his portrayal of teenagers who save themselves from becoming victims of "would-be saviors" (Au and Alexie 93), and instead choose to find their own path.

> Now I write books for teenagers because I vividly remember what it felt like to be a teen facing every day and epic dangers. I don't write to protect them. It's far too late for that. I write to give them weapons—in the form of words and ideas—that will help them fight

their monsters. I write in blood because I remember what it felt to bleed" (Au and Alexie 93-94).

Alexie emphasizes the need to provide teenagers with a method to confront their challenges by the use of their imagination. It is his thesis of saving American Indians. If young people, like Arnold, are given the opportunity to have their voices heard, they will no longer accept being the objective-others, viewed from an unbiased and external perspective; instead, they will become the subjective-others, representing themselves in ways that perpetuate their prejudice.

Furthermore, in his study of American Indian fiction, David Treuer feels the power of art which outlives its culture as it maintains its influence beyond the specific time and place of its creation. Treuer posits: "there is a tendency to read Indian artistic endeavors (whether visual or textual) as cultural products, as little dioramic pieces that describe a way of life" (*Native American Fiction* 121). Similarly, Arnold's cartoons are perpetually culturally significant. Cartooning is a safe venue for challenging life difficulties experienced on the reservation and therefore challenging the politics of institutional racism caused by a long history of oppression due to colonialism. Arnold evaluates his comics: "I think the world is a series of broken dams and floods, and my cartoons are tiny little lifeboats" (Alexie, *TD* 8). Drawing is a skill that allows Arnold to transform his suppressed voice into a visual language of communication. In combining the use of visual and verbal methods, cartooning "offer[s] common ground in an ethics of seeing and storying experience that embraces polyvalency and resists the absolute primacy of any one form [of representation]" (Stirrup 344).[53] Representations of cultural negotiations, in Arnold's comics, may utilize one-panel cartoons or a multiple-panel sequence that recounts a brief story, with each containing layers of personal emotional components, ironies, or humorous observations. While Arnold's cartoons may not achieve the fame that he desires since they are only doodles attached to his cheap notebook, they do provide him a sense of control because there are no restrictions or prevailing narratives governing the way they are created. Essentially, the process of drawing offers a distinct and exciting experience that differs from oral communication but is equally significant.

Arnold's survival journey begins when he leaves the tribal school for the Reardan School. Following this pivotal decision, his cartoons change their thematic reflections. They delve deeper

[53] The visual culture of representation is part of Alexie's interests. His poetry collection *Old Shirts and New Skins* (1993), is composed in a collaboration with the artist Elizabeth Woody, who enhances his poems with visual imagery. Also, Alexie's *Thunder Boy Jr*. is a book of pictures that communicates with children via visual depictions of a child's quest for a name that truly reflects his identity.

into the exploration of identity, spurred by his direct interaction with the outside world. Arnold knew little about Reardan students from an old basketball game. Based solely on that encounter, he cannot help but envision them as idols. “Those kids were *magnificent*. They knew *everything*. And they were *beautiful*. They were beautiful and smart. They were beautiful and smart and epic. They were filled with hope (Alexie, *TD* 59). Arnold’s overly dramatic and italicized portrayal of the Reardan students is Alexie’s motif to demonstrate examples of the value of maintaining relationships with people outside the boundaries of the reservation. Arnold, who lives at home most of the time, is unable to accurately depict the kids he meets once. A cultural shock, as it is very clear in Arnold’s description of the students can cause harm. Consequently, his alienation due to cultural differences will be significant at Reardan. In a description of cultural shock in urban areas, Patricia Helton says “coming to the city . . . is still a culture shock. . . . It’s such a fast pace and [Indian People] have such a family oriented idea about life” (qtd. in Hoikkala 127). However, Arnold’s imagistic reflection is also an example of his low self-esteem. In studying the self, Viktor Gecas posits that the self-concept is mostly articulated as “a *product* of social forces and influences . . . People are not born with selves. Rather selves emerge out of social and symbolic interactions” (85). As a result of dominant narratives, “differences in values between Native-American culture and the dominant culture often result in poor self-concept in Native-American children” (Jackson and Lassiter 242). In addition to thinking that white people are smart because their school is better than his, Arnold also sees himself as a mirror of all the American Indians he knows, most of whom are failures, which is why he has little prospect of fitting in at the new school.

Arnold turns his aspirations of inferiority into a cartoon after choosing to move to that school of "geniuses" (see Figure 3). The drawing is a reflection of his anxiety and fears of being engaged in relationships where social and cultural differences are very obvious. Arnold's poverty and his low self-esteem cause him depression even before meeting anyone at Reardan. Figure 3 is an exaggerated representation of the hegemonic differences and where racism is negotiated through the visual contrast of "WHITE" versus "INDIAN." The very fact that Arnold draws this cartoon before a real experience at the new school is proof of "identities . . . settling into a primordial polarities" (Bhabha, *LC* 4). In other words, the line that divides the figure drawn in the comic into two images is an indicator that Arnold still sees the world through divisions of hegemonic binaries. Hybridity and the untruthfulness of mainstream racial prejudice are scarcely subjects for discussion for him and his fellow reservation people. So, when attempts at cultural negotiation are absent, people's self-perceptions become limited and almost static. In Figure 3, the poor features of the Indian side are overstated in comparison to the overblown idealization of the white side which raises feelings of empathy towards Arnold's future at Reardan. Yet, comics are third spaces where Arnold is meant to be reinscribing his identity and culture far from colonial perspectives. Decolonization, as Helen Tiffin argues, "is process, not arrival; it invokes an ongoing dialectic between hegemonic centrist systems and peripheral subversion of them" in post-colonial literature (17). Binaries in post-colonial literature are still effective because it is impossible to subvert colonial discourses by bringing others that completely take their places (Tiffin 18). So, the binaries that Arnold draws are not static but dynamic. This is clear when the figure of the two images is shown as one person not two. Having imagined his anxieties, Arnold is now driven to personally witness the tangible disparities between himself and the students of Reardan.

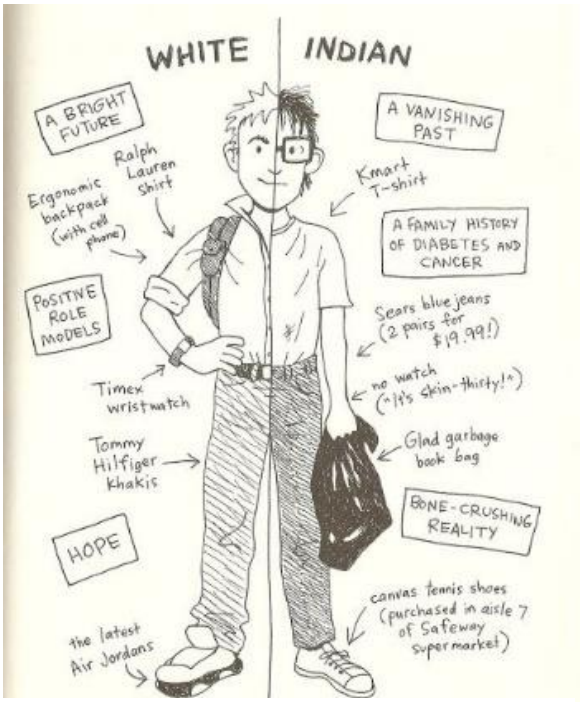

Figure 3 (Alexie, *TD* 66)

Morover, Figure 3 appears to harbor a subconscious desire to be "White." It is part of personal interests, as in Fanon's words "there is no native who does not dream at least once a day of setting himself up in the settler's place" (39). The "INDIAN" side of the drawing signifies, through a poor outfit, a "vanishing past," a "family history of diabetes and cancer," and a "bone-crushing reality." In contrast, the "WHITE" side's sophisticated look signifies a "bright future," "positive role models," and, the recurring concept that Arnold tries to find, "hope" (Alexie, *TD* 66). All of those annotations, in addition to the list of brands of outfits, make the comic exhausted with meanings and reflections of an abused reality. In his description of James Welch's art, Kenneth Lincoln states that "there is ironic beauty in the pain" of fiction where the truth is always present *(Native American Renaissance* 158). This notion recalls the words of the novel's artist, Ellen Forney, "My dad got a copy of the book as soon as it came out. He'd read a review that said he'd laugh and cry, which he of course shrugged off as marketing pap. The next day, he called me to say that he'd chuckled out loud and teared up a few times by the end. He was amazed" (Alexie, *TD* 273). However, nothing seems strong enough to stop Arnold's search for hope as a way to his survival.

Before going to Reardan, Arnold is alienated because he is oppressed by other oppressed and unhappy reservation people. As a result, he had few options for changing his situation. At Reardan, however, he is perceived merely as a representation of the prevailing myths of "Indians" which gives him other experiences of alienation. While some aspects of "Indianness" and the lack of knowledge about the harsh realities of life on the reservation may assist Arnold in overcoming some social challenges, the majority of these cultural attributes cause him deep distress, and, ultimately, alienation. Nevertheless, Arnold attempts to keep his relationship with the Reardan students, knowing that his feelings of being misunderstood do not imply an absence of connection. To do this, he approaches the students from a postethnic standpoint. Postethnicity, according to David A. Hollinger, is a "stretching of the 'we'" (113). Hollinger does not believe in hegemonic conflicts between "them" and "us." Both are people of various ethnic backgrounds. To be postethnic means to be a person who "recognizes that the individuals live in many circles simultaneously and that the actual living of any individual life entails a shifting division of labor between the several 'we's' of which the individual is a part" (Hollinger 106). To start his journey of being a student of Reardan, Arnold accepts the suggestion of reading books. This dedication aids in his intellectual development and allows him to take advantage of the chance to develop

romantic feelings for a Reardan girl. Arnold experiences some self-love as a result of these actions, but his emotions of alienation persist.

Arnold's third chance to maintain his relationships at Reardan is his choice to make good use of the opportunity to play basketball on the school team. He decides with the belief that, as an American Indian, he has basketball skills, and to display them with a famous team will help him be recognized. Arnold's case, at this time, is similar to Thomas's decision to sing his stories on the stage of the blues. It is a choice that can drive him out of his otherness into an actual engagement in school life as a normal teenager. Furthermore, the strength that Arnold has to show in the gym will help his spiritual healing because it will make him connected to traditional American Indians. Basketball, similar to horse riding, carries considerable symbolic importance and meaning for American Indians. Basketball is cultural, and it does not have to be ethnically defined; it is a culture of personal interests. In his discussion of basketball representations in American Indian literary works, Peter Donahue says that the sport is a favorite activity for American Indians, even outside Alexie's claim that it was their invention.[54] It is a sport that has a connection to the spiritual rituals of American Indians.[55] "Hero legends seem to have shifted from those about runners to these about basketball players" (Peter Donahue 53).

The basketball trope in Alexie's works, as Nancy Peterson argues, "manifest[s] tribalism" in "contemporary contexts" ("The Poetics of Tribalism" 135). The visual images of the players are those of "'twentieth-century warriors who will never kill' . . . and run like ponies with long hair swinging freely in the wind" (Peterson, "The Poetics of Tribalism" 137). To Peterson, Alexie is willing to do so because he has those reservation roots which give him the notion of being tribalist, and an engagement with non-Native multicultural materials of writing techniques. It is, therefore, his "creative bricolage" ("The Poetics of Tribalism" 135). So, Alexie's creation of Arnold is driven by his enthusiasm for basketball, which serves as a representation of his American Indian heritage and his hybrid identity. According to Wade Davies, American Indian literature made it easier for him to comprehend how basketball allowed American Indians to take part in the sports culture, "while still expressing indigenous identities" (*Native Hoops* x). He reasons the

[54] "Julius Windmaker was the latest in a long line of reservation basketball heroes, going all the way back to Aristotle Polatkin, who was shooting jumpshots exactly one year before James Naismith supposedly invented basketball" (Alexie, *TLR* 40).

[55] "Sports had . . . been integral to Native form of artistic expression, material and musical. . . . the colorfully beaded hoops. . . the bison hair-stuffed balls . . . drumming and singing . . . [all] locked in fierce competition" (Wade Davies, *Native Hoops* 9).

American Indians' passion for basketball to their desire to "escape an otherwise regimented existence" (*Native Hoops* 80). Moreover, Davies states:

> [Native athletes] claimed possession of the sport to serve their own purposes. Ever-determined and adaptable, young Natives perceived structural parallels between basketball and their ancestral sports, and so played this new game to connect to the old ways and score victories amidst the injustices of the white man's world. At the same time, the sport also allowed for escape. For youngsters who had been wrested from their homes and confined within institutional walls, basketball became a mental and physical refuge, allowing them to temporarily leave behind daily drudgeries, relieve stress, and bond with teammates. ("How Native Americans Made Basketball Their Own")

Arnold's passion for basketball motivates his imagination for other achievements besides overcoming alienation at Reardan. He dreams of being well-known in the world of basketball as an American Indian. The power of this position will probably let him "play pro basketball in, like, Sweden or Norway or Russia or something" (Alexie, *TD* 251).

The idea of playing basketball seems promising because it gives Arnold the power to imagine his identity for international recognition. But, when the coach explains why he has allowed Arnold to play, Arnold's dream falls off. "Coach said I was the best shooter who'd ever played for him. And I was going to be his secret weapon. I was going to be his Weapon of Mass Destruction" (Alexie, *TD* 161). Alexie consistently underscores the profound emotional and cognitive toll inflicted by colonial ideologies and power structures stemming from the pervasive influence of mainstream narratives. He employs this notion to highlight the challenges and significance of his characters' reliance on imagination for their survival. The military metaphors employed by the coach to justify his selection of Arnold are symbolic representations of the prevailing settler-American individuals who are motivated by historical acts of extreme damage. By using those colonial metaphors to describe Arnold's role, the coach seems affected by the masculine features of Indigenous warriors to come out in his acts while playing. It is this stereotypical conception that justifies the use of the "Indian" mascot for the Reardan school team. In his *Redskins: Insult and Brand,* C. Richard King points out the construction of whiteness as represented in team mascots. "The assumptions, aspirations, and anxieties of Euro-Americans not only introduce Indianness into athletics in the form of mascots and monikers but anchor the ongoing defense of them as well. At root, this cultural complex, as embodied by the Washington

professional football team, turns on owning Indians" (8). Following the conversation with the coach, Arnold is once more faced with "institutional racism" (Munson 13), for which he creates a cartoon (see to Figure 4).

As Bhabha asserts, othering starts when "*pre-given* ethnic or cultural traits set in the fixed tablet of tradition" (*LC* 2). The coach does not value Arnold's physical abilities and talents as he does with other members of the team. To him, Arnold is the "savage other" who will contribute to the team's triumph in the match. Arnold's body is comparatively smaller than that of the other team members, and he lacks sufficient strength to match their level of performance.

> It is the stereotype of Native Americans as bloodthirsty savage that led non-Natives to choose Native American mascots for sport. Traits associated with this stereotype—such as having a fighting spirit and being aggressive, brave, stoic, dedicated, and proud—are associated with sport; thus, selecting a Native American mascot links sport teams with such trait. (Laurel R. Davis 24)

Even though Arnold understands how absurd the connection between American Indians and savage manners is, he decides to take advantage of the Coach's expectation and act like a "Indian savage" as long as it keeps him on the team. It cannot be denied, however, that Arnold wishes for this image of "Indians" being strong to be true, and that he can be identified as a good American Indian player. "Just as the dominant society has frozen its image of Indian people with a snapshot of Plains Indians of the nineteenth century, so too have we ourselves adopted some of the same limited thinking in how we see ourselves" (Paul Chaat Smith 168). In Alexie's Smoke *Signals*, for example, Victor teaches Thomas how to act and save himself from being beaten. Victor says "You gotta look mean or people won't respect you. White people will run over you if you don't look mean. You gotta look like a warrior" (Eyre). As far as they may profit from them, Alexie's characters would prefer to be seen in those powerful pictures of the "Indian" than as a destitute, pitiful reservation people.

Figure 4 (Alexie, *TD* 160)

According to Jolene Rickard, if American Indians cannot understand "the philosophies or traditions that frame their cultural mapping with their artwork. . . the artwork is typically narrowly confined to thin interpretation based on old-fashioned identity politics" (83). In addition to providing insights into Arnold's sense of alienation, Figure 4 presents significant insights into his present state of maturity in self-representation. Stereotypes are challenged by reality in the comic. In the cartoon, Arnold's figure is illustrated as a skinny young man wearing ugly glasses and dressed in an "Indian" outfit along with a band of feathers which is usually simulated in the media. In addition to subverting the coach's beliefs, preconceptions, and fantasies of American Indians with the ironic comedy of the artwork, Alexie shows that his protagonist has mixed feelings regarding the profile of his forefathers. The caricature's clothes represent the colonial trope of early Indigenous nations living in jungles. Robert Jensen argues; "the easiest way to justify [domination over the indigenous lands] . . . is to define away the humanity of the subordinated group, so a barbaric policy can be seen as natural and inevitable" (37-38). It is the claim of savagery and barbarianism that was used to excuse the settler-American massive destruction of the Indigenous cultures.

Arnold, in this comic, exhibits what Philip J. Deloria calls "mimicking white mimickings of Indianness" (189). To add his critical touch of satire and humor, Arnold incorporates the roaring sound into this piece of work to infuse the drawing with the anticipated fierce bravery. It is an image that reflects his desire to be authentic from the white man's perspective of "Indians," presented by his body as an Index (Schwarz 15). Moreover, Arnold demonstrates a noticeable motion throughout the comic. In his discussion of the pictographic tradition of ledger arts which was widespread among American Indians of the Great Plains, Vizenor states: "the warriors and their horses are pictured in motion . . . The scenes and motion were of memories and consciousness . . . [It] is seen in the raised hooves of horses, the voice lines, traces of arrows, the curve of feathers, footprints, and the trail of buffalo blood in a hunt. (*Fugitive Poses* 179). Arnold's exploitation of the warriors' motion is paradoxically demonstrated through the athletic movement of his hands and the flapping of feathers.

3.3 Survival as an Academic Achievement

The climactic depiction of Arnold's survival experience, as he transforms from being devastated and bullied into a bright student and a basketball star who gets the chance to be interviewed on TV, is articulated in his cartoon of a school grading card (see Figure 5). Arnold's time at Reardan helps him enhance his ability to communicate and negotiate his racial heritage and personal interests via cartoons, as well as in real-life interactions with people. Above all, he has liberated himself from the emotional and physical restrictions imposed by reservation boundaries.

Figure 5 (Alexie, *TD* 244)

Figure 5 reflects an outstanding academic performance. It mirrors a transformation of self-identification, if compared to Arnold's other drawings. The cartoon is drawn with humorous annotations about the student's status. It is so because humor can make the presentation of achievements more engaging and enjoyable for others to look at. For Eva Gruber, American Indians use humor to represent themselves; "to get people laughing can create spaces in which previous assumptions lose their validity, so that new perspectives can be playfully introduced and readers are promoted to reconsider their assumptions and preconceptions" (35). Arnold decorates the illustration with jokes and wordplays of him being a "PhD" holder, a "Pretty hot Dude," and a "Fresh mint," from "Rear dumb" (Alexie, *TD* 244). Every phrase is a humorous inscription of Arnold's new way of seeing himself and his relationship with his schoolmates and teachers; they also indicate positive views of his future. Moreover, Arnold chooses to place the same mascot he drew when he first went to Reardan because, then, it made him the "only other Indian" (Alexie, *TD* 65). Nevertheless, the mascot in Arnold's card cartoon has different features. It reflects an "Indian" with a protruding tongue. Regardless of the unpleasant connotation associated with this gesture, the "Indian" mascot looks funny. Next to it, Arnold adds the term "plotht!" to articulate the auditory representation of the gesture. According to Kristina Baudemann, this type of writing is a "nonsensical syllable" that "introduce[s] a bug into the rigid system of signifiers and thereby threaten[s] to deconstruct the colonial archive" (75). The utterance of "plotht!," as well as the facial

funny gestures, disturbs the logic of mascots being logos of a "savage" power. Arnold's use of his imagination makes his comics a "paralinguistic space" (Cox, *Muting White Noise* 109) where the reader can think of a meaning that is not imposed on the text.

Figure 5 exemplifies Bhabha's notion: "to be different from those that are different [the marginalized] makes you the same [as the dominant]" (*LC* 44). Cultural differences that are articulated through the marginalized have to be different from the images that are created in colonial narratives and simulations of othering. In an extended study of the image of American Indians in the pictorial press, John M. Coward clarifies that the illustrations of "Indians" created by settler-Americans in the nineteenth century, are reflections of ideas about race and racial difference. Coward states:

> In general, the pictorial press represented Indians as racial outsiders and cultural curiosities, usually in an "us versus them" manner where Euro-American standards and values were the norm and Indian standards and values were abnormal and thus deviant. . . . Indians nearly always appear "Indian" to one degree or another. . . . their faces, hair, clothes, and other characteristics clearly distinguished from characteristics that might undermine the illustration's "Indianness." (186)

To critique such works, Alexie employs a deliberate approach to constructing settings that stimulate a diverse range of pictures through the imaginative powers of his characters. Arnold's drawings, albeit simple, have a significant impact that makes cultural negotiation visualized. When Arnold is depicted as different from the "Indian" image, thereby he becomes equal to Reardan students. Since there is a reputation for "Indians," Arnold expects difficulties on his journey to Reardan. But things do not work that way. His parents and grandmother end up being his strongest allies. He is offered rides by other reservation people. He makes friends with a number of Reardan students. The teachers give him grades that are consistent with his performance, regardless of his race. Penelope, a Reardan student, shows him a little affection. Defeating the expected failure of "Indians," Arnold defines his success by decorative stars displayed on the sides of the report. His joy over a school achievement demonstrates that hope is not always "white" (Alexie, *TD* 59). In addition to mortality, poverty, and drunkenness, hope can be an American Indian trait. Consequently, Arnold's name can be used to replace the question marks in the comic strip depicting an American Indian searching for the meaning of hope (see Figure 2).

By the end of the novel, Arnold suggests Reardan to Rowdy, his best friend on the reservation believing that they have both matured and "knew stuff" (Alexie, *TD* 261) that was not known before but is revealed due to the indulgence in new unexpected experiences on and off the reservation. Despite his refusal to accept the offer of joining Reardan, Rowdy acknowledges Arnold's self-identification progress, which he sees as a reclaiming of the ancestor's nomadic life. Unlike anybody on the Spokane reservation, Arnold, as Rowdy found in books about American Indians, is "an old-time nomad" (Alexie, *TD* 262), who keeps moving in the world in search of life. Arnold's new self-identification as a good American Indian basketball player and a poor but smart and successful student replaces his identification of himself as an American Indian victim of a failing educational system on a "sad, sad, sad reservation" (Alexie, *TD* 50). Arnold is proud of his achievements and that feeling reduces his shame and alienation. This observation becomes his way of claiming survival.

As it is demonstrated, Arnold's cartoons are third spaces of negotiation, allowing him to survive and overcome prejudiced perceptions toward his race and others. Cornel West's perceptions of "love ethic" and the use of "new language of empathy and compassion" in race conversation are Jan Johnson's insights of a "cross-racial kinship" offered in Alexie's *Flight* and *True Diary* (Johnson 235).[56] In other words, Alexie's resolutions suppose that today's multicultural culture offers effective ways to overcome alienation, such as empathy and love for others. When Arnold's classmates express their dissatisfaction with the teacher's inappropriate remark about his long absence due to a series of deaths in the family, Arnold completely blurs racial binaries and confirms his cross-racial kinship. "I used to think the world was broken down by tribes. . . . By black and white. By Indian and white. But I know that isn't true. The world is only broken into two tribes: The people who are assholes and the people who are not" (Alexie, *TD* 199). Arnold, as described by Alexie to be "struggling to reconcile two identities (rez Indian and off-rez Indian)" (qtd. in Davis and Stevenson 188), ends up achieving that consciousness of cross-racial kinship.

In a description of his state of identity, Arnold says: "traveling between Reardan and Wellpinit, between the little white town and the reservation, I always felt like a stranger. I was half Indian in one place and half white in the other" (Alexie, *TD 135*). This description clarifies Alexie's desire to create characters who are willing to survive through cultural negotiations and

[56] *Flight* is analyzed in chapter 4.

the management of their anger and imagination. Arnold finds himself in a transitional state in both scenarios. The idea of fixed identity definitions is challenged by this duality of self-recognition, which also blurs the boundaries between opposing forces and challenges conventional binary distinctions. Identity is not fixed; it is fluid. Furthermore, in multicultural communities like the United States, cultures will constantly become hybridized. As a result, the ability of each individual to survive and pursue his own interests is what really counts. When Rowdy gives Arnold a cultural explanation for leaving the reservation, the survival expedition assumes its full positive importance. Native Americans lived as nomads.

Flight is the third work to be interpreted as an example of Alexie's use of the theme of alienation to point out the troubles of his characters' lives as American Indians. *Flight* is one of the works that stresses the alienation of an urban American Indian. The work is valuable for the study because Zits, the main character, has never been on a reservation. So, crossing the borders and embracing a post-reservation mindset for him needs to be more virtual. Zits's journey to survival takes the readers to a deeper understanding of the value of the liberation of the minds than the previous works because it focuses more on making interracial dialogues to process the idea of survival. Second, Zits is not only experiencing the American Indian hybrid culture and the way it can save his life but he himself is a hybrid American Indian from a racial perspective. The platform which Zits uses as a mode of survival and to get into the process of being decolonized is that of imagining dialogues from different time periods. His space is virtual as the author composes the plot as time travels. As a post-colonial literature, *Flight* has a wider dimension of challenging coloniality. The work gives a sense that Alexie critiques the misrepresentation of the history of America which consists of multiple cultures. To display alternative visions of American history, the plot is constructed in time-traveling episodes.

Chapter Four

Time Traveling: Zits's Futuristic Look at American Indian Tribalism in *Flight*

When I tell him that I get lonely, he says, "The individual has always had to work hard to avoid being overwhelmed by the tribe. If you try it, you will be lonely often and sometimes frightened. But no price is too high for the privilege of owning yourself."

"Who said that?"

"Nietzsche."

—Alexie, *Flight*

This chapter focuses on Alexie's utilization of time traveling as a third space that allows Zits, the main character of *Flight* (2007), to have an entirely fresh perspective on self-identification after multiple futuristic negotiations of interracial relationships.[57] The space of time journeys is contextualized when Zits uses the power of his imagination and anger in a mental creation of stories and dialogues with people from other times to overcome alienation and abuse in the urban environment of Seattle. Zits's alienation originates from his father's abandonment, rendering him ineligible for federal tribal citizenship. To learn about American Indians, Zits grows a passion for and a strong interest in television documentaries and films about American Indians. Nevertheless, his life as an orphan exposes him to other problems besides the absence of a recognized cultural identity, like poverty and child abuse. As he navigates the perplexing and often violent world of foster care, Zits loses hope of finding a place where he can be loved, financially supported, and protected and, therefore, he makes a decision to carry out a mass killing. At this critical moment, his desire to survive helps him change the direction of his life story. Zits's mind produces episodes that occur in various retrospective periods to become his cognitive mode of survival. In the dreamlike landscapes, five rides motivate Zits to negotiate the notion of being an American Indian. Each episode has its way of subverting simulations and mainstream narratives, leaving the young character unsure about the veracity of his television sources. Throughout the time travels, Alexie gradually allows Zits to gain more control over the bodies he inhabits, preventing him from acting on impulse and enabling his growth and development. Zits's modified perception of his identity

[57] "interracial relationships serve as a microcosm of Indian-white relationships, and Alexie depicts them as ultimately a struggle for power" (Grassian, *Understanding Sherman Alexie* 51).

as an urban, non-tribal American Indian in need of assistance in getting rid of his acne is exacerbated by his virtual time travel adventures. This recognition symbolizes his choice to embrace a post-reservation mindset, which frees his mind from limitations that impede his understanding of contemporary challenges faced by American Indians. Zits's readiness to pursue help gives him a chance to be happy with the things he has.

In six sections, *Flight* is analyzed to be another example of Alexie's survival stories. Section one, "*Flight*: A Slipstream of Science Fiction," explains the slipstream science fiction genre as identified by Grace L. Dillon. The reference is important as it specifies the author's intention to modify and indigenize the genre. The second, "Urbanization: Tribalism versus Ethnic-Indianness" is a clarification of the idea of tribalism as an Indigenous perspective of belonging to the tribe and the transformation it goes through due to colonialism. The third, "The Irony of Real 'Indians'" articulates Zits's fascination with the image he has in his mind about old-time American Indians being ignorantly labeled as the "real Indians." Sections four and five, "Zits: A Time Traveler" and "American Indians: Warriors or Traitors" analyze Zits's time journeys. In doing so, I look into Zits's change of perspectives as he discloses scenes that are significant to him and to which he reacts differently. Section six, "Survival: Questioning the Veracity of Media Stories" reflects Zits's new consciousness of his self-identification. The development is striking because it demonstrates the character's greater propensity to participate in the actual urban environment where he lives. Thus, the protagonist closes his story as an alienation survivor.

4.1 *Flight*: A Slipstream of Science Fiction

In her *Walking the Clouds: An Anthology of Indigenous Science Fiction*, Grace L. Dillon, defines the genre of Alexie's *Flight* as a slipstream of science fiction. Slipstream science fiction is "a species of speculative fiction within the sf realm" (2). Dillon explains that the slipstream genre enables Indigenous authors to intentionally break free from conventional genre rules and the typical expectations of their readership. If mainstream science fiction, as Arthur B. Evans believes, is associated with "the increasing significance of the future to Western technocultural consciousness" (qtd. in Dillon 2), Indigenous slipstream science fiction "exploits the possibilities of multiverses by reshaping time travel" (Dillon 4). Indigenous slipstream science fiction "allows authors to recover the Native space of the past, bring it to the attention of contemporary readers, and build better futures" (Dillon 4). It is a cognitive mode for survival that provides a space for cultural negotiation. Alexie's *Flight* transports the protagonist to the past without the use of a time

machine, which is frequent in time travel stories. It is a mental trip that leads a young hybrid American Indian to reconsider the historical representation of American Indians. His increased understanding enables him to seek peace in forgiveness and pursue his interests.

The journeys in which Zits narrates his virtual encounters with many violent scenarios in American Indian history share similar thematic elements with Kurt Vonnegut's structural presentation of violence and time traveling in *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969). Billy Pilgrim, a time traveler like Zits, experiences events from different moments in his life without any control over their chronological order. Most of those experiences reflect Vonnegut's anti-war themes and perceptions. Similarly, Zits's transitions between various time zones occur without him having the power to influence their choice. Those time journeys teach the young man to see life as a series of unpredicted events, reinforcing the idea that he has no control over his destiny. The sole control Zits possesses throughout each flight is shutting his eyes and reopening them. Zits's reaction recalls Thomas Builds-the-Fire's, the storyteller of horrors and genocides in Chapter 2, preparation to narrate a tale by closing his eyes. It is, as has been included in a study made to value cognitive resources in creative thinking, that "closing eyes during thinking enhances creativity" (Yonemitsu et al.). Shutting the eyes is a form of meditation and essentially a moment when no external forces can dictate the appearance of mental images. The eyelids serve as barriers for Alexie's characters, transporting them to a serene area away from the distracting noise coming from settler-Americans.

4.2 Urbanization: Tribalism versus Ethnic-Indianness

In her study of Alexie's *Ten Little Indians*, Jennifer K. Ladino makes clear the evolution of creation taking place in Alexie's portrayal of urban American Indians: "Alexie's urban Indian identity is like all identity: performative, cobbled together from a web of lineages, and at once self-generated and constructed by and within fraught social forces. Because of the way identity becomes increasingly blurry as diverse people come into contact in urban space, cross-cultural empathy is given more space to emerge and thrive" (44). In his early works, Alexie focuses on the tribal affiliations of his characters; these are mostly Spokane or outsiders who live on reservations and are suggested to be afflicted to some other tribes, such "the man who was probably Lakota" in *Reservation Blues*. But as he creates stories of an expanding population of urban American Indians, like Zits, who have no tribal ties, his characterizing method shifts. Ladino also specifies the author's own identity evolution. Alexie "evolved into an author with considerable hope for human compassion that crosses racial, ethnic, tribal, geographic, and socioeconomic boundaries"

(38), which eventually seems to be Alexie's thesis in later works depicting urban and multiracial American Indians.

Three distinct situations reveal Alexie's portrayal of an alienated urban American Indian. First, characters who do not meet the requirements for federal tribal status of American Indian citizenship as set forth by the United States. Second, characters who have limited or no knowledge about their tribe since they are either abandoned or adopted. Zits's situation exemplifies both of these cases. Third, characters who live outside their reservation and, for some reason, never actively engage in interactions with their tribal communities. In the story "Emigration," for instance, a Spokane character struggles with infrequent communication with his mother after moving to the city, reaching a point where she no longer recognizes his voice over the phone. This story is part of the collection titled *Blasphemy*, where Alexie ridicules and critiques various behaviors stemming from modernity that are frowned upon by tribal American Indians who consider themselves traditional.

Deluded by TV simulated representations of old-time "Indians" and the fact that federal laws in the United States do not acknowledge his American Indian citizenship, Zits feels alienated from his American Indian identity, which makes him unhappy and lonely in his metropolitan environment of Seattle. Zits experiences the dilemma of "modern tribalism," in which American Indians no longer adhere to their traditional criteria for tribe membership but rather follow the others imposed by the United States, such as blood quantum (Fletcher 13). The "'Indian,'" as Young clarifies, "is defined by federal and tribal law as an individual who is a tribal citizen" (113), while there is a limited number of federally recognized tribes and their members. In the Introduction to *The Great Vanishing Act: Blood Quantum and Future of Native Americans*, Dr. Henrietta Mann describes the ways settler-Americans have shattered American Indians while constructing and enforcing their politics of defining who has to be affiliated and who has not the right to do so. Membership Identification Cards become the means to tribal recognition. "I am Cheyenne, I do not need a card to tell me that," says Mann (x). However, some urban American Indians are no longer considered tribal due to the expanding population of American Indians and the adoption of settlers' techniques of identifying who is and is not Indigenous.

Zits grows up to be an abandoned youngster who is periodically put into foster care. Tragically, he has not met his father or knows his tribe; "My father was an Indian. From this or that tribe. From this or that reservation. I never knew him, but I have a photograph of his acne-

blasted face. I've inherited his ruined complexion and black hair and big Indian nose" (Alexie, *Flight* 8). The thing that Zits does here is that he dismembers his body to look like "Indians," which Bhabha describes as a threat. "The 'atmosphere of certain uncertainty' that surrounds the body certifies its existence and threatens its dismemberment" ("Forward" xvi). This kind of incarnation, however, is still insufficient to classify him as a tribal American Indian. He lives as a non-tribal. Zits's description of his American Indian physical appearance voices Fanon's idea of "'epidermalization,' which is the thought that essential identity is found on the skin's surface" (Huddart 19). In addition to Fanon's concept of "epidermalization" which elucidates racism, Zits's contemplation of his unfavorable physical attributes encompasses the longing to acquire an identity, even if it is subordinate, as it is preferable to remaining ethnically lost. Zits's physical features do not link him to his other ethnic portion, which could offer him power of recognition, even though he is the offspring of an interracial marriage. He does not, for instance, have blue eyes, which would make him belong to the settler-American tribe, as Lydia R. Cooper has observed in her study of Zits's racial trauma. Cooper states: "although some of the children staring at him are also foster children . . . blue is a genetic impossibility for Zits's half-Indian irises and so, by extrapolation, the blueness of the other children's eyes represents the unbridgeable racial and psychological gap between them and Zits" (130). Eventually, Zits lives in an ambivalence of being American Indian in his looks but a non-tribal American Indian in records. The emphasis Zits makes on the ugly features is an expression of pain; if being an American Indian gave him all those ugly features, at least the love and kindness of a family may make up for it.

Though possible as options, Zits can neither accept help nor identify with other ethnicities because the TV documentaries he watches, the very few books he reads, and his bad experiences as an orphan visualize them as enemies, physically unrelated, or, at best, not friends. Zits is a TV addict. "Everything I know about Indians (and I could easily beat 99 percent of the world in a Native American version of Trivial Pursuit) I've learned from television" (Alexie, *Flight* 14). This childlike reflection suggests a limited understanding influenced by audiovisual sources that emphasize the portrayal of the "Indian" from a colonial nostalgic perspective and, sometimes, with characteristics of the "noble savage" to draw attention. It implies that the methodologies employed in constructing these simulations and incorporating standardized occurrences and portrayals in all television productions, such as historical conflicts, iconic figures, or tragic events, make it challenging to assert their inaccuracies. As a result, the young viewers feel related. "I hated Tonto

then and I hate him now," says Alexie discussing his experience as a child watching the "Indian" on TV simulations. "However, despite my hatred of Tonto, I loved movies about Indians, loved them beyond all reasoning and saw no fault in any of them" (Alexie, "I Hated Tonto (Still Do)" n.p.).[58] As a result, Zits is unable to confront the reality of his media-driven judgment of historical knowledge, let alone find a way to decolonize his mind and challenge the colonial narrative of how he should be identified as an American Indian.

Besides his American Indian features, Zits has green eyes inherited from his mother, but, as is the case with his father's side, he cannot identify as Irish because his mother died and his aunt decided to disappear. "I am Irish and Indian, which would be the coolest blend in the world if my parents were around to teach me how to be Irish and Indian. But they're not here and haven't been for years, so I'm not really Irish or Indian. I'm a blank sky, a human solar eclipse" (Alexie, *Flight* 9). Zits's statement is both a sad admission of cultural loss, perplexity, and loneliness, as well as an expression of his willingness to accept his hybrid race if he finds out the means. In being able to represent his half-Irish part, Zits might get the power to defeat "the coloniality of power," which is stated in racial narratives. Due to theories of race hegemony "coloniality. . . became the cornerstone of a Eurocentered world. This coloniality of power has proved to be more profound and more lasting than the colonialism in which it was engendered and that it helped to impose globally" (Quijano 85). To be considered Irish is a step toward gaining racial acceptance from a group with influence.

Zits perceives himself as an invisible stranger, only his acne-ridden face identifying him. "CALL ME ZITS. . . My real name isn't important" (Alexie, *Flight* 6). Zits's anger and the decision to hide behind his ugliness not only problematize his self-identification, but also make his search for hope very difficult. In a reflection on the question of finding hope in various ways, Alexie responds that the difference between Zits and Arnold of *The True Diary*, both teenagers, is the connection with the tribe, or, being unmoored versus moored ."Zits would think of Arnold as a very lucky and spoiled whiner," says Alexie (qtd. in Davis and Stevenson 188). Arnold is more confident and powerful because he has tribal recognition, while Zits is more of a doomed victim. Zits needs time to understand that "epidermalization," as argued by David Huddart, "in practice

[58] Tonto is the American Indian character in *The Lone Ranger*, a TV comic presentation in the 1930s which has been followed by many adaptations.

prevents recognition and solidarity, and disrupts the coherence of that essential identity's narrative" (19). In the end, Zits's only real power comes from his capacity to survive in the capitalist, industrial, international, and modern world. He must achieve this by using his imagination to guide him in that direction.

Ever since the Anglo-American invasion, "tribal membership [of American Indians] is the key indicator of whether or not an American Indian qualifies for federal, tribal, and, to a lesser extent, state services such as educational scholarships, preference in employment and housing, and health care" (Fletcher 302). Inasmuch, the American Indian tribal affiliation as a way towards the federal recognition of their citizenship as indigenous is complicated due to political, economic, and cultural factors. Recognition criteria reluctantly converted from tribal family relationships to a federal law of racialized membership categorized as a federal Indian policy. This means that tribal membership and, thus, citizenship is not inclusive to all American Indians. As a result, American Indian researchers have works in which they define American Indian membership while living in metropolitan, multicultural settings. People feel alienated, since their tribal status is unknown if it is unrecognized by the government. In *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto* (1969), for example, Vine Deloria emphasizes that "tribal existence has always been predicted upon a land base [the reservations], a homeland, within which tribal existence could take place" (233). If the rising urban population is taken into account, such a hypothesis might restrict American Indians' existence. Vine Deloria, however, predicted a future outlook for other residential settings. He does so because urban American Indians are a bigger population than reservation American Indians. "Urban Indians," for Deloria, "have become the cutting edge of the new Indian nationalism" (248). Later, in a more perceptive examination of urbanization, *The Urban Indian Experience in America* (2000), Donald L. Fixico posits that: "the urban Indian experience, is a story of social and cultural alienation, . . . but it is also a step of survival, adaptations, establishment of an urban Indian identity, and development of an urban Indian identity culture in virtually every large city in the country" (188). It can be inferred that for Fixico, alienation, and efforts to maintain ethnic survival are the main struggles among urban American Indians.

To address the growing sense of isolation among urban American Indians, other intellectual discourses build different sorts of special identity definitions in addition to tribal connections, like that of pan-Indianism. "Pan-Indianism [is] the expression of a new identity and the institutions and

symbols which are both an expression of that new identity and a fostering of it. It is the attempt to create a new ethnic group, the American Indian; it is also a vital social movement which is forever changing and growing" (Thomas 75). American Indians who are interested in those centers come together under a single definition of being Indigenous despite their cultural differences, which helps forge a distinctive force that will represent their urban identity. In his discussion of decolonization as a concept of power, Jan C. Jansen and Jürgen Osterhammel posit that "powerful critiques of nationalism," as Fanon and Rabindranath Tagor understand in pan-unities, presume "the one and only alternative to colonialism" (160). Such kind of a union is an acknowledgment of the Indigenous nations' openness to the idea of hybridization which gives agency to negotiate the location of their cultures. According to Cowger, the National Congress of American Indians' role demonstrates that "culture and identity may endure *because of*, not just *in spite of*, new situations" (6; emphasis added). Pan-Indianism is effectively considered in the many works of Fixico and his studies of urban American Indians. "Pan-Indianism affecting different tribal nations crossed tribal barriers for unique situations or particular needs, for political reasons second, social concerns third, and then for economics as the last significant reason." (Fixico, *The Urban Indian Experience* 124). This is a declaration that urban American Indians have a chance to find an Indigenous way where they may express themselves freely without being constrained by colonial discourses of who and how they should be acting, looking, or living.

Even in pan-Indian projects, urban American Indians have been recognized first and foremost based on their tribal identity. For Deloria and Lytle,

> a tribal Indian—and this appellation is certainly better than simply "traditional" in many respects—did not want to associate with people outside the tribal community unless he or she was forced to do so. An "ethnic" Indian, on the other hand—and this label is most apt, in view of the subsequent developments—welcomed participating with others and looked beyond the boundaries of the reservation to see both opportunities and dangers the tribe might encounter. (235).

By positing the affiliation of being ethnic-Indian, which the current chapter uses as an implied solution to Zits's non-tribal dilemma, Deloria and Lytle have developed a revolutionary approach to retaining the American Indian ethnic presence. Despite their optimistic tone, the two intellectuals do not gloss over the consequences of this fusion, which I do not claim that Alexie is doing either. Only tribal American Indians who live largely on reservations and have federal

recognition of citizenship will ever be traditional; other affiliations are artificially stated for the sake of survival. “The merging of many tribal identities and histories in the urban setting meant the adoption of a common, albeit artificial, heritage” (Deloria and Lytle 236). The new artificial ethnic identities of non-tribal urban American Indians can never tell the whole truth about American Indian identity or culture; they are, instead, most effective in addressing the challenge of urbanization and alienation.

4.3 The Irony of Real Indians

Before addressing Zits’s desire to become a “real Indian,” it is important to highlight that he does not consider any form of negotiating over the simulated cultural identity of American Indians until midway through the story. His disinterest in exploring alternate strategies to withstand alienation stems from his belief that meeting his father and earning tribal citizenship are the only options to put him on the path to being a real American Indian. On the other hand, he believes in his intellectual ability to understand the causes that prohibit him from identifying as an American Indian, especially in contrast to the brave actors he sees on television. The heroic features, which Zits believes are important characteristics of real “Indians” are those polished traits of the simulated old-time warriors that reflect their deep sense of being patriotic (having a special love and devotion for their people) and the shared sense of tribalism (a feeling of belonging to a particular nation). It also places the public mainstream in a fixed position of being the enemy. Zits demonstrates a deeply problematic comprehension of the American Indian identity, which is a recurring theme in Alexie’s works.

In a mocking tone, Zits questions whether “Indianness” stands behind his ugliness and, eventually, his loneliness. “I wonder if loneliness causes acne. I wonder if being Indian causes acne” (Alexie, *Flight* 8). The word “Indian” is employed in this context in an ironic, criticizing manner, representing Zits’s wretched situation as is the case with Alexie’s other alienated characters. Irony and satire “are essentially moral elements of [Alexie’s] artistry” (Evans 63). In his article “Sherman Alexie: Irony, Intimacy, and Agency,” David L. Moore explains that irony, used by Alexie’s alienated characters, is a method of expression that “refocuses connections by their lack,” whereas the use of humor and comedy “sparks the surprise of reconnections” (300). “Indianness,” as Zits ironically utters it, contradicts his frequent nostalgic reference to old-time “real Indians.” In Zits’s opinion, there are two kinds of American Indians: the “real Indians,” as simulated in TV documentaries, have features of warriors, nice braids, and well-defined facial

musculature; and American Indians such as himself, who look defeated, westernized in their hair and clothes, and ugly. Therefore, Zits's own description of how he would like to be identified is that of a "real Indian." "Maybe I can't live like an Indian, but I can learn how *real Indians* used to live and how they're *supposed to live* now" (Alexie, *Flight* 15; emphasis added). Zits believes that the characters depicted on television as "Indians" are representations of "real Indians" because they are violently fighting the Anglo-Americans, primarily on horseback, in retaliation for oppression. Their tribalism is thus cherished on battlefields through patriotic and heroic acts of loyalty.

Utilizing these grounds of patriotism and heroism to explain Zits's longing for "real Indians" is not intended to portray him as a fool or a maniac. The character is powerless and deceived. The exotic sceneries of the "real Indian" pastime violence while encountering settler-colonials displayed on TV documentaries satisfies his rage against colonialism, poverty, and physical abuse. It also increases his feelings of loneliness and justifies his insufficient communication skills. Zits does not want to be a "real Indian" to fight because he is aware that there are no wars in his time. He wants to be as powerful as the "real Indians" were or to be like those wealthy and well-known modern American Indians. He wants to be known among rich American Indians. "Since 'real' Indians are not wealthy, being 'rich' means that some Native Americans are not sufficiently different from 'other' Americans to deserve sovereign rights" (Spilde qtd. in Schwarz 83). In creating Zits's dilemma of identity definition, Alexie negotiates the long-lasting effects of coloniality on Indigenous nations who are still powerless to defeat domination over their lives. Documentaries about American Indians are modern forms of colonialism. The "dominant culture," for Drucilla Mims Wall, "wishes the difficult and complex Native to disappear so that the constructed, controlled, and purely simulated Indian can conceal people rather than reveal them" (103). With similar perspectives, Alexie devalues Zits's self-identification based on colonial discourses. The "real Indian" labeling is offensive, and it shows a hegemonic ranking for individual qualities based on unreliable resources. The imposed misconceptions of "real Indians" paralyze Zits's consciousness, foiling him from realizing that his current non-tribal ethnic dilemma is real and has less to do with the visualized (unreal!) history of Indigenous nations than being a colonial aftermath.

As *Flight* reveals, being Indigenous does not require a federal certificate of tribal identity, and the history of Indigenous resistance to colonialism is much broader than those few narrowly

concentrated battle episodes represented on TV. The emergence of the American Indian tribal identity as a federal approval is the result of an imposed ideology that serves the desire of the colonist tribes to become dominant by having power over the Indigenous identification process. Urbanization and mass mobilization, both of which are initially encouraged to assimilate "Indians," end up becoming significant factors pursued to achieve better living conditions that can empower devastated American Indians living on or off the reservations.

4.4 Zits: A Time Traveler

For readers of American literature of the marginalized, Alexie's *Flight* alludes to Richard Wright's *Native Son.* Wright's novel presents the story of a young African American, Bigger Thomas, who chooses to run away after committing a violent act of murder. Bigger Thomas's escape is detailed in the second section entitled "Flight" to be a quest for "progression of understanding" (Reilly 396). It is so because the main cause of the murder, which Wright focuses on, is Bigger Thomas's natural fear of harm due to his awareness of racism. In a similar rhythm of progression after the apprehension of being an American Indian murderer, Alexie portrays the story of Zits's adventures in time. That is, Zits 's flight is a journey of transformation driven by fear and confusion.

In her reflection on the alienation of multiracial characters, Allen states: "the half-breed believes he is wrong, so he creates wrongness in his Indian self or in his white self. When he understands he is both and neither, that he is a human being participating within a human landscape, he will be a whole person, engaged in living the life he has instead of one he wished for" ("A Stranger II" 23). Based on Allen's viewpoint, Zits's ability to survive alienation is limited because he tends to blame his problems on his father's absence, thus denying the role he, himself, has to give meaning to his life. Furthermore, Zits expresses remorse for his mother's absence. However, there is a difference in the emotional reaction to the mother's passing from the fury toward the thought of an abusive American Indian father. As an American Indian orphan but "not an official Indian" (Alexie, *Flight* 12), Zits cannot be sheltered by the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) and must instead endure the traumatic experience of being a foster child experiencing multiple kinds of violence. Consequently, his low self-esteem as a "blank sky" or a "human solar eclipse," and his reference to his illegibility for ICWA are early indicators that his identity dilemma, poverty, and loss are caused by, but not limited to, his lack of a federal tribal affiliation recognition. Furthermore, Zits has age-specific problems that undermine his self-respect and leave

him angry most of the time. He is a skinny fifteen-year-old with an acne face and the inability to improve his substandard living conditions; his only friends are the poor, drunk, homeless American Indians. For Zits, becoming federally recognized as an American Indian is a source of power capable of transforming his chaotic life into something more stabilized that can help him dream of being rich.

In an attempt to address Zits's overlooked option of being satisfied as an American citizen, he is encouraged, ostensibly at least, by a social worker to experience his belonging to the larger nation-state by wearing a tie and a shiny pair of shoes. As the social worker specifies, dressing reflects an attitude of belonging. Rejecting and resenting the idea of returning to an ancient historical period, the American white-collar men's culture of the 1950s, in which clothing communicated a sense of class, Zits replies: "Do you really think I'd become some kind of asshole citizen if I wore a tie and shiny shoes?" (Alexie, *Flight* 10).[59] Zits's statement demonstrates resistance to an oppressed class structure of membership in dominant communities through clothes, which can affect social solidarity and respect. Despite this, if Zits rejects the idea simply because he wants to maintain the image of an American Indian who is often stereotyped as having a distinct fashion style that is incompatible with wearing a suit, then his comments reflect his delusions. Many urban American Indians adhere to specific clothing styles out of necessity for their jobs. During an interview, Alexie expressed his disinterest in limitations on representing urban American Indians: "I live in a white-collar Indian world . . . And you don't see any representations of white-collar Indians in any kind of media—journalism or movies or books or magazines. It's just simply not a part of the discussion" (qtd. in Cole 107). Clothing that defies the common image of American Indians wearing moccasins, jewlaries, or feather headdresses is an image of survival and hybridity that is underemphasized in popular mainstream discourses and literature. Nevertheless, to be identified as a tribal American Indian, which is becoming Zits's most important demand, has nothing to do with a "tie" and "shiny shoes," and thus, he simply does not care.

Alexie illustrates Zits's reluctance to engage in any form of negotiation upon his personal feelings by portraying the awkward encounter with the social worker. This behavior, as Zits

[59] The 1950s in the United States, a significant era of change, saw a shift in the dress code towards a more formal and conservative fashion style. This change, influenced by overall cultural and societal changes, including the rise of suburban life, economic prosperity, and others, had a profound impact on cultural representation. The era is known by different names, such as the "Post-War Era" or the "Eisenhower Era."

himself explains, is often attributed to the individual's acquisition of passive self-control to overcome oppression during a long period of experiencing alienation. "I learned how to stop crying. I learned how to hide inside of myself . . . I learned how to be cold and numb" (Alexie, *Flight* 138). Zits's techniques of hiding inside make him selfish in his sadness, just like Thomas in *Reservation Blues*, where the connection to pain is taken as very personal. Foster parents, as Zits describes them, establish their relationship based on the idea of sympathy or harassment but not love. Even those American Indians who foster him, though a few, are "bigger jerks" (Alexie, *Flight* 12) than others. To indicate social distance and indifference to any discourse, Zits frequently uses the word "whatever" and breaks contentious conversations. It is his "way of defying the dominant society" (Hilary N. Weaver 244). However, it is also a way of showing the inability to control anger or to use imagination.

It is through virtual experiences of time traveling, Zits's anger and imagination come together and help him survive. According to Dillon, travels in time, or "time slippages," in "Alexie's *Flight*," convey the message that one can outrun the monster of revenge, move beyond anger that leads to senseless violence, and forgive (4-5). Ultimately, anger and imagination are the positive initiative forces that help engage Zits in a virtual cultural enunciation space, and they are, unexpectedly, acquired after a friendship with a white boy. In the conversation quoted as an epigraph, Justice, a "friend" from juvenile jail, guarantees power to Zits through indifference to tribal membership and that owning the self is important, even if it means loneliness and alienation. Justice's name is ironic, as the two youngsters encounter each other in prison where they perceive no manifestation of justice. Also, Justice's race is Zits's abstract definition of antagonism and injustice. However, in Zits's absurd world, Justice's explanation of Nietzsche's philosophy sounds reasonable. For the first time, Zits recognizes how certain individuals place importance on a person and perceive it as possessing inherent beauty. Despite Zits's affection for Justice, Alexie uses their meeting to depict the oppressive power that Anglo-Americans continue to utilize to control and damage American Indian lives. In exchange for gratitude, Justice promotes the notion that "killing [can] make sense" (Alexie, *Flight* 48). To achieve power and end loneliness, Justice encourages Zits to revise the Ghost Dance of 1890, a pan-Indian "metaphor for Indigenous revolution" (Tatonetti 16). The reflection on this spiritual ceremony, practiced in an attempt to bring back all the dead American Indians as the settlers disappear, inflames Zits with a desire to practice something cultural and demonstrate his relatedness to old-time "Indians."

Fooled and manipulated by Justice, Zits is made to believe that resistance can work by the power of weapons instead of prayers and the dance beat. The American Indian ceremony presented in a pan-tribal Ghost Dance religion is reconstructed, by Justice, to be a symbol of the American Indian desire to kill all settlers. With two pistols, Zits rushes to accomplish a mission of mass shooting in a crowded bank. This violence, as Justice inspires, is meant to be revenge for the physical look, loneliness, poverty, ancestors' genocide, foster parents' abuse, and neglect that Zits suffers from. In the context of the historical comparison in post-colonial literature, Justice's theory of deceiving Zits by being his mentor, because he is knowledgeable, is Alexie's critique of the frontier's idea that they need to civilize "Indians." Alexie's American Indians are still in a struggle with colonization of power.

> Americans who were setting out to make a new society could find a place in it for the Indian only if he would become what they were—settled, steady, civilized. Yet somehow he would not be anything but what he was—roaming, unreliable, savage. So, they concluded that they were destined to try to civilize him and, in trying, to destroy him, because he could not and would not be civilized. (Pearce 53)

Despite Justice's implied intention to ruin Zits's life, Alexie uses his stories to bring about change by giving the protagonist a chance to live rather than die. The Ghost Dance typically transforms from a "tragic iteration to triumphant sign" in Alexie's fiction (Tatonetti 20). After the climactic scene of attacking the bank, *Flight*'s storyline demonstrates Zits's survival journey empowered by imagination in planned time traveling journeys. In each journey, Zits "undergoes a process of transfiguration that alters the substance and form of his pain" (Perez 291). To be a "real" American Indian, Zits has to mature, and this development is achieved by historical cross-racial examinations of humanity.

Zits has developed media literacy by watching TV. He can imagine a scene or an adventure using good narrative skills. It is his survival mode as he visualizes an Indigenous perspective of identity. In his introduction to *Visualities*, Denise K. Cummings states that "the visual [in its hybrid nature] has become a primary means of meditating identities" in contemporary American Indian literature. It is "the field of vision as a cite of power and social control" (Cummings). So, after the mass killing, Zits's imagination takes him into time traveling journeys. Zits opens up his eyes five times inhabiting different bodies: Hank, the FBI agent; a mute Indigenous boy at the battle of the Little Bighorn; Gus, the old Irish man who hunts Indians; Jimmy, the pilot; and his father. During

each journey, Zits gains greater mastery over the body that he occupies. This authority facilitates his interaction with the scenes and their characters which is narrated as cultural negotiating monologues. To protect himself, Zits learns how to close his eyes and alter the settings, showing that he can make use of whatever he has and can control to ensure his survival. The plot of Zits's time traveling adventures is crafted to be the cognitive survival mode that helps him abolish simulated images of "Indianness," rethink his disregard of goodness in others, and figure out the explicitness of contemporary urban American Indian ideology of identity as a personal and collective construct in progress.

In an extensive study conceptualizing her "future imaginary" notion in Indigenous works of art and fiction, Kristina Baudemann argues that "while the future is commonly framed as the self-evident result of the progression of time, imaginaries can be talked about in terms of ideological formations and the cultural productions of images" (13). According to Baudemann, the future is changeable and not predetermined. Therefore, Indigenous authors stress the significance of imagination to play a part in creating their characters' future. Imagination possesses the power to alter the future based on personal aspiration. The realization of these aspirations, or at the very least, the potential for their realization, determines the course of the future. Likewise, the futuristic concept in the title of this chapter encompasses two interpretations. First, Zits's encounter with several periods of history enables him to present his futuristic viewpoint to evaluate conflicts. As a result, the argument of culture and identity becomes cross-temporal, bringing ideas and viewpoints from many periods together for comparison and study. The American Indian camp of 1876, which he visits, for example, smells bad, and Zits confesses his disinterest in the "old-time Indians" smell. "I never read anything about this smell. I never saw a television show that mentioned it. . . . But you know what's really crazy? I seem to be the only one bothered by the stench" (Alexie, *Flight* 55-56). Zits's discomfort with the smell is a futuristic expression of belonging to a modern time where modernity and hybridity distinguish life from that of the past.

The second point about Zits's futuristic view is disclosed upon his return to reality. He grows greater empathy and concern for his future, opting to seize every chance to live. With each journey, Zits undergoes transformative insights that fuel his vision for a brighter future. He comprehends that the future is not devoid of potential, but rather teeming with opportunities for improvement. By time traveling, Zits achieves his major goal of joining the world of "real" American Indians. Unexpectedly, however, the people he meets, like Crazy Horse or his father,

emerge in ways that defy his pre- time travelling assumptions. Accordingly, the setting of Zits's time-traveling adventures is the third space where identities are depicted from an American Indian perspective, allowing him to put into practice his beliefs and reconsider his reality—the world in which he lives. The term "futuristic" is also used to describe Alexie's approach to portraying American Indians who can challenge the mainstream narratives of their identity and existence. In this sense, the author's thoughts and ideas contribute to a brighter future for all of his young characters, including Zits, Arnold, and Thomas.

Amber Hickey's *Rupturing Settler Time* highlights the value of time travel narratives in expressing the concept of "othered temporal." The "othered temporal" is a mimicry technique of colonial discourses. It is articulated in "spatial experiences and knowledge" (Hickey 165), where Indigenous artists "use emerging, experimental, and established media as a method of creating ruptures in Euro-Western notions of time, providing an embodied experience of a temporal otherwise and glimpse into decolonized futures" (Hickey 163). It is the Indigenous commitment to resist the hegemonic temporality over their history, the so called "settler time" by Mark Rifkin (qtd. in Hickey 163), through new methods of spatial cultural imaginations. The "other temporal" does not necessarily decolonize the present to imagine a decolonized future as far as the "Indigenous understanding of temporality are often not clearly linear—they may be spiraling, slipstreaming, or rhizomatic" (Hickey 166). Negotiations of the past can solve present Indigenous problems. Skawennati's machinima series *TimeTraveller*™ is one example that Hickey analyzes for its use of time travel to "be a tool of creative resistance" (167) which is similar to Alexie's *Flight*.[60] Hunter travels to times of his choice: the Dakota War of 1862, the Oka Crisis of 1990, and the Alcatraz reclamation of 1969, to name a few (*TimeTraveller*™). The difference between Hunter's time traveling experience and Zits's is that Hunter has access to Intelligent Agent Mode which helps rescue him from being disappointed by what he sees and gives him "a more nuanced narrative" (Hickey 168) of historical events. In contrast, Zits does not receive any form of assistance but, instead, experiences confusion manipulated by television documentaries. To address this issue and aid the protagonist, much like Skawennati's insertion of an intelligent agent mode, Alexie employs the concept of incarnation to safeguard Zits. Zits feels secure by embodying

Hank, Cuse, Jimmy, or others as he gets the chance to express his thoughts out loud but behind someone else's body. The different bodies he incarnates give him power of speech. It

[60] All 9 episodes are available on https://www.timetravellertm.com/episodes/.

allows him to face the world without directly confronting it himself. Meanwhile, the common motive between Skawennati and Alexie is that both have similar interests in "rupturing established stereotypes of Indigenous peoples in popular media" (169) and using time traveling as a mode of "showing *a* future," as Skawennati states (qtd. in Hickey 170) version of possibilities for American Indians.

4.5 American Indians: Warriors or Traitors

Flight is a story of transformation filled with dangers but aspirations at the same time. Because Zits is a teenager, who may lose control over his reactions, the author does not give him full power over the bodies during incarnations but rather lets him develop that sense of power to make decisions gradually. Precisely, in time traveling, Zits gets the agency to deconstruct "the aesthetic ruins of Indian simulations" (Vizenor, *Fugitive Poses* 15) by drawing parallels between the past and the present. Therefore, his analogies are observations into the future. While recounting each of his journeys, Zits maintains a strong link to his actual reality by frequently alluding to the unfortunate events of his childhood and the premeditated murder he carried out at the bank. In addition, his introspective thoughts allow him to analyze and juxtapose different aspects of the lives and history of American Indians and all humanity, as well.

Ultimately, Zits's comparisons, between past and present and self and others, are narrated as part of cultural negotiations. They help him realize that he embodies many qualities of a real American Indian. By bringing up the recurrent topic of betrayal—an innate human trait that does not go unnoticed despite narratives of superiority—Alexie makes the connections between the events of each episode. Since betrayal suggests that no one is perfect, Zits will see the possible good in himself. So, betrayal is the main idea standing behind the subversion of colonial narratives. There is betrayal among the same ethnic members— whether they are colonizers or colonized. Betrayal can also be cross-cultural. Emotional betrayal or personal betrayal are other phases of the trait. As a result of this consciousness of betrayal, Zits becomes better at making wise decisions and avoiding impulsive judgments. By the end of the novel, the character decides to give himself a chance to thrive in life. Upon returning to his present reality prior to the occurrence of the killing, as is typical in narratives involving time traveling to the past, Zits decisively chooses to rule out his decision to commit a mass killing.

In his first journey, incarnating Hank's body in 1975, Zits utters his first cultural realization as he becomes part of a counter-narrative to American Indian warriors. Zits, transfigured as Hank,

a white agent who encounters American Indian activists Horse and Elk, directors of Indigenous Rights Now (IRON). Ironically, based on Zits's media education, Horse and Elk are "freedom fighters" (Alexie, *Flight* 46). Yet, when he engages in a dispute with them, they act as betrayers who spy on American Indians. Zits is left in a state of disbelief by the encounter, which certainly raises doubts about "the belief that [any] nation demands unquestioned and uncompromising loyalty" (Grosby 5). Horse kills a young American Indian, whose body shows bruises of earlier torture, when he refuses to reveal tribal secrets to the FBI. In watching the young man's murder, Zits cannot resist being honest in his futuristic examination of the identity of real American Indians. "I look at Elk and Horse. They're smiling. I realize they aren't freedom fighters or anything like that" (Alexie, *Flight* 46). Zits states that American Indians have been betrayed by American Indians too, and therefore, he feels ashamed of his foolish nostalgia for times where "crimes against humanity" are dominant ("Author Sherman Alexie Talks '*Flight*'"). Eventually, Zits concludes his first journey with the realization that individual acts of treason in a variety of situations cannot be overlooked and that patriotism cannot be assessed by the standards of documentaries. Hank, who passes out at witnessing the murder of an American Indian, is a more compassionate person than the IRON members. As a formative experience to survival, Zits recalls and regrets killing people at the bank and describes himself as "brainwashed" by Justice.

To critique the idea of legendary noble and brave warriors on the battlefield, Zits opens his eyes incarnating the body of a little mute Indigenous boy at the Little Bighorn in 1876. His muteness is an outcome of war crimes. Zits's first reaction is anxiety to meet the "real Indians" who live in tepees, use tribal languages, gather in big numbers with a collective pan-Indian mindset to unite against settler-Americans, and, of utmost significance to Zits, express affection for their sons. "Who knew that old-time Indian braves serenaded their sons? It's beautiful. I'm in love" (Alexie, *Flight* 58). This happiness does not last for long when Zits finds himself in charge of a killing act. It is an act of revenge against a young Anglo-American soldier captured by the boy's father. The episode has significance as it parallels the action that Zits planned to carry out in the bank. The mute kid, however, shows no interest in killing someone just because he shares the same racial group as the actual murderer, even though he feels the fury to do so. Zits says, "I feel the anger building inside of me. I feel the need for revenge. Maybe I'm only feeling the old-time Indian kid's need for revenge. Or maybe I'm only feeling my need for revenge. Maybe I'm feeling both needs for revenge" (Alexie, *Flight* 68). The mute boy controls his anger through good imagination;

killing a captive soldier will not make his pain or muteness go away. Once again, Zits reconsiders his bank attack. This time, he realizes his own cruelty. Zits questions his claim of being a victim of people's injustice towards him: "Did I blame those strangers for my loneliness? Did they deserve to die because of my loneliness?" (Alexie, *Flight* 68). The rhetorical questions posit an implied answer, suggesting that violence is not by any means a way out of alienation and loneliness, it is a way into additional troubles, thereby asserting that "revenge [is] a circle inside of a circle inside of a circle" (Alexie, *Flight* 68). The scene with the mute boy reassesses Zits's rudeness toward other people. "Zits typically responds, "Whatever," to his foster parents' morning greetings since he believes they are the ones responsible for his loneliness. "Whatever" is his word of retaliation. White people are killed in the bank for no other reason than that. According to Zits, the appropriate response toward white colonists is to shoot individuals inside banks

Not far from the idea of serial revenge circles and their effects, Zits lives in a state of shock, watching the Battle of the Little Bighorn aftermaths. Through the eyes of the mute boy, he reflects on the brutality of American Indians against the dead American soldiers after their heroic acts on the battlefield. The corpses are mutilated, and American Indians, "the real deal" (Alexie, *Flight* 55), become "creative" in dismembering them. Such brutality cannot be defensible leaving Zits amazed by the new account of American Indian heroes. At that moment, the young urban American Indian experiences a growing sense of anger towards old American Indians, which puts him in a condition of ambivalence. Unlike Zits, who does not go to school but learns from TV, Marie, an educated woman from *Indian Killer,* can control her impulses towards such themes of American Indians behaving like criminals. For Marie, a university student, the answer for accusing American Indians of scalping becomes an argument where she tries to prove a point in defense of her ancestors. She replies: "You've got it all wrong . . . The French were the first to scalp people in this country. Indians just copied them" (Alexie, *Indian Killer* 66). Copying the colonizer, as Marie suggests, is an act of mimicry and a method of self-defense. In contrast, Zits, in his limited education, fails to validate his perception of Indigenous forefathers as legendary heroes where he meets numerous uncertainties. There is no question that Zits has seen such images in his TV documentaries and, therefore, his imagination brings them back to that specific episode. In being confronted with the truth that American Indians, in present and past times, are not morally flawless is Alexie's method of giving the protagonist a way to liberate and embrace a post-reservation mindset. By adopting this altered viewpoint of analyzing history, the character is prepared to

rebuild his sense of self, protected by his means of survival and shielded from deceptive documentaries of the Indigenous past. It is crucial to note that, in the majority of his works, Alexie "adept[s] at constructing a narrative that tells more than one tale" (Cresswell and Dixon 141). The use of historical irony, then, which is contextualized in all episodes, makes Zits's journeys charged with the power of contradictions. Alexie does not aim to blame one side more than the other for the cruelty of dismembering dead soldiers.

The producers of television documentaries, the primary medium of mainstream media, prioritize the creation of stereotypical pictures of Indigenous characters, such as the representation of Crazy Horse. According to Daniel Francis, the credibility of such inaccurate representation is questionable because, behind them "an important part of Native history is at once trivialized and domesticated" (127). According to Francis, when characters of Indigenous persons are visualized "dressed in traditional costumes and placed in a context that evokes the past, they are not Indians as they appear to us in modern life" (188). Consequently, the mainstream media operates as a business that exploits history to propagate colonial ideology and generate profits by strategically aligning their pictures with prevalent cultural biases or societal expectations. Zits's desire to embrace the warrior mindset of old American Indians, which he knows about from TV documentaries, fails him when he encounters a different truth. Cruelty and betrayal are features of those who are supposed to be heroes. This new consciousness leaves Zits disillusioned, feeling detached from their culture. However, Alexie depicts a ray of light by revealing that Crazy Horse was of hybrid heritage, suggesting the possibility of connecting different cultures and giving Zits a chance for reconciliation and connection. The new account of Crazy Horse initiates a challenging idea and a new context that helps Zits feel the possibility of being a "real Indian." To create such an image, Alexie "play[s] off the immediate text against a colonial context" (Moore, "Sherman Alexie" 306). Crazy Horse, the legendary Oglala hero, who has never been photographed and thus nobody has a graphic document of his features, is, as Zits describes, "very pale, almost white-skinned . . . His hair isn't black at all. Nope, it's light brown, and some strands of it are almost blond" (Alexie *Flight*, 61). Crazy Horse's reimagined appearance, "a spiritual figure, a savior" (Bellante and Bellante 7), reflects Alexie's futuristic view of hybridization and the struggles over modern tribalism. The new portrayal of Crazy Horse, while sounding extravagant, suggests that Zits's imagination is empowered to negotiate and, as a result, defy popular simulations to find

alternative ways of identification. “This legendary killer of white men *is* half white, like me” (Alexie, *Flight* 61) is Zits’s declaration of belonging to the old-time American Indians.

In this second episode, filled with significant historical revelations, such as the encounter with Crazy Horse, Zits improves his negotiation skills, allowing him not only to understand various perspectives of American Indians but also to strongly advocate for and defend their actions. Following the description of Crazy Horse’s whiteness, Zits values the modern weapons used iby American Indians in the conflict. Yep, these particular Indians said, ‘Fuck bows and arrows. We’re going to get technological!’” says Zits (Alexie, *Flight* 64). Those words are not meant to ridicule the utilization of technology but to acknowledge that some American Indian warriors opt to employ new tools for self-defense, as weapons are fundamental instruments of control. Old weapons are replaced by new ones as a preference made for the sake of survival. According to Bhabha, the act of imitating can “change the often-coercive reality” (Bhabha, *LC* 121). Zits’s usage of the phrase “Fuck bows and arrows” is humorous because it highlights his dissatisfaction with how the media portrays traditional methods of resistance against colonialists

Zits learns more about what it means to be a hero during his third adventure as he witnesses acts of defense from personal standpoints, which comprise behaving decently regardless of one’s physical strength or affiliation with a tribe. Incarnated in Gus’s body, an Irish American “who hunts Indians” (Alexie *Flight*, 74), Zits meets a young Anglo-American soldier who saves an Indigenous child, Bow Boy, and violates his military duty of approaching their camp. Zits names him Small Saint in an exaggeration of his sacred behavior while struggling not to see himself as a killer of “Indians” for inhabiting a tracker’s body. The irony in this situation is that Gus is Irish and Zits is “Indian.” It is the blend Zits has anticipated to be “cool” in his desired self-identification. In reality, there is nothing cool about being multiracial if one part shall submit to the cruelty of the other. Small Saint is not a saint, and he is not a “white” who has “gone Indian” (Alexie, *Flight* 81); he acts, from a personal feeling of remorse and responsibility towards the child left alone on a battlefield after a sudden attack. The heroic act of Bow Boy and his attempts to use a bow and an arrow for self-defense motivates Small Saint for a better reaction in which it happens that he does not need to inspect skin color or ethnic kinship. He wants to see himself as a human acting on personal ethics. It could even be that Small Saint felt condescension towards Bow Boy, where, ironically, sympathy is given in a way that reinforces power imbalances. As for Zits, he feels helpless and like a betrayer because Gus is good at tracking and his memories are full of

images where “dead white bodies stripped naked and mutilated and ruined” (Alexie, *Flight* 75) by American Indians. Those visions irritate Zits’s feelings. They force him to seek a rationale for opposing the idea that ethnic affiliation indicates unifying characteristics; “But we’re not all the same kind of Indians, are we?” (Alexie, *Flight* 76). Individual behaviors distinguish people within the same ethnic tribe. In his recurrent feedback on the bank mass shooting through each episode, Zits gets less selfish and more spiritual and recognizes this journey as “God’s final punishment” (Alexie, *Flight* 80) for him. Heroism, in its Small Saint presentation, enflames Zits’s consciousness of individuality. It gives him the essential message behind Nietzsche’s words. To be an urban, orphan, homeless, and poor American Indian does not have to reflect a deficiency in belonging to a tribe, but it makes your means to exist different. Inspired, Zits gets the power to control Gus’s body and saves both, Small Saint and Bow Boy. He, himself, becomes the real hero.

If heroism is non-tribal, violence and cruelty are non-tribal too. In the first chapter, I discussed the importance of anger in inspiring imagination when properly controlled. However, Alexie aims to convey a specific perspective of violence in all of his works. In *Flight*, violence is characterized as a strong, destructive energy that arises when hate and national identity cause one to lose sight of one’s own humanity; “violence is perpetuated on both sides” says Alexie in describing the novel (“I Hated Tonto (Still Do)”). Therefore, Zits time travels once more to an experience that can help him understand that violence is not a means of survival. In the fourth adventure of his journeys, violence arises from another narrative of two stories of betrayal. One instance involves the husband, Jimmy, betraying his wife. The second act of betrayal involves an individual, Abbad, who claims to have been treated unfairly and thereafter engages in an act of violence and kills many people as the media announces. Zits is filled with astonishment as Jimmy memorizes the scenes of betrayal, and, once again, reflects on his act of killing people. What matters the most is that the fourth adventure validates Zits’s realization that in any narrative discourse, no matter how trustworthy it appears, only parts of the story are reflected. As the storyline indicates, Zits is encouraged to rethink his cultural knowledge of TV documentaries and be aware of historical misrepresentations of reality. Violence is akin to revenge, which ultimately fails to facilitate Zits’s escape from the vicious circle of being alienated.

After traveling on four separate journeys at different points in time, Zits’s futuristic perception leads him to conclude that he is a falling object due to his betrayal act in the bank. He changes his tribal affiliation’s expectation of heroism and power into an uneasy recognition of all

humans as betrayals, "We're all the same people. And we are all falling" (Alexie, *Flight* 112). Despite the negativity, Zits's newfound self-identification is a genuine shift because he has given up on the media's simulated reflection of "real Indians" and includes himself and all others in the circle of human betrayal. However, in the fifth and final flight adventure, the character learns that his father is not a betrayer but rather a victim of conventional thinking.

Zits finds the last experience to be intriguing as it delves into his father's experience of feeling alienated. The portrayal of American Indian men lacking parental skills is a recurring theme in the majority of Alexie's literary works. They are embodiments of an absence of imagination and so struggle to thrive as survivors. Alexie's father figures primarily serve as representations of transmitting a mindset influenced by colonization, as well as an excessive burden of memories related to genocide and suffering, to their offspring. They are, along with their sons, "mirror image[s] of dominant prejudices, assumptions and fears regarding American Indians" (Brandt 35). Moreover, they are held accountable for their inadequate preparedness against invasion, as well as the resulting consequences, such as hybridization and its impact on their way of life, including widespread displacement, scarcity of resources, interethnic marriage, and alcohol addiction, among other issues. Therefore, in the use of survival modes, Alexie predicts the effect of cultural negotiations for examining and pardoning family members, relationships, and forebears.

Once more, Zits closes his eyes and imagines himself traveling in time to be in possession of his father's body. It is an adventure where Alexie intensifies Zits's cultural negotiation into a climactic scene. Using his increasing power over the body, Zits gets control over his father's memories in search of justification for his abandonment. Thereafter, he realizes that his father's decision to live alone, abandoning his wife and son, is motivated by a fear of failure he inherited from his father. Zits's grandfather sees his son "ain't worth a shit" (Alexie, *Flight* 133), for being unable to hunt and help feed the family. He acts violently toward his son and fails to fulfill, metaphorically speaking, the Indigenous seventh generation principle.[61] The grandfather embodies the archetype of a traditional American Indian, firmly believing that hunting remains a legitimate and authentic way of life for American Indians. Confronting this reality is distressing, yet therapeutic for Zits. From the story of his father, Zits learns that even on reservations where

[61] "This concept is based on an ancient philosophy of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy (Iroquois), which is recognized as the oldest democracy in the world and believed to be the model of the American Constitution, the foundation document of the most powerful and prosperous nation on earth" (Haley).

officially recognized American Indians live, the significant effects of modernity and hybridity reduce the possibility of living like the old times; instead, people take advantage of their opportunities in life, otherwise, they fail to live a life of dignity. Zits envisions his future as a destitute and vulnerable person, resembling his father, who is desperately seeking recognition from strangers.

4.6 A Vision Quest: Questioning the Veracity of Media Stories

Alexie's *Flight* conveys a reworked form of the American Indian vision quest, which entails acquiring a contemporary rite to passage into a life of maturity. "The Native American quest for visions and dreams among both children and adults provides a wise perspective that is both natural and deeply human" (Kohl 359). It is a ritual that invokes the power of transition directed by the guardian spirits. Alexie writes: "Long ago, as part of the passage into adulthood, young Indians used to wander into the wilderness in search of a vision, in search of meaning and definition. Who am I? Who am I supposed to be? Ancient questions answered by ancient ceremonies" (*Ten Little Indians*, 32-33). Zits cannot have a traditional vision quest, and therefore Alexie creats a contemporary and accessible version of a vision quest. His focus is directed towards purpose behind a vision quest, which is to "catch a glimpse of the great wholeness" and "to relate to the larger perspective" (Mahdi 356). Alexie integrates the theme of the experience in the survival journeys of his characters. By envisioning virtual reality scenarios of time traveling, the protagonist views history that opens up to him and answers the implications of modern tribalism on the life of urban American Indians. This type of depiction creates an evocative backdrop that strengthens the narrative and broadens the protagonist's post-colonial critical viewpoints. Zits's trip of the vision quest encompasses the concept of time traveling since the power of spirituality to obtain answers comes from inside oneself, reducing the need to be, for example, on an abandoned hill. Zits's spiritual motivation strengthens his ability to recognize the flaws in TV narratives of traditional American Indian identities. It is so because "seeing the past (and present) from multiple points of view is an essential part of the maturing process" (Vogel 131).

According to Baudemann's argument on the contemporary plots of American Indian literature, which aligns with Zits's time traveling, it is obvious that, "from these altered, re-forged, and re-made archives different futures can arise" (7). When Zits returns to the physical world, he finds himself standing motionless in the bank earlier in time at the mass murder scene. In a second, Zits comes up with an interpretation for his desire to kill; "I'm supposed to kill for Justice" (Alexie,

Flight 135). Zits's speech displays a revolutionary attitude that highlights his defeat due to the coloniality of power. There is no basis to justify mass murder other than naïve obedience to someone's commands.

Zits, who has experienced abuse in his family and is unable to access appropriate mental health services, uses imagination to get over his socialization difficulties. Through five imaginative acts involving the cognitive process of internal dialogues from a post-reservation perspective, he demonstrates his ability to be an alienation survivor. As a third space, time traveling helps him have a post-colonial perspective involving primarily critical insights into the legacy of being tribal and, therefore, having patriotic acts of heroism. What matters the most is that Zits becomes conscious of the complexity of modern tribalism. Every episode strengthens his ability to negotiate cultural and identity issues by showing how his violent deed interacts with colonialism as an oppressive system. Killing is a misuse of power and displays cruelty toward all individuals. Rhetorically Zits asks "I am surrounded by people who trust me to be a respectful stranger. Am I trustworthy? Are any of us trustworthy? I hope so" (Alexie, *Flight* 136). Since being trustworthy is what people with emotional stability typically expect from those around them, Zits's query has a profound aim to hold that duty. This in turn inspires him to articulate a completely new view of self-identification:

> I'm happy.
>
> I'm scared, too. I mean, I know the world is still a cold and cruel place.
>
> I know that people will always go to war against each other.
>
> I know that children will always be targets.
>
> I know that people will always betray each other.
>
> I know that I am a betrayer.
>
> But I'm beginning to think I've been given a chance. I'm beginning to think I might get unlonely. I'm beginning to think I might have an almost real family. (Alexie, *Flight* 154)

Each line of the aforementioned realization articulates Zits's transition from an alienated state of indifference and silence to another where he finds the agency to seek his survival options. Nevertheless, Zits is not expected to master his new life phase quickly. The thing that Alexie wants to maintain in creating Zits's story is that Zits's resolution does not feature "another dead Indian" (Perez 285). The protagonist establishes genuine objectivity as he recognizes those who

live around him as “people,” who can easily be victims of power dynamics, but not inherently enemies. As a result, he reconsiders his options for becoming “unlonely” and having “an almost real family.” “Family,” as the novel suggests to be the thing that Zits is searching for, is the community where love and protection against external dangers are expected. By being a member of a family, Zits will find his missing “potential” and “live up to [it]” (Alexie, *Flight* 23).

“When I make promises, I keep them,” says the last foster mother in response to Zits’s “whatever” (Alexie, *Flight* 152). Her words have a profound effect on Zits, bringing tears that symbolize peace and resolution. While the character has received offers of assistance, this is the first time he may consider them as offers for survival. Zits, by now, prioritizes his desire for a fulfilling future over his misguided notions about American Indians, or any other cultural identity, recognizing the fundamental importance of people’s shared humanity. Consequently, *Flight* reflects Alexie’s hopeful vision of the prospects of urban American Indians without tribal connections. Over the course of five journeys, Zits changes his perception of himself from a “human solar eclipse” to an urban American Indian who is “happy” and has more opportunities in life than his father. These new visions of the self and identity represent his first move toward surviving alienation. Furthermore, various perspectives are presented to address the numerous misconceptions concerning history and culture. In the evolution of Zits’s post-colonial consciousness, he identifies Justice as an oppressor, IRON members as traitors, revenge as an unheroic act, Crazy Horse as half-white, friends as betrayers, an absent father as a victim of violence, and acne as a result of oily skin, bacteria, or hormones, but not as a sign of loneliness as an American Indian. Zits recognizes that he may be an urban American Indian with the power to make decisions and the qualities of a hero to save himself and others. Zits, or Michael as he reveals by the end, resolves to make a radical change in his life decisions that will keep him free of TV illusions. For a fresh start, Zits meets his new foster parents. They promise to give him hope for a better life, starting with a face free of zits.

Chapter Five

A Poetics of Identity Negotiation: The Retelling of History in "Another Proclamation"

Like other contemporary American Indian authors, Alexie revises the conventional Western and Anglo-American standards of composing poetry. This endeavor is his mode to articulate and indigenize his poetic representations of American Indians' feelings of anger and the power of their imagination. In the process of creating the narrative, forms, and structures of his poetry, the author becomes a cultural translator of survival stories. A cultural translator brings newness to the minority discourse by having the agency to stage cultural differences, sometimes described as blasphemy or a "foreignness" of a language. (Bhabha, *LC* 227). Alienation in poetry is expressed through poetic narratives that bring out the complex and miscellaneous relationships between American Indians and settler-Americans. The poems provide evidence of the lingering effects of colonialism on the worldwide understanding of American Indians and help modernize and reevaluate the construction of their identity by using post-colonial perspectives of cultural negotiations. As has been the case of survival modes in the previous chapters (2,3, and 4), poetry is a survival story for American Indians. To argue Alexie's poetic mode of survival, the analysis focuses on a close reading of "Another Proclamation," meanwhile, an analytical viewpoint of *War Dances* and its other poems is included as an additional perspective on how his poetry represents alienation survivors.

I study Alexie's poetic mode of survival in four sections. The first, "*War Dances*: A Book of Survival Poetry," looks into the central issue of alienation and the story of survival explored in the whole collection. Furthermore, views on Alexie's poetics are presented, with his poetry being seen as a reproduction of Indigenous storytelling literature. The second section, "The Other Version of History," presents a close reading and analysis of "Another Proclamation." The poem, in its plotline of retelling a story of genocide against 38 Sioux, offers a space for cultural negotiations and, hence, a challenge to colonial narratives of that history. It is necessary to note that citing the poem will maintain its original structure, which serves its interpretation. Moreover, the section elaborates on the poem's narrative arc as a "revisionary historical poem." Notably, with the emphasis on survival, the third section, "Getting Along: The (Inter)Cultural Song of Survival," explains Alexie's approach to overcoming alienation and his poetic impact on the historical struggle of American Indians to survive. The fourth section, "The Emergence of an Indigenous Poetic Representation of American Indian History," offers further elucidation on the subject of

American Indian poetry and Alexie's conceptualization of it as a space for ensuring the right to live.

5.1 *War Dances*: A Book of Survival Poetry

War Dances (2009) is a collection of poems written in various poetic representations that revise common Western or Anglo-American poetics with Indigenous features of narration and consciousness. It is an interest that Peterson identifies as "the poetics of tribalism" ("Poetics of Tribalism"134). As well, in his description of Alexie's poetry and the rush that feels like an "energy released," Lincoln states: "Alexie pushes against formalist assumptions of what poetry ought to be, knocks down aesthetic barriers set up in xenophobic academic corridors, and rebounds as cultural performance" ("Futuristic Hip Indian: Alexie" 17). Therefore, using those specific poetic perspectives in the collection exposes the author's survival concept. In accordance with my claims, *War Dances* explores the theme of survival within each work and establishes a cohesive and interconnected relationship throughout the collection. The works include several poetic depictions that explore the concept of mortality and the aspiration to transform a presumed fate into a state of survival by personal efforts. They, thus, display the poet's interest in the introspective examination of the history and struggles of American Indians. As a result, the entire piece of work appears to be a monologue, where the poet surpasses genre limitations and poetic conventions to showcase his artistic abilities and the challenges and difficulties American Indians face. Sometimes, the speaker is identified by the first-person pronoun "I" or, on occasion, by the name "Sherman."

"The Limited," is the first poem in *War Dances*. It is a poetic representation of a murder attempt witnessed by a poet. It does, however, end with a rhetorical inquiry in which the poet examines his agency and purpose in the world, while he struggles to find the strength to save himself. "Why do poets think/ They can change the world? / The only life I can save/ Is my own" (Alexie, *War Dances* 6). Furthermore, the lines appear to incite the notion that people must prioritize their own interests, a notion that Alexie explores in his prose and poetry plots of survival. As stated in the introduction of Chapter 1, Alexie believes that his depictions of American Indian characters have the potential to create change on a smaller scale, which might subsequently expand. This attitude is pragmatic rather than overly ambitious. It suggests a balance between recognizing the limitations of personal impact and still seeking to contribute meaningfully in the realms of tribalism and interculturalism. It is a perspective grounded in realism, yet its potency to emphasize the persistent ability of humans to survive is unquestionable.

In his description of exile intellectuals which I recall to be similar to Alexie's efforts to create survival poems for alienated American Indians, Edward Said says: "the exilic intellectual does not respond to the logic of the conventional but to the audacity of daring, and to representing change, to moving on, not standing still" (64). Alexie's poetry extends beyond controversial subject matters and into indigenizing its poetics in form and content. In reference to Alexie's "Totem Sonnets" from *The Summar of Black Windows*, Nissa Parmar argues: "As its name suggests, the series is a formal synthesis of the sonnet and the totem pole—a cultural production of some tribes of the Pacific Northwest" (233). Each poem creates a vertical structure in fourteen lines, signifying a totem figure (Parmar 233). From Parmar's perspective, the mixture between the sonnet form and the totem structure articulates intercultural poetics and so, as I maintain, they are reflections of post-colonial cultural negotiations. To keep on reflecting on alienation, *Go, Ghost, Go* articulates the gap between the historical presentation of American Indians and the modern fact of their existence. As the title indicates, Alexie makes use of the Ghost Dance reference. "And how can he, a white man, fondly speak/ Of the Ghost Dance, the strange and cruel/ Ceremony/ That, if performed well, would have doomed/ All white men to hell, destroyed their colonies, / And brought every dead Indian back to life?" (Alexie, *War Dances* 21). Alexie has no mercy in presenting the difficulties that an Anglo-American professor has when teaching American Indian subjects to an audience of American Indians. The professor and his American Indian students are alienated in their relationship.

The last poem in *War Dances* is "Food Chain." This poem is deeply metaphorical as the speaker explores the rites that must be followed after his death. "Food Chain" reveals a deceased man's will, but Alexie subtly alludes to the Ghost Dance motif. The dead's will says that the aunts who gather seeking food have to be shot dead; "Set the ants on fire. / Make me a funeral pyre" (Alexie, *War Dances* 175). The last lines, then, become a metaphorical reference to American Indians' ways of survival. The smoke coming out of the shooting gets into the eyes of the crow and takes them away; "Let my smoke rise/ Into the eyes/ Of those crows/ On the telephone wire" (Alexie, *War Dances* 175). Smoke signals are one of the common American Indian symbols used by the author. In an interpretation of Alexie's *Smoke Signals*, Joanna Hearne argues that the symbol used for the film's title means different things when the context is an Indigenous perspective. It is "an indigenizing strategy that reorients the images, sounds, [and] symbols" (126). Moreover, finding such indigenous aspects in a genre that is not Indigenous is a signifier of gaining power

over the text and its context. The smoke signal in "Food Chain" is meant to burn the eyes and distract the crows, which symbolizes the settler Cavalry forces being very close to thousands of bodies murdered for a spiritual dance. The poem ultimately affirms the desire to live: "I loved my life" (Alexie, *War Dances* 175).

According to this discussion, I maintain my claim that Alexie's poetry, in which he represents the struggles of American Indians, interrogates the same hypothesis that Bhabha discusses for his third space theory of cultural negotiation. "It is that Third Space, though unrepresentable in itself, which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized, and read anew" (Bhabha, *LC* 37). As it was clarified in Chapter 1, Bhabha's perspective on post-colonialism centers on the concept that cultures perceived through the lens of a third space provide the marginalized a transitional zone where they can construct interpretations of their identity and reconcile its conflicting aspects. So, as with the previous three analytical chapters, any spatial literary framework that unfolds a cultural plot context, such as Alexie's poetry, allows characters who have experienced marginalization or exclusion to express themselves rather than face repression. Alexie's use of poetry facilitates the creation of poetic cultural negotiations that are motivated by anger and imagination.

In the introduction to a collection of American Indian poetry, Mary Austin discusses the relationship between poetry and American Indian songs. For Austin, "the poetic faculty is, of all man's modes" because it represents emotion (xiii). However, the poetic genius of any nation—Indigenous or American— has to hit "footing in their native soil" (xiii). While American poetic art is dependent on the Western culture of poetry writing, the American Indian verse forms are built on songs of ceremonies (Austin xiv). Those songs come from memories and their rhythm changes with the story's movement (Austin xv). Some of the songs have only a rhythm with no words (Austin xvi). It is so because "it is not the words which are potent, but the states of mind evoked by singing . . . Medicine men sing for their patients, and, in times of war, wives gather around the Chief's woman and sing for the success of their warriors" (Austin xvi). From a similar perspective, American Indian poetry is not valued by its rhythm or meter, but rather by "the reaction it produces" (Austin xvii). In interpreting American Indian poetry that has those roots, the very nature of its primitive verse should be taken into account (Austin xviii). For the American Indian, poetry is "a shorthand note to his emotions, a sentence or two, a phrase out of the heart of the

situation;" therefore, "it is the 'inside song' alone which is important" (Austin xviii). However, it cannot be denied that American poetry impacts modern American Indian poets like Alexie, who flops between traditional notions of reciting a poem, the conventions of European poetry, and the creations of new poetics, like those of Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson. Nissa Parmar argues that Alexie's poetics have a "hybrid nature" in form and content (195). For Wurth, poets from T.S. Eliot to Alexie are the same. They "poetically render what they knew" (408).

While cultural struggles of identity, social relationships, and survival are prominent themes in Alexie's poems, writing poetry is an act of mimicry of the Western genres. Nevertheless, his poems are clear productions of hybridity. He writes in what he calls the American Indian way of being multi-genre, inspired by Joy Harjo, Simon Ortiz, N. Scott Momaday, and Leslie Marmon Silko. Also, Alexie demonstrates his fascination with modern American poetry, like that of Whitman and Dickinson.[62] In discussing his interest in crossing barriers, Alexie explains his approach to poetry: "I write whatever feels and sounds right to me. . . [poems are] more of a reflex talent than fiction" ("Introduction" xxii). The desire to transcend the constraints of any literary genre is an articulation of ambivalence that evolved into productions of hybridity understood in post-colonial perspectives to be signs of power.

According to Eric Gary Anderson, American Indian writers are "mild at best" when it comes to the "lure of genre" (37), as long as they can achieve "cross-genre fluency" (39). Anderson believes that the American Indian's limited engagement with poetry as a literary genre can be attributed to their desire for themselves to be recognized and understood beyond the restrictive title of poets. The American Indian writers, Anderson states:

> would like to be understood less as poets working in particular poetic genres than as American Indians using writing to make available—to their own people, to Indians of different nations, and to non-Native readers—connections between the ways they see and ways their readers might see, connections between where they come from, where they have been, where they are, and where they are going. (46)

Poetry, if specified, is written to be their voice, which is why it is "*situated* differently" (Eric Gary Anderson 54). This indicates that American Indian poets are fearless about exploring non-traditional artistic approaches as long as they effectively convey their viewpoints. It is their way

[62] Alexie's publications are categorized according to the Western manner of genres, resulting in his recognition and awards including works of poetry, short stories, or novels.

of making mimicry their weapon. Three poems in *War Dances* are identified as Odes: "Ode to Small-town Sweetheart," "Ode to Payphones," and "Ode to Mixed Tapes." In comparison to old English Odes which are known by their "strain of enthusiastic and exalted lyrical verse" (Gosse xiii) or, in William Sharp's understanding, their "intellectual meditation" (qtd. in Shafer 2), those poems may sound ironic or improper for the genre. However, Alexie's Odes are situated to be a product of American Indian intellect and mediation that is mixed with deep emotions. The poems' titles reflect the poet's mimicry of the genre in having the "nature of an apostrophe" (qtd. in Shafer 2), where each has its poetics based on the thematic complexity of American Indian plot contexts. For Dean Rader, the characteristics of American Indian poetry assert that "genre functions as a kind of stealth bridge connecting otherwise opposing cultures and methods of expression" ("The Epic Lyrics" 142). Therefore, Alexie is likely anxious about expressing his thoughts in certain forms of conventional poetry and prefers his use of multiple poetic modes or creating his own poetic methods of representation like those of prose poems.

In *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, it has been noted that "the chief informing influence on [American Indian] poets who are contributing to what has been aptly called the Native Am. Literary renaissance seems to be their awareness of tribal poetics narrative trades. What they self-consciously inherit of the old ways of the Native imagination" (Preminger and Brogan 43). Per the aforementioned realizations that poetry serves as a form of expression for American Indians, Allen's view of genocide (or the extinction of American Indians) and continuity (or regeneration) in contemporary American Indian poetry is a thoughtful awareness of the themes that are most commonly represented. Allen states, "a contemporary American Indian is always faced with a dual perception of the world: that which is particular to American Indian life, and that which exists ignorant of that life. Each is largely irrelevant to the other except where they meet—in the experience and consciousness of the Indian" ("Answering the Deer" 149). To challenge those misrepresentations of the American Indian identity and existence, which I identify as the cause of alienation in my analysis, Allen argues the value of contemporary American Indian authors seeking modern poetic means of harmonizing portrayals of their misrepresented selves with those that reflect their ongoing existence. Modernity "provides various means of making the dichotomy [of extinction and regeneration] clear and of reconciling the contradictions within it" ("Answering the Deer" 149). As a result, American Indian poems are sources of power that can assist the alienated in connecting with the outside world. From this standpoint, Alexie's poetry consistently explores

the American Indian identity in its modern cultural portrayals that call into question mainstream narratives of the history of innovation and, thus, genocide within their artificial depictions of the "Indian" identity and, thus, resistance and survival.

Aside from his perspective on poem writing as a continuation of American Indian oral literature, the emergence of hybrid and revolutionary poetics by several American poets had a considerable impact on some critics' perceptions of Alexie's poetry. The author's poetry is regarded as canonical in studies of American literature. In an allusion to this statement, Franziska Schmid states "Alexie's 'multi-tribal identity' serves as the key to understanding his stance towards Indian authorship and its standing in the academic American canon" (189). According to Berglund, a considerable portion of Alexie's poetry has been examined for its utilization of "formal poetic conventions" ("Imagination" xvii). Nevertheless, certain poems "defy easy categorization, raising questions about whether they are nonfictional essays, prose poems, or experimental short fiction" (Bergland, "Imagination" xvii). In "On Airplanes," for example, has twenty-five stanzas, each containing two lines. In the last section, the poet diverges from this established pattern by devoting four lines to criticize systems of imperialism and colonialism: "How imperial! / How colonial! / But, ah, here is/ The strange truth:" (Alexie, *War Dances* 127). "Invisible Dog on a Leash" outlines six divisions that confound the classification of the piece into either poetry or a short narrative. Some divisions present a narrative story, while others indicate their poetic nature through the use of line-breakers. Regarding Whitmanian impact, Alexie employs many poetic forms to give his works a fragmented appearance, which recalls Whitman's interest in breaking up poetic diction. In his observation of Whitman's poetry, Bloom states, "though doubtless homoerotic in his yearnings, Whitman's poetic stance is fiercely universal, and pervasively autoerotic" ("Introduction" 9). Whitman has his way of writing because poetry is "a work of art [that] is indefinable and illimitable in effect" (Bradley 437). Whitman's prose poems are "balanced logical units" (Bradley 438) written, as Bliss Perry suggests, in the form of a "ruined blank-verse" (108). In this demonstration of the similarity between the poets, Alexie's poetry exhibits a freedom of structural forms akin to Whitman's, rather than rigidly adhering to pre-determined styles within this genre. Alexie adeptly plays on poetic traditions and classical tropes, producing poems that read more like stories (Rader, *Engaged Resistance*143). For this aim, he uses a fusion of verse and prose poetry to reproduce American Indian stories.

In Alexie's poetry, the most prevalent way to contextualize the survival stories of American Indians entails the narration of history. In addition to retelling a particular historical event, as exemplified in "Another Proclamation," *War Dances*, which might be regarded as the pinnacle of Alexie's poetic pursuit, includes multiple poetic narratives of survival. In the argument about the use of historical contexts in American Indian literature, Joy Porter states: "Indians were either ignored or grossly misrepresented by conventional historians. . . . [Accordingly,] Native American literature across time have voiced a different experience of American history . . . and a different consciousness of the past itself" ("Historical and Cultural" 39). Thus, Alexie's poetry of retelling history indicates the emergence of an indigenous poetic representation of American Indians. They are an exhibition of his imagination empowered by his anger. In choosing this kind of discourse, Alexie, in Bhabha's words, "enacts a poetics of translation" (*LC* 212) that retells the history of America as a nation-state built on the exclusion of Indigenous nations.

5.2 Emancipation: Another Version of History

In the poems of retelling history, Alexie employs his poetics to construct a counter-narrative that complicates the colonizer's historical trajectory while dynamically revitalizing American Indian survival viewpoints. "The impact of genocide in the minds of American Indian poets and writers," Allen writes, "cannot be exaggerated. It is a pervasive feature of the consciousness of every American Indian in the United States, and the poets are never unaware of it. Even poems that are meant to be humorous derive much of their humor directly from this awareness" ("Answering the Deer"143). In making this assertion, Allen emphasizes genocide as a prevalent issue that cannot be avoided while interpreting American Indian poetry. Genocide and every other act that caused the death of Indigenous nations are actively present in Alexie's poetry. The title of the collection, *War Dances*, indicates that the poet does not simply touch on the subject of genocide in individual poems, but rather establishes genocide as the major issue throughout the collection. *War Dances* is a utilization of Alexie's survival poetics from which the cultural negotiations of modernity in an examination of the American Indian history of conflicts and failures are conceptualized. The title is an allusion to the Ghost Dance which is "the latest of a series of Indian religious revivals, and . . . the idea on which it is founded is a hope common to all humanity" (Mooney 654). Accordingly, survival within the collection is a common reflection of speakers "living in a multiethnic environment in situations where identity and cultural loyalties are questioned" (Berglund xii).

In “War Dances,” a work that contains several pieces of sad representations inspired by the author’s life, Alexie recalls his father’s terrible youth after losing his father during World War II. “War Dances” is a work that can hardly be identified to a specific genre; however, it encompasses many complex emotions that are mostly displayed in poetic representations of agony. Alexie reflects on his father’s life as an alienated by retelling his sad story of family deaths: “I thought of my father’s life: he was just six when his father was killed in World War II. Then his mother. . . . Six years old, my father was cratered. In most ways, he never stopped being six. There was no religion, no magic tricks, and no song or dance that helped my father” (*War Dances* 50). The work concludes with the subsection titled “Reunion,” in which Alexie writes: “I wanted to call up my father and tell him that a white man thought my brain was beautiful. But I couldn’t tell him anything. He was dead” (*War Dances* 56). Alexie and his father were continuously critical of the settlers’ perceptions of them as “Indians,” as they proved unable to overcome the colonists’ lengthy history of considering themselves superior. The utterance appears sarcastic when, after years of conflict and genocide, the settler colonialist sees the “Indian” brain as valuable and beautiful. Like “War Dances” every work in the collection articulates a modern story of survival in its negotiations of cultural differences. To provide a more substantial basis for my investigation of cultural negotiations within survival poetics, I conduct an in-depth examination of “Another Proclamation.”

“Another Proclamation,” is an illustration of the numerous cases in which American Indians have experienced genocide and violence at the hands of settler-Americans. However, it is inherently significant due to the lack of readily available knowledge that sufficiently meets the contemporary viewpoint of Americans. “Another Proclamation” is a poem that describes the historical event of the public execution of 38 American Indians on December 26, 1862. The speaker, whom I will refer to as Alexie, experiences a sense of alienation due to the fraudulent representation of American history. Alexie is particularly disturbed by the fact that Abraham Lincoln, whom he views as the perpetrator, is publicly acclaimed for his Emancipation Proclamation as an act of goodwill for freeing slaves, yet his reproaches towards American Indians are concealed. So, the poem is an example of Alexie’s use of a poetic mode to revise a historical event. As a poetic pattern of writing, the retelling of history reads more like filling the void to critique coloniality.

In summary of the historical event, on August 17, 1862, four drunk Little Crow Indians from the Dakota tribes, generally identified as Sioux, participated in a violent action and slaughtered many settler Americans. The chief, who was informed about the accident, gathered sufficient human forces and assaulted more settlers in their homes and farms. Over 800 people were killed. Although many Sioux were imprisoned as criminals, 38 individuals were publicly executed on December 26, 1862. (Cox, *Lincoln and the Sioux*). This historical episode serves as a critical argument for Alexie since it coincided with Lincoln's 1863 declaration of the Emancipation Proclamation. This proclamation is hailed as an act demonstrating Lincoln's compassion for the people who had been enslaved.

"Another Proclamation," which is no exception to the collection's prevalent themes of death and survival, sheds light on a relatively obscure aspect of American Indian history by challenging the idealized perception of Lincoln as a prominent figure in the emancipation movement. For Sarah Wyman, this specific poem by Alexie is best categorized as a form of "revisionary historical prose poems" ("Telling Identities" 246). It displays an intense feeling of empowerment by describing individual incidents, which are often difficult to put into words in other settings. "As though unable to form this content into cadenced rhythms, [Alexie] rather piles words like blocks of truth, spelling out the implications of Lincoln's dastardly act" (Wyman 246). By redirecting the narrative focus onto Lincoln's less known cruelty against the American Indians, Alexie proceeds to examine the execution of American Indians in Minnesota. The interest to "rewrite dominant American history," as Grassian states, is because history "barely acknowledges the violent colonization and subsequent massacres of Indians by European settlers, because, as Alexie suggests, to do so would severely damage American national identity and pride" (*Understanding Sherman Alexie* 8) "Another Proclamation" refrains from delving into the historical context of the execution. Instead, it focuses on present concerns about American Indians being overlooked and alienated. From this perspective, the poem demonstrates pragmatic knowledge of the concept of survival.

"Another Proclamation" illustrates Alexie's equation of survival poetry, validating the genre's distinct nature when written by American Indians. In the opening lines he uses a rhetorical question and a poetic fusion of verse and prose forms. The interplay between the structured components of verse and the more free-flowing quality of prose adds complexity and depth to the poem's negotiation of the history of the executed American Indians. Regarding my consideration of the theme of alienation, the first lines indicate a deficiency in the relationship between the

speaker, an American Indian, and the audience. The speaker observes a missing detail in the usual account of Lincoln's contributions to American society: his brutality toward American Indians. The tone of this negotiation asserts that American Indians have endured injustice that has been overlooked by many, primarily due to the consistent portrayal of Lincoln as a heroic symbol of freedom. However, those initial words serve as a starting point to captivate the reader using a poetic retelling of history, thereby promoting a more comprehensive exploration of the topic.

> When
> Lincoln
> Delivered
> The
> Emancipation
> Proclamation,
> Who
> Knew
> that, one year earlier, in 1862, he'd signed and approved the order for the largest public execution in United States history? (Alexie, *War Dances* 89).

The first eight lines of verse are one of two instances in "Another Proclamation" where Alexie's poetic style requires using single-word lines. Here, the poet makes use of the classic poetic trope of capitalization at the beginning of the lines. The visual presentation of the lines highlights Alexie's anger toward certain people and incidents. Moreover, the utilization of single-word lines extends their effect beyond that visual significance and links them to the poem's auditory significance. Each word has only one stressed syllable and, therefore, it becomes a single rhythmic unit. Capitalized and, therefore, stressed lines, which slip outside the frames of a specific meter, and have no pauses but one punctuation mark, draw attention to two primary subjects: the paradox of Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation when compared to his decision to execute people in public and the fact that few know about his decision of the execution. The first poetic representation, then, is an initial negotiation of history that covers genocidal acts like that of Lincoln.[63]

[63] In addition to Alexie's "Another Proclamation," other American Indian poets have been enthusiastic about retelling history. One of the examples to be mentioned here and in the same use of the execution story is the poem "38" by Layli Long Soldier, published in the 2017 collection *Whereas* (49). Long Soldier effectively appeals to the readers' emotions through the deft use of a recurring metaphor involving "grass" woven throughout the poem.

The initial verse part of the poem transforms swiftly into a prose piece. A prose poem, as defined in *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, has the characteristics of being hybrid and innovative as far as it brings something new and controversial to the genre of conventional poetry. Those features, along with the oxymoron identified in use of the phrase "prose poem" show how such works have the possibility of articulating contradictions and, therefore, become well-suited for a wide spectrum of interpretations and modes of expression like being a space that is "finding out something not accessible under the more restrictive conventions of verse," "a willfully self-sufficient form," or "politically oriented" (Preminger and Brogan 977-78). Regarding this notion, Alexie exploits the brevity of prose poetry to combine American Indian stories with the Western form of poetry, as I discussed in Chapter 2 in relation to Thomas' employment of creating lyrics.

Following the impact of the single-word lines, Alexie adds further details about the implementation of the execution by the use of different poetics, as represented in prose poetry. The poem shows that Lincoln's regime, which claimed the Emancipation Proclamation to all slaves in 1863, authorized a public execution in 1862. The stated "one year" period, which in reality is a mere span of four days, suggests a significant discrepancy between the true passage of time and what is officially declared in records. Alexie creates this sense of a long temporal space by archiving each event under a different year. The execution occurred on December 26, 1862, whereas the Emancipation Proclamation was declared on January 1, 1863.

While Lincoln is referenced at the poem's beginning, he is not the primary emphasis while discussing the themes of alienation and survival. Instead, the poem's primary focus is on public execution and what it represents regarding the unjust application of the law and the inaccurate interpretation of these events in narratives about American Indians due to persisting imperial ideology. However, the mention of Lincoln has a significant poetic purpose. The poem uses an allusion to stimulate the reader's curiosity and communicate the speaker's mixed feelings about the truthfulness of American history. It emphasizes an exaggerated representation of Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation while ignoring the suffering of American Indians.

Alexie continues the recital of the execution by using the juxtaposition of matched questions and responses. "Who did they execute? 'Mulatto, mixed-bloods, and Indians'" (Alexie, *War Dances* 89). The executed are of marginalized races. This initial identification is notable since three racial groups appear on the list of those killed as part of a broader reference to marginalized

groups in the United States. By including American Indians along with "mixed-bloods" and "Mulatto," a parallel narrative that echoes multiple storylines involving minorities that have gone through cultural embellishment and a history of racism. Throughout history, all three racial groups have been treated unfairly and unjustly. The three, as well, are hybrids in post-colonial terms. This reference, as presented in the poem, exhibits a seemingly general identification. The inclusion of all three groups in the story expands the scope of the discussion about the executed Sioux Indians, while also limiting it due to their similarly marginalized demographic position.

In addition, the poem illustrates the rationale for the execution as well as the particular area where the act took place in other question and answer exchanges. "Why did they execute them? 'For uprisings against the State and her citizens'. Where did they execute them? Mankato, Minnesota" (Alexie, *War Dances* 89). Even though the two questions and answers are execution-related facts, they have poetic reflections. According to Peter Stockwell's study on the relationship between literature and cognition, the implied meanings in the two preceding answers can be interpreted as cognitive poetics. "Autonomous texts can be parsed and described by linguistics, but the heteronomous object of literature can only be described analytically by a cognitive poetics that integrates textual patterns and readerly disposition and effects" (211). The first cognitive poetics, then, is expressed by the employment of a nonstandard pronoun "her" that turns the United States into a character-type figure. "Very strong examples of deictic shift cues are spatial and temporal locative expressions and new names or pronouns" (Stockwell 58). Alexie subverts the natural gender of the states, and uses instead a feminine metaphorical gender. The "her" pronoun contextualizes an ironic metaphor of the United States to be a mother of people. The reference to Mankato, Minnesota, is the second cognitive poetics I want to point out. It is cognitive because the message conveyed can only be understood by people familiar with colonization's sad history. In the 1850s, Mankato experienced a significant influx of settlers, leading to its transformation into a frontier region. These settlers seized the lands previously inhabited by the Dakota Indians and displaced the French colonial territories. "Often called 'settler sovereignty,' this belief included the general supposition that the land was theirs, and they could take a 'preemption' claim wherever they wanted" (Gary Clayton Anderson 47). During this period of increased colonization of Indigenous lands, treaties were broken, massacres were held, and poverty dominated the lives of the displaced Indigenous peoples.

While the acts of organizing constant uprisings to express anger against poverty and land domination are critical to the historical story of the execution, they are treated in the poem's narrative with a controlled tone as a reasonable justification. Alexie's anger is notably heightened in his poetic narration of questions and responses disclosing factual information regarding the execution and modifying the representation of Lincoln.

> How did they execute them? Well, Abraham Lincoln thought it was good
> And
> Just
> To
> Hang
> Thirty-eight
> Sioux
> simultaneously. Yes, in front of a large and cheering crowd, thirty-eight Indians dropped to their deaths. Yes, thirty-eight necks snapped. (Alexie, *War Dances* 89).

The second use of single-word lines makes the poetic creation of the answer effective—both visually and in speech. In their strong rhythmic impact, Alexie emphasizes the significance of his words. This use is a challenging mimicry to the prevailing Western literary convention wherein lines of poetry typically commence with uppercase initials, so indicating a requirement for emphasis. The use of single-word can facilitate several interpretations, as readers have to engage with the text to uncover the intended meanings. Examining how the act of hanging may be interpreted as "good And Just," with the latter standing out in its uppercase J letter, reveals the incorporation of multiple layers of complexity within the poem. Even if hanging appeared to be an appropriate conclusion, individuals that are fully aware of the circumstances cannot judge it as just.

The second identification assigned to the individuals who were put to death four days before the Emancipation Proclamation's announcement is "Sioux." They are not "mulattos," "mixed-bloods," or "Indians;" they are 38 Sioux. Still, for American Indians, Sioux maintains a general misrepresentation because the executed were Dakota. Furthermore, Alexie precisely designates the individuals who are hanged as Sioux only when he argues the act of hanging to be justice from Lincoln's point of view. In this context, Lincoln is a symbol of coloniality, while the 38 Sioux individuals are emblematic of those who have been colonized. Indeed, the 38 convicts

are victims due to a multitude of factors. The aforementioned sentence is performed in a manner that exhibits brutality towards mankind, as it is carried out simultaneously and in an open-air setting, with an audience that expresses enthusiastic support. Lincoln's absurd notion that the execution act is a just action against violence is subordinated when considering the event with its portrayal of oppression and force against American Indians.

While the claim of Sioux identity is invalid in the larger scheme of things, Alexie's application of it is challenging for actual historical records. The "38 Sioux Indians" are the words inscribed on the old Mankato monument "Here Were Hanged 38 Sioux Indians Dec. 26th 1862." Sioux is not the name of a particular tribe, at least from the perspective of American Indians. It is a colonial corruption of a name Indigenous nations never used for themselves before contact. Furthermore, it is not the name of Dakota, the subject of this narrative in the historical fiction authored by American Indian scholars. Sioux is an alliance of tribes with three major divisions in the southern states of the United States: the Dakota to the east, the Yankton-Yanktonai in the middle, and the Lakota to the west (Gibbon 2). Each is subdivided into additional recognized tribes and additional minor political units. Guy Gibbon, in his eight chapters of *The Sioux*, for instance, speculates on the significance of his book's units and topics to dispel the illusion that anyone can comprehend the Sioux or any other people (Gibbon 1). Sioux is a generic term used to refer to numerous American Indian nations with diverse languages and cultures. To shift his historical narrative from being general to being specific, Alexie skillfully and especially uses the colonial title of the Sioux as one nation. By employing this modification, Alexie adds a personal and concrete element to his poem, which can elicit stronger emotions and create a more vivid image in the mind of the reader. When retelling the history of an individual tribe of American Indians or even other nations, this strategy is used to progressively build the poem's credibility and emotional impact.

5.3 Getting Along: The (Inter)Cultural Song of Survival

In the poem's final section, the speaker transforms the sense of alienation caused by the historical injustice, of being inaccurate in its representation of American Indians, into that of alienation survivor by the use of other poetics. The transition into an alienation survivor is an expected process that occurs after embracing a post-reservation mindset which the speaker has embraced in making the decision of retelling history. "Another Proclamation" ends with lines in which the speaker 1) adds a survival reference to the story and 2) becomes more open to sharing

the pain of being the descendant who seeks narrative justice, with the readers/listeners from any other nations. These two main demonstrations stand for the negotiation of the American Indian cultural act of singing for death. In a discussion over the politics of cultural difference, Bhabha posits that difference becomes clear when the marginalized have the agency to break anything that is dominant, generalized, or fixed. It is so because defying cultural convention calls into question their legitimacy (Olson and Worsham 361). Thus, Alexie defies the preconceived notion that those survival songs would be particularly remarkable for those traditional American Indians by presenting them for an international audience.

"Another Proclamation" portrays a cultural negotiation of identity by an American Indian who has been freed from the historical subjugation and control of imperialism to critique the political ideologies of representing Lincoln as a hero. Alexie's post-reservation mindset gives him the agency to confront the issue of Lincoln's other proclamation and thereafter assumes the duty of placing a resolution within a contemporary viewpoint of the poem. In his article "Borderland Voices in Contemporary Native American Poetry," Robin Riley Fast states:

> Contemporary American Indian poetry reflects both internal and external border experiences. Emotional, political, economic, and cultural barriers are imposed on Native peoples from without and may then be internalized by individuals and communities. The appropriate response, the poetry often implies, is first to recognize these barriers and their effects for what they are. This recognition may lead to a redefinition and reinforcing of some barriers, as a protective way of reclaiming and reasserting the power of cultural, communal self-definition. Borders, then, may be understood as functional, even desirable, or as impediments to be opened, crossed, blurred, or eroded. (514)

According to this notion, Alexie's use of poetry helps him challenge the settler's prevailing control over historical narratives. Furthermore, it is a significant personal achievement to advocate for the writing rights of oppressed people, as I have argued in my discussion of Bhabha's notion of writing rights (1.2), aiming to get recognition and oppose the colonial mindset that supported the genocide of American Indians.

"Another Proclamation" ends with lines in which the poet 1) represents a different end to the story of the Sioux men and 2) becomes more open to sharing the pain of being the descendant American Indian who negotiates injustice with the readers/listeners from any other nation. These two main demonstrations, which I will explain in more detail eventually, come out of Alexie's

poetic representation of Indigenous death song cultures. Utilizing death songs as a poetic illustration reinforces Bhabha's assertion that post-colonial negotiations should adhere to a specific analytical approach to demonstrate the differences between cultures to highlight the intercultural nature of the world, rather than simply its multicultural aspects.[64]

Anglo-American anthropologists have studied and classified singing as a cultural tradition of American Indians. James Adair's *History of the American Indians* discusses several types of songs performed during times of conflict, victory, death, and mourning. Death songs observed by Adair are archived as Halelu-Yah Yo He Wah, signifying their words, while their vocalization is identified, by Adair, as whoop (Adair). Although the study is an old one that has not been authorized by American Indians, its value lies in the irreplaceable nature of the setting or landscape in which it was conducted, an environment that cannot be replicated. Joseph Epes Brown's *The Sacred Pipe: Black Elk's Account of the Seven Rites of the Oglala Sioux* is another work where stories of death songs are translated. In the second chapter of the book, Black Elk recalls the first time keeping of the soul was practiced as a rite in the tribe. The ritual is performed in multiple acts, such as collecting a hair lock, lighting a pipe, chanting prayers, acting sacred, eating meat, and other activities to release the soul. One noteworthy aspect in Black Elk's record is Brown's translation of the prayers, such as: "*Hi Ho! Hi Ho!* Thanks" (22), or "*Hi yee!* Thanks! So be it!" (26). It can be said that the authenticity of the English translation by Brown is challenging because he adds those English expressions that may not be the real meanings of the prayers. Despite possible cultural misrepresentations, the book certainly demonstrates that the Sioux tribes, like all other American Indian nations, have a long-standing tradition of mourning the departed, which has been passed down through successive generations.

By using anthropological archetypes and as-told-to autobiographies, simulations of American Indians are placed in a specific cultural context of being nostalgic and similar across various cultural backgrounds. Therefore, understanding the destructive force of anxiety and the need for singing becomes increasingly insignificant. Failure to appreciate or comprehend the greater context around the death song, such as its cultural significance, historical trauma, or the precise circumstances that led to its performance, would result in a narrow and perhaps incorrect interpretation. In "Another Proclamation" Alexie confronts these preconceptions by serving as a cultural translator. He incorporates the image of singing death songs in his poetic interpretation of

[64] The idea has been developed in Chapter 1 (1.2).

the execution to challenge the prevailing simulation associated with the "Indian" death song and to elicit a strong emotional response from the readers/listeners on the brutality of the killing. Ironically, a death song transforms into an intercultural anthem for survival.

For Geoff Hamilton, power over history is essential for authors "to identify and ironize the ways in which Indigenous identities have been disfigured" (57). In having this agency, American Indians produce different literary texts that can powerfully read as anti-imperial translations (Krupat 32). Consequently, novels or literary narratives authored by American Indians present a distinct portrayal and influence while discussing the tradition of death songs. By the use of poetry as a third space, Alexie's retelling of history gets into a negotiation of hybridization when he adds a modernized version of the American Indian death songs. By the end of the poem, a transformation is noticed in the trajectory of the execution episode and Alexie's poetics generate a modern identity argument of survival.

> But before they died, thirty-eight Indians sang their death songs. Can you imagine the cacophony of thirty-eight different death songs? But wait, one Indian was pardoned at the last minute, so only thirty-seven Indians had to sing their death songs. But, O, O, O, O, can you imagine the cacophony of that one survivor's mourning song? If he taught you the words, do you think you would sing along? (Alexie, *War Dances* 89-90).

The three rhetorical questions here offer a conversation over the American Indian death songs and the fate of a condemned person who receives a last-minute pardon. Singing a death song is a practice that uses "the power of the sacred to overcome the horrors of the world" (Brill 10). It is one method of healing. It is thus because death is regarded as a natural aspect of life in many Indigenous cultures (Hampton et al. 10). In *Black Elk Speaks*, Black Elk explains that anytime he and the other Oglala Sioux with him confront death, he sings his death song "because if it was the end of our lives and we could do nothing, we wanted to die brave" (Neihardt 175). Thus, Alexie's integration of death songs serves as a means to envision a cultural narrative that offers a critical perspective on the execution of the Sioux.

"For the captive to keep singing the song—without crying out at inflected torture—was a way of continuing to wage war by maintain his or her past identity" (Rath 156). The death song that Alexie adapts in his poem is a complex articulation of the right to live. The executed, who varied in age and, hence, knowledge of culture, chant multiple "songs" of death, resulting in a

cacophony since they do not rhyme together. A death song is a sacred act among American Indians. "It is a most personal act—the composing and, of course, the singing" (Warren 216). Such a spiritual activity is not meant to make a melody and, therefore, 38 death songs is a "cacophony." The stress on using death song chants as representations of an audio experience of cacophony, Alexie proves his poetic contribution in the construction of the history of the execution wherein his depicted characters act as anti-romantic images of the Indigenous death stories. The poetic description of the singing incident functions as an emotive indication that popular narratives that celebrate the spirituality of Indigenous ceremonies are insufficiently compelling to explain their disinterest in the act of killing. Additionally, the term "cacophony" underscores the dissonant and overwhelming nature of singing for death where natural justice is completely absent.

Death songs, as performed by Alexie's 38 Sioux on a scaffold in 1862, have poetic agency and serve as a vital representation of a chaotic and emotionally intense experience. The Sioux's death songs undergo a creative change in their cultural significance to portray readiness for death in the real world, transforming it into a poetic depiction of sorrowful and destructive experiences. The poet aims to emphasize the value of individuals while contemplating existential questions for American Indians with the lack of justice caused by power struggles and dominance. After articulating a great deal of anguish due to the unjust actions of Lincoln, which makes the poem seem dark and tragic, Alexie delivers the transitional phrase "But wait," to signal a pause for reconsidering his resolution when something unexpected happens. To be used at the beginning of a sentence, the phrase gains a stressed intonation pattern that carries a sense of urgency. It is Alexie's use of his poetics to invite readers to join his implication of what comes next where he has less interest in portraying death and failure. The phrase contributes to the poem's perspective of survival and becomes a discourse marker before passing the poetic description of a survivor experience which goes within the context of third space post-colonial negotiations.

One person of the 38 Sioux individuals is granted a pardon. As it is presented, that person receives the notification on the scaffold. The moment is simultaneously sorrowful and ironic. It's shocking how a sentence may change at the last minute. It feels like melodrama. Alexie's suggestion of a hasty judgment, which is proved when someone is pardoned, trivializes the investigative process that led to the sentencing of the Sioux. Alexie's attention to the pardoned song makes the scene even more significant. The song is a mourning for the deceased Sioux. The Sioux's mourning chant likely portrays his profound anguish and the burden of being the sole

survivor amidst the passing of his companions. The mourning song lacks a discernible tune and echoes as a cacophony, much like the collection of 37 death songs. It is thus because the pardoned Sioux sings for his grief and sadness but not his relief of being a survivor. This song depicts the experience of a Sioux man who has been deeply affected by the execution trauma and is forever bearing the consequences of survivor guilt. So singing is therapeutic and healing. This notion is even extended to include every reader with the poem's potent portrayal of survival. It is here where Alexie uses his understanding of having a decolonized mindset. Alexie does not believe in the efficacy of being traditional as a healing ideology in the modern world of American Indians; he offers his hybrid paradigm of survival, which is articulated by asking readers of different cultures and affiliations to participate in the singing. The mourning song has to become an international song of survival wherein all individuals collectively empathize and comprehend the suffering of their fellow beings.

"Another Proclamation" ends with one more rhetorical question that has a lot of sad feelings emphasized by the frequent repetition of the vowel sound "O." The letter O, commonly employed in poetry as an apostrophe to express a plea towards someone or something, assumes a modified function that conveys a tone of sorrow when it is recited. It is a sound poetic that Brill de Ramirez describes as a "sonority poetics" which, in her claim, makes the interpretation of poetry a little difficult ("The Distinctive Sonority" 108). Alexie employs the mournful tone of the sound poetic, namely through the use of the letter "O," to elicit a deep emotional response from readers and maintain an atmosphere of grief for the deceased individuals. Furthermore, the absence of an ethnic identity in the pronoun "you," as a reference to the readers addressed implies that people of all backgrounds are urged to empathize with the distress and sorrow felt by the survived Sioux. Death songs are culturally significant, but singing them alongside others represents a new representation of survival. It is a description of Hollinger's concept of "rooted cosmopolitanism" (5). Alexie's appeal for his readers to spread the song of grief serves as a temptation for humanity to set off on a journey of postethnic humanity and an announcement of cultural differences.

Even though the poem does not mention it, it is important to note that Abraham Lincoln pardoned 265 out of 303 American Indians accused of the uprising. Alexie perceives this act of generosity as hypocritical since the dominant narrative excessively emphasizes it, so preventing people from recognizing the intricate nature of the gesture's impact on American Indians (Alexie, "Sherman Alexie/On Living Outside Borders"). This fact gives Alexie and other American Indians

a feeling of alienation. So, "Another Proclamation" is a poem that challenges the prevailing notion that Lincoln, despite his association with coloniality and the maltreatment of American Indians, is revered as a savior. It retells the story, but the poet places greater emphasis on drawing attention to the tale of the 37 Sioux who perished.

5.4 The Emergence of an Indigenous Poetic Representation of American Indian History

In *Changing is Not Vanishing* (2011), Parker attempts to restore early American Indian poetry. He claims that poetry has been used as a space of self-expression from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and that colonialism is a main topic.

> The issues and ways of thinking that characterize. . . [the early American Indian] poems include colonialism and the federal government, land, the condition of the world in general, nature, Christianity, and other Indian peoples. Often, as well, sadly, but understandably, the poets imagine Indian people through internalized racism. (Parker 11)

Parker's work for the anthology exemplifies Alexie's thesis that poetry is survival. It is the means for the American Indian poets to present themselves in topics that reflect the reality of who they are. It is, however, in being realistic, poetry does not lose the value of its poetic sensation. As Parker believes, art and topicality are not at odds. There is "an art to imagining a topic . . . [and] topicality in all art" (6). It is, therefore, in the interpretation of Alexie's poem, the poetic presentation of the execution and the disruption of Lincoln's vanity are seen as his poetics of negotiation.

Alexie's poetic images which he uses as tools to transform the genre into something more of being American Indian and a tool in which he navigates different alienation issues is a manifestation of the power of poetry. It is a "responsibility," as Cook-Lynn indicates, "of a poet. . . to 'consecrate' history and event" (qtd. in Shanley 45). *War Dances* is a passionate articulation of the American Indian viewpoint of identity, culture, and history. Like Joy Harjo, who believes that "the word poet is synonymous to truth-teller" (qtd. in Wilson 109), Alexie employs his rage and imagination to engage in poetic representations of history. In an examination of American Indian poetry published in John Milton's special edition of *The American Indian Speaks*, Andrew Wiget's argues that in the 1960s the American Indian poetry evolved as a respectable venue for artistic pursuit among American Indians that is capable of allowing readers to hear the voice of the marginalized. The value of the American Indian poems, for Wiget, lies not in their genre specialization but in how well they express distinct viewpoints that resonate universally with the

American Indian identity dilemma. Therefore, the poets have encountered a challenge in composing poems narrating the modern problems of American Indians with no interest in making any reflections of their simulations. American Indian poetry is defined as an utterance of a "statement of personal truth that substitutes an act of self-naming for an act of other-labelling" (Wiget 604). So, Alexie's poems are spaces of contemporary identity and cultural negotiations.

According to Peterson, the American Indian history of genocide has "gone unrecognized" ("If I Were Jewish" 63), meaning that the American Indian perspective of victimization has not received enough attention. To draw attention to history, poets use their power to engage a broader range of audiences and make reflections on those occurrences. They "bring up complicated epistemological and ethical issue" ("If I Were Jewish" 64) to view the American Indian perspective of being victimized and then survivals. Alexie's poetry, as Peterson reads, is "not merely playful or imaginative; they reflect a significant ethical engagement with issues attached to genocide and histories and [the American Indian] use of them" ("If I Were Jewish" 65). In light of Peterson's identification of genocide references in American Indian poetry, Alexie proposes a reinterpretation of historical events in his poetry as a successful effort to address alienation. His poems typically offer a comprehensive exploration of the core and aftermath of historical events, exposing the most challenging portrayals of historical wrongdoing. Alexie's poetic prowess shines in his ability to contemporize the portrayal of history and address concerns about the enduring influence of the past on the present.

Conclusion

The dissertation asserts that the concept of alienation is a theme that encompasses all unhappy relationships depicted in the works of Alexie. Alienation is evident in the works of prose through the protagonists' self-identification, either explicitly claimed or implied in their perspectives of themselves. The deficiency of the relationships that stand behind the feelings of alienation is troublesome because the interactions are unavoidable. The characters live in a setting where individuals need one another. In Alexie's poetry, however, images of American Indian lives, feelings, and history that penetrate to the heart of the pain they feel and share as marginalized devastated nations or as recollections of tragic days are examined as alienation. The poetic illustrations of such unhappiness are verses of speakers who are in need for a collective healing and reconciliation. Furthermore, Alexie's poignant poetry reveals the theme of alienation in its poetics, regardless of its subjects, as long as it is a composition of an American Indian whose identity, culture, memory, and recognition in literary arts have historically been constrained and marginalized by the mainstream culture of art and literature. Poetry serves as a form of resistance to colonialism which stands as a power fostering alienation among American Indians.

Thomas's alienation, in *Reservation Blues*, is depicted through his experience of loneliness and his identification as a misfit storyteller. His desire to become a contemporary storyteller elicits disapproval from the Spokanes, who prefer narratives of healing, such as those of traditional storytellers, to Thomas' themes of genocide, poverty, and misery. The Spokanes feel impotent after hearing Thomas's stories because they undermine their pride and delight in their ancestors' spirituality. The occupation of a solitary position at the post office, where he can force people to meet him, exemplifies Thomas's poor relationship proficiency and, therefore, alienation. Also, Thomas does not show signals of displeasure in the face of the suffering he receives from his fellow rez pals, Victor and Junior, because he knows their sentiments of vulnerability, it is common on the reservation. In an attempt to change his life interests, Thomas gets into other experiences of alienation when he joins Coyote Springs as the lead singer. Audiences of many races gather to watch the "Indian" sing, but Thomas disappoints them with his concerts, which are either cover songs of well-known bands or forceful renditions of reservation blues.

In *True Diary*, Arnold is a teenager who has serious alienation experiences that come along with institutional racism. The first is expressed by his pursuit of medical treatment, due to health concerns, where he is regarded as less human than the white race. Besides other racist behaviors,

the medical aid providers classify him as an "Indian" who does not require anesthesia like other people. Arnold's second experience of alienation occurs at Reardan, the off-reservation school he transfers to because it possesses high-quality educational resources. This decision results in him receiving racist remarks from his teachers and schoolmates. The deficiency of Arrnold's relationships makes him identify as a part-time Indian. As Alexie uses the word Indian to reflect both: the identity of his characters as Indigenous and the image of the "Indian" created in colonial discourses, the identification as a part-time Indian stresses Arnold's delusion. Arnold finds himself an "Indian" while at school, and a Spokane poor American Indian on the reservation. While probably, he identifies as an Indian while on the reservation, and white when at Reardan. He can be a part-time white as he seems on a journey to assimilate.

Zits, in *Flight,* self-identifies as a blank sky and a human solar eclipse because he cannot find his father to teach him how to be an American Indian. The struggle with self-identification due to the absence of parental guidance leaves Zits alienated from his foster parents. "Whatever" is Zits's magical linguistic to protect him from making any emotional investment in relationships. It is an answer to every question and an indication of a lack of motivation to be part of any dialogue. Zits's lack of connections with others is influenced by the stories of television documentaries, whose depictions of "Indians" and Anglo-Americans make him feel not enough "Indian" and hence alienated. Furthermore, these documentaries portray the metropolitan world of settler-Americans as evil. The expansion of the gap between Zits and his environment is exacerbated by the corruption in the fostering institution. Zits's name is Micheal, and the use of his zits as a name is his way of hiding the pain he feels for being young, with complication issues, and lonely, with no one to offer him help.

In the last chapter of the dissertation alienation is represented through a poetic account of history of American Indians. "Another Proclamation" tells the story of Abraham Lincoln's decision to execute 38 Sioux. The speaker reflects on the sense of alienation by emphasizing the audience's limited understanding of the historical injustice that occurred only four days before the declaration of the Emancipation Proclamation. The deficiency of relationships between American Indians and settler-Americans resulting from historical misrepresentations is seen in the surprising revelations of the other version of history. Such experiences of alienation have burdened the American Indian poetic images. A historical injustice is rendered when a powerful image of cruelty is recognized.

In the post-colonial contexts of the aforementioned works, and in contrast to the distressing representation of characters in traditional and early renaissance American Indian literature, the modern challenges faced by Alexie's characters demonstrate a tendency towards survival resolutions through personal efforts. Alexie's focus on individual characters, despite receiving criticism for prioritizing the person over the group, is justified by the belief that each person, in his/her natural imperfections, serves as a source of inspiration for many others. Furthermore, the idea of a collective tribal pursuit of survival is hard to be a unique insight into the life and experiences of American Indians. Alexie's literary approach, akin to his personal life story of success, revolves around characters who have greater influence than the collective in the quest for change, eventually helping sustain the American Indian belief of being survivors.

In Alexie's writings, the journeys to become alienation survivors are founded on his methodical and constructive ideology of examining the positive implications of managing anger and imagination. The primary goal of constructing survival journeys is to safeguard the characters from an unclear and perhaps tragic fate while also exposing them to the possibility of realizing, or even achieving their aspirations. When the characters begin regarding their journeys of survival, the contexts signify that they have been given the capacity to adopt a mindset of transcending the constraints, like those of the reservation borders, imposed by colonial discourses of marginality.

Thomas is exposed to the blues. Fascinated by the idea of making songs of his stories, the character decides to get involved in a musical mode of survival. He transforms the genre and performs reservation blues. Arnold is gifted with the talent of drawing cartoons. This artistic mode helps him talk to the world. The way Arnold uses his cartoons to communicate is by making them represent his life story and therefore his perspective of identity and culture. Contrary to Thomas and Arnold, Zits develops a greater willingness to survive using his imagination to re-present the colonial history of "Indians" into that of American Indians through a virtual mode of time traveling. Zits's power of imagination and, therefore, survival helps him re-present humanity. People can be victims and betrayers regardless of their racial backgrounds. The speaker of "Another Proclamation" uses poetics as a mode to represent survival. A song of survival has the power to bring the world together. In each mode, Alexie reorients the narrative to be more of a representation of American Indian stories, perspectives, evilness, love, and history. They are indigenized. Moreover, he consistently strives to integrate indigenous elements into his writing, both in terms of structure and subject matter.

It is noticed that the majority of the characters who become alienation survivors are young and that can be related to some primary reasons. Alexie has an interest in making stories of American Indian characters at this age because it is when pain is felt harder and hurts the most. Their agony validates his writings. Also, the depiction of survival stories is dependent on the power of imagination which can be challenging at a young age. The power of imprinting the colonial fancy of the identity of the "Indian" is seen better through young characters. Accordingly, the power of imagination to resist those misrepresentations and discourses of marginalization is more courageous among the youth. Imagination is an art of getting power that starts small but ends big as the works of Alexie show.

Imagination for Alexie's characters is a method of making them better with a little transition. As American Indian characters whose main problems are arising from colonial narratives shaping their identity and culture, being better needs to be able to talk about those imposed thoughts and resist them if possible. For that reason, imagination creates a third space to achieve the wish of negotiation. Each of the created modes of survival is a third space of exploration and negotiation about identity and the location of culture. The third space of cultural negotiations is a sanctuary where blasphemy can be displayed with much humor and irony to make a point or resist an existing one. The thing that becomes clear in all of the characters' negotiations is that they brought them closer to themselves rather than being an engagement to change the others' ideas of them. They do not even take into account the attitudes of others. Taking the responsibility of presenting oneself in any kind of a mode entails adopting a post-reservation mindset which makes them courageous in their imagination.

Alienation, which is experienced by Thomas, Arnold, Zits, and the speakers of "Another Proclamation," is inextricably tied to the disastrous impact of colonialism imposing a certain framework for low esteem of self-identification and causing widespread cultural destruction. The nostalgic relationship between the characters' present and their mythological history is sustainable because simulations, stereotypes, memories, racism, and the popular narrative of binaries are dominant narratives that the characters are exposed to in their daily lives. In essence, it has been argued that colonial ideologies and narratives persist and undergo continuous transformations in their expression. Accordingly, one of the most important things that Alexi's works offer is their way of criticizing and challenging colonial thought, which is still part of the lives of his characters. The history of American Indians has never been presented accurately mainly because it is part of

the colonial agenda making the records bias. The deficiency of relationships caused by history is that overwhelming power which makes the American Indians feel that no justice is meaningful if that real history is not recognized. In every case, the writer depicts, the reason for the distortion of relations has something to do with the occupation, which continued to present an unreal image of Native Americans.

Alexie's works are representations of American Indians being victims of colonial discourses of hegemony. As devasting as this theme could be, those same works portray the protagonists as resolute survivors capable of pursuing personal interests to live better lives. This simultaneous representation expands the author's portrayal of the complicated nature of the human being; it also encourages readers to connect with the story and the characters' struggles to reconcile their past and predict the future. Each character has his/her moment of getting into their imagination to control their anger, which ends up in the creation of various modes of survival. However, imagination is not a free power that can be pushed to extremely high levels. Because imagination is influenced by a variety of elements, its use is limited. As a result, the characters take some time to figure out how to use it for their own benefit. Alexie uses every mode of survival as a space to negotiate his characters' identities. Engaging with the third space encourages critical dialogue and reflection on social, political, and cultural issues. By confronting differences and contradictions, individuals can challenge dominant discourses and ideologies, fostering intellectual inquiry and social change.

Alexie's stories and verses imply that an individual's survival is dependent on individual ambitions, rather than the preservation of conventional traditions, which are sometimes inauthentic or impossible to achieve. All conversations over identity and culture can be beneficial if the characters find a way to authorize the use of mimicry and to pursue and earn personal interests. Alexie knows that the survival of individuals is the road towards the survival of the whole. He imagines Thomas as a lead-singer in order to rescue him from poverty, Arnold as a student in Reardan to protect him from racial discrimination in school, Zits as an orphan with options of getting help to prevent him from becoming homeless, and he conceives the tale of the 38 Sioux as a narrative of adaptation to raise awareness among the readers/listeners about misrepresented history.

In being an active writer for quite a long time, Alexie modifies his perspectives in reaction to changes in the world around him. He initiates his professional journey by depicting the

experiences of individuals residing on the Spokane reservation and concludes by exploring the experiences of urban American Indians who lack tribal affiliation. Ultimately, his stories serve as his messages of resistance against cruelty and any other expression of a colonial heritage that aims to exploit more American Indians. His works present him as a healer more than a victim.

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