Hacettepe University Graduate School of Social Sciences

Department of American Culture and Literature

MANIFESTATIONS OF REALISM AND TRAUMA IN SHERMAN ALEXIE'S *THE LONE RANGER AND TONTO FISTFIGHT IN HEAVEN*, *RESERVATION BLUES*, AND *THE ABSOLUTELY TRUE DIARY OF A PART-TIME INDIAN*

Ekin ŞAHİN

Master's Thesis

Ankara, 2024

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ACCEPTANCE AND APPROVAL

The jury finds that Ekin Şahin has on the date of 16.01.2024 successfully passed the defense examination and approves her master's thesis titled "Manifestations of Realism and Trauma in Sherman Alexie's *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, *Reservation Blues*, and *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*".

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ABSTRACT

ŞAHİN, Ekin. *Manifestations of Realism and Trauma in Sherman Alexie's The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven, Reservation Blues, and The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, Master's Thesis, Ankara, 2024.

Being exposed to centuries of settler colonial practices has had long-term effects on Native Americans. This thesis examines how Sherman Alexie's *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* (1993), *Reservation Blues* (1995) and *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* (2007) depict the historical trauma caused by settler colonialism and the reservation experience through different manifestations of realism. These three works convey the reservation experience through partly autobiographical characters who live on the Spokane Reservation and focus on discussions of ethnic identity in the United States. Utilizing Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart's concepts of "historical trauma" and "historical trauma response" to offer close readings of the selected works, this study focuses on the uses of "reservation realism," magical realism, and autoethnography, respectively in each chapter, revealing Alexie's attempt to realistically reflect Native American experience despite existing racial hierarchies, prejudices, stereotypes, and selective historiography.

Keywords

Settler colonialism, Native Americans, reservation, historical trauma, realism, Sherman Alexie

ÖZET

Ekin. *Sherman Alexie'nin The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven, Reservation Blues ve The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian Eserlerinde Travma ve Gerçekçiliğin Görünümleri,* Yüksek Lisans Tezi, Ankara, 2024.

Yüzyıllar boyunca yerleşimci sömürgeciliğe maruz kalmanın Yerli Amerikalılar üzerinde uzun vadeli etkileri olmuştur. Bu tez Sherman Alexie'nin *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* (1993), *Reservation Blues* (1995) ve *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* (2007) adlı eserlerinde gerçekçiliğin farklı görünümleri aracılığıyla yerleşimci sömürgeciliğin neden olduğu tarihsel travmayı ve rezervasyon deneyimini nasıl tasvir ettiğini incelemektedir. Bu üç eser, rezervasyon deneyimini Spokane Rezervasyonu'nda yaşayan yarı otobiyografik karakterler üzerinden aktarmakta ve Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'ndeki etnik kimlik tartışmalarına odaklanmaktadır. Çalışma, seçilen eserlere yakın okumalar yaparken Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart'ın "tarihsel travma" ve "tarihsel travma tepkisi" kavramlarından faydalanır. Eserleri sırasıyla "rezervasyon gerçekçiliği," büyülü gerçekçilik ve otoetnografi merceğinden okuyarak, Alexie'nin ırksal hiyerarşilere, önyargılara, stereotiplere ve seçici tarih yazımına rağmen Yerli Amerikalı deneyimini gerçekçi bir şekilde yansıtma çabasını ortaya koyar.

Anahtar Sözcükler

Yerleşimci sömürgecilik, Yerli Amerikalılar, rezervasyon, tarihsel travma, gerçekçilik, Sherman Alexie

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INTRODUCTION

The establishment of the United States by European colonists is a prime example of settler colonialism. Native Americans had populated North America long before Christopher Columbus inadvertently discovered the Americas. Although scholarly estimations of the Native American population before the arrival of Columbus arrived in 1492 fluctuate, it is estimated that as many as 18,000,000 Native Americans populated the lands north of the Rio Grande (Luebering 161). The US Census Bureau's 2022 statistics indicate that Native Americans constitute only 2.5 percent of the total population of the US, with around 8. 5 million individuals (US Census Bureau, American Indian"). The fact that their current population is significantly lower than that of the pre-Columbus era can be directly ascribed to colonial endeavors of the early European settlers and the genocidal practices of US government which were among its Native American policies (Legters 769; Duran and Duran 28; Dunbar-Ortiz 9).

The colonization of Americas and the subjugation of Native Americans have brought long-lasting psychological, social, and economic consequences. Drawing on the problems her tribespeople experience, Hunkpapa/Oglala Lakota social worker and mental health expert Dr. Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart introduced the historical trauma theory. She analyzed the influence of historical trauma on Native Americans and their historical trauma responses. Following Yellow Horse Brave Heart, many scholars, such as psychologist Dr. Eduardo Duran, who is of Apache/Tewa/Lakota descent, and Dr. Bonnie Duran, who is of Opelousas/ Coushatta descent, have contributed to the field of historical trauma pointing out to healing practices. This thesis will make use of historical trauma theory to offer close readings of Native American author Sherman Alexie's *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, *Reservation Blues*, and *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* which are attempts at realistically depicting the Native American experience in the face of ongoing settler colonialism. It will analyze Alexie's depiction of reservation life through different manifestations of realism – reservation realism, magical realism and autoethnography which challenges racial hierarchies, prejudices, stereotypes, and selective historiography. Before introducing his attempts at realism in each work, examining settler colonialism and its

implantation in the US, and the concept of historical trauma would be necessary to better comprehend contemporary Native American experience.

Settler colonialism is a distinct type of colonial practice in which "outsiders come to land inhabited by Indigenous peoples and claim it as their own new home" (Smith, et al. xii). Lorenzo Veracini argues that the term "colony" has two connotations: "A colony is both a political structure dominated by an external agent and an external entity that reproduces itself in a particular environment" (2, 3). The term "colony" indicates to the localized supremacy of an external agent in both cases (Veracini 3). Even though "colonial and settler colonial forms routinely coexist and reciprocally define each other," there are numerous fundamental and theoretical differences between colonialism and settler colonialism such as the permanent settlement of settler colonists, their formation of a new society and the emphasis put on assimilation (Veracini 4).

Settler colonists dispossess their positions as domineering external agents over time, since they develop a distinctive identity and sovereignty claiming the territories inhabited by the Indigenous peoples as their home (Bhambra). According to Patrick Wolfe "the primary object of settler-colonization is the land itself rather than the surplus value to be derived from mixing native labor with it" (*Settler Colonialism* 165). Its approach to land and labor differs significantly from other colonial practices. For settler colonists "invasion is a structure, not an event" (Wolfe, "The Elimination of the Native" 388). Settler colonialism frequently necessitates the displacement of indigenous peoples from settled territories to maintain this invasion structure (Legters 711). The practices of the English colonies in North America the policies of the US government that follow them, can be used as examples of this structure.

The English had several motivations for establishing permanent settlements. In the 16th century, the English privatized most of the common land, displacing peasants, who constituted most of the population (Dunbar-Ortiz 34). Displaced commoners relocated to the English colonies to work as indentured slaves for the promise of land (Dunbar-Ortiz 35). This gave settler colonists a cheap labor force, resources, such as cotton and tobacco, for producers in the "homeland" and settler for the colonies that solidified their claims to the land (Dunbar-Ortiz 35). In the early 17th century, religious groups began to establish settlements and mercantile colonies. In 1620, the Pilgrims, who separated from

the Anglican Church, founded the Plymouth Colony in Massachusetts (Paul 138). A decade after the establishment of the Plymouth Colony, in the spring of 1630, Puritans set sail for America, to establish the Massachusetts Bay Colony (Goldfield, et al. 43) The opportunity to freely exercise their religion attracted religious outcasts in England to the New World, thereby increasing the permanent English population in America.

Following a period of early colonization between 1607 and 1630, the English continued to expand into what would become the US throughout the 17th and 18th centuries, establishing thirteen colonies from present-day New Hampshire to Georgia. In the 1750s, the current territory of the US was divided between English, French and Spanish settlers (Roark et, al. 124). The French quest for expansion into Ohio brought them into conflict with the English colonists in Virginia. The escalating tension between the two colonial states eventually turned into the Seven Years' War, also known as the French Indian War (Roark, et al. 159). The territory previously claimed by the French was ceded to England upon their victory. With this victory, the English were able to eliminate most of their European opponents and pursue a more expansionist policy.

After the American Revolutionary War, and the declaration of independence in 1776, the US made territorial expansion one of its priorities. The expansion was inspired by the ideas of "American Exceptionalism" and "Manifest Destiny," together with the Puritan idea to set an example to the rest of the world by establishing an ideal society. American exceptionalism is the idea that America is "distinctive," "unique," and "exemplary," that is, a model for other nations to follow (Pease). Similarly, manifest destiny is the belief that the nation has a divine right to expand throughout the continent (Kutler 188). Arised from these beliefs and intensified in the early 1800s, the territorial expansion of the US directly impacted Native American people. In 1803, purchasing lands in the west of the Mississippi River Basin from France, the US doubled its territories (Goldfield, et al. 226). In 1820s, before his election to the office of president, Andrew Jackson insisted that Native Americans and settlers could never get along together, and the government would not be able to protect Native Americans from the harassment of white settlers (Brown, "Trail of Tears" 149). Jackson's presidential campaign revolved around the promise of free land for white settlers which would open Native American territory to white settlement (Brown, "Trail of Tears" 149, 150).

Following his election, he enacted The Indian Removal Act in 1830, which ordered that areas held by Native Americans east of the Mississippi River would be traded for lands to the west of it (Calloway, *The World Turned Upside Down* 185; Gibson 71). This relocation order demonstrated that the US government had taken a more aggressive attitude toward Native Americans. The land "granted" to Native Americans was called "Indian Colonization Zone," which mirrored the colonial mentality and the expansionist attitude of the US.

The Indian Removal Act proved to be a temporary solution, in the face of the growing population of colonists in America. To address this problem, the Indian Appropriations Act of 1851 was enacted to establish "Indian Reservations" (McKay 4). Although the relocation of Native Americans to reservations was thought to be a solution for opening up space for white Americans, the inflow of white people to the west eventually led to the enactment of General Allotment Act in 1887. The act enabled reservation lands to be divided into small portions of private property (O'Neill 14). Under this law, the land was to be allocated by the state and one hundred sixty acres of land would be given to the head of each family, and smaller portions would be given to the youth and orphans (Calloway, *First Peoples* 644). Prior to allotment, reservations were examined and lists of tribal members were prepared so that "surplus reservation lands" could be sold by the state (644). In addition, the state would retain ownership of the land for twenty-five years (644). The establishment of the reservation system and the subsequent enactment of General Allotment Act not only replaced Native Americans and narrowed their living space, but also allowed white settlers to infiltrate even the "zones" reserved for Native Americans, which illuminates the invasive nature of settler colonialism. As the General Allotment Act exemplifies, in settler colonial states the colonist and the colonized share the same territory, yet the ideological superiority and social segregation persists (Loomba 28). As Tracey Banivanua Mar argues, despite the co-existence, the colonizer almost never acts uninvasively (25).

Native Americans refused to be plundered and responded with resistance even if it did not result in significant change. Early examples of this resistance were the Pequot War (1636-1638) and King Philip's War (1675-1676) (Paul 154; Treuer 28; Luebering 52). In both resistance efforts, Native Americans were bloodily repressed by English settlers.

Pequot War led to the deaths of hundreds of women and children, as well as the selling of the remaining Pequots into slavery (Paul 154; Treuer 28). King Philip's War, which is considered to be the "bloodiest conflict" in 17th century New England, resulted in the destruction of Native American villages and death of an estimated 3,000 Native Americans following which settlers swept over the territory of southern New England (Luebering 52). After the French and Indian War (1754-1763), Chief Pontiac of the Ottawa nation organized an alliance of Native American tribes to oppose English rule (Calloway, *First Peoples* 345). The rebellion was intended to oppose the English invasion of and policies on tribal lands (345). The alliance refused to accept the peace conditions imposed by England and authorized by France. During the rebellion, more than four hundred English soldiers and almost two thousand settlers were killed or captured (Roark, et al. 165). Following the rebellion, the English government stimulated an effort at reconciliation between Native American tribes and English colonists to prevent further violence by establishing an *Indian Barrier State* through the *Proclamation of 1763* ("Indian Barrier State").

Native American resistance persisted after the English colonies were replaced by the US. According to Dunbar-Ortiz, while Native American resistance posed a military threat to the US, it was a resistance and an independence movement that challenged the fundamental principle of colonial authority giving the message that "no resistance can be tolerated" (150). Apache Wars, which lasted from 1850 to 1886 were the longest military conflict in US history (Dunbar-Ortiz 150). When the US took over part of Mexico in 1848 after the Mexican American War, The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ordered both parties to "fight" the "savage" Apache (150). By 1877, most of the Apache were pushed into the harsh desert environments (150). Yet the Apache, led by Geronimo, opposed being confined to the San Carlos reservation in Arizona (150). When Geronimo ultimately surrendered, they were only thirty-eight people including women and children who were followed by 5,000 American troops (Dunbar-Ortiz 150). Another revolt against the settler colonial invasion was the Dakota War (1862), often known as the Great Sioux uprising (Calloway, *First Peoples* 538). The Dakota Sioux were on the point of starvation when the Civil War broke out (538). For years, their chief, Little Crow, had an amicable relationship with the US parties, which led to the ratification of treaties selling Dakota territory (538). Still, American authorities did not

make the yearly payments promised, and they advised the starving Dakotas "to eat grass" (Calloway, *First Peoples* 538). The Dakotas killed over a thousand settlers resulting in the trial of four hundred and execution of thirty-eight of them which marked the largest public execution in American history (538). Fourteen years later, the Sioux and Cheyenne tribes won over the American army in the Battle of Little Bighorn (1876) (Dunbar-Ortiz 151). Lieutenant Colonel Custer, who commanded the Seventh Cavalry, was prepared to launch a military attack on Sioux and Cheyenne towns threatening the civilians near the Little Bighorn River (151). The Sioux and Cheyenne commanded by Crazy Horse and Sitting Bull defeated the assailants (152). After the victory of the Sioux and Cheyenne, this conflict became known as "Custer's Last Stand" following the death of "Indian-killing Custer" (Calloway, *First Peoples*, 610). While it was an important victory for the Native Americans, it would not be enough to solve their problems, because for years after this loss, the American army was still "smarting from their defeat" in the Battle of Little Bighorn (Calloway, *First Peoples*, 558).

In the late 19th century, Wovoka, who "founded the religion of the Ghost Dance," promised the coming of a Messiah, the disappearance of all settlers from their land and a return to the pre-colonial past (Brown, *Bury My Heart* 380; Luebering 84). The US authorities believed that the religious movement led by him was threatening and aimed at stopping the Ghost Dance rituals (Luebering 84; Brown, *Bury My Heart* 384). The government's attempt at stopping the rituals led to the tragic events at Wounded Knee. In December 1890, the Lakota gathered on the Pine Ridge Reservation driven by the promises of the Ghost Dance (Calloway, *First Peoples* 558). The Seventh Cavalry unsuccessfully attempted at disarming them, which led the soldiers to open fire on the camp, resulting in the deaths of between two and three hundred men, women, and children (558). Many of the wounded did not survive the harsh winter weather that struck the Plains, which added to the death toll of the horrific massacre (558). The armed conflict between Native Americans and the US in the west came to an end with the Wounded Knee Massacre (Calloway, *First Peoples* 559).

The massacre stopped Native American armed resistance in the West, yet Native American resistance movements went on in the other parts of the country. As Vine Deloria puts it, in the mid 20th century, Native Americans "began to examine the

conditions under which they lived, and they soon seethed with discontent and a new determination to correct the injustices" (*Behind the Trail of Broken Treaties* 27). In the 1960s, Native Americans began to be organized to protect their civil rights, inspired by the nationwide Civil Rights Movement. Influenced by the spirit of the times, Native American activism during this period came to be known as "Red Power," which as a broad ideological and cultural movement, emphasized Native American pride, unity, and self-determination and resistance against colonial attitudes and actions (T. Johnson, *Red Power* 7). With the intensification of Red Power movement, The American Indian Movement (AIM) emerged in 1968 (T. Johnson, *Red Power* 7). Started by four Chippewa activists, Clyde Bellecourt, Eddie Benton Banai, Dennis Banks and Mary Jane Wilson, the movement mainly aimed at addressing and finding solutions to the systematic issues plaguing Native Americans (T. Johnson, *Red Power* 7). AIM shared the larger Red Power principles and fostered a sense of community among Native Americans during the 1960s and early 1970s when Red Power expanded as a wave of protest (Deloria, *Custer Died For Your Sins* x). In their pursuit of Indigenous sovereignty, cultural revival, and resistance to governmental policies, AIM activists and others under the auspices of Red Power carried out remarkable acts throughout the 1960s and 1970s such as the Occupation of Alcatraz (1969-1971) during which a group of Native American symbolically claimed the island for Native Americans. Trail of Broken Treaties (1972), and Occupation of the BIA (1972) were also nationwide protests culminated in Washington, D.C. to draw attention to Native American rights (T. Johnson, "We Hold the Rock"; "The Trail of Broken Treaties, 1972"). Despite the existence of resistance movements, in settler colonial states, the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized is firmly ingrained (Wilson and Yellow Bird 1, 2). The existing institutions are structured to sustain the colonizer's privilege and the colonized people's subordination as a result of which generations of individuals could hardly challenge their position within this relationship (Wilson and Yellow Bird 1, 2). This structure is further perpetuated through assimilationist policies which aimed at erasing the culture of indigenous people.

Settler colonists "strive to replace Indigenous society with that imported by the colonizers" (Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism* 27). They place a strong emphasis on assimilation which has a greater systemic significance in settler colonies than in other

colonial formations (Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism* 3). Since forming a new community is the prime purpose of settler colonists, demographic homogeneity is sought to the greatest extent possible. Assimilation is presented as a policy that aims to mitigate the political and social repercussions of ethno-racial inequality, which is a widespread settler response to the issues created by demographic heterogeneity (Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism* 3). Patrick Wolfe calls this process the "logic of elimination" ("Elimination of the Native" 387). He believes that settler colonialism is intrinsically eliminatory ("Elimination of the Native" 387). Policies and practices that fall under the purview of the logic of elimination include "encouraged miscegenation, the breaking-down of native title into alienable individual freeholds, […] religious conversion, resocialization in total institutions such as missions or boarding schools, [and] […] frontier homicide" (Wolfe, "Elimination of the Native" 388). Lyman H. Legters claims that while any form of colonialism is inherently related to the issue of genocide, the possibility, if not likelihood, of genocide rises virtually immediately in settler colonial contexts (771). Native Americans have been exposed to almost all the strategies mentioned by Wolfe and Legters above.

The English colonists' assimilationist policies began to manifest themselves soon after the Virginia Company arrived at the Americas. The Algonquians' supreme chief Powhatan's daughter Pocahontas was abducted and held captive by English settlers in 1613, following which she was converted to Christianity and married an English colonist named John Rolfe (Roark, et al. 62). In 1616, Pocahontas traveled to England with her husband and newborn son where her presence was used as a means of promoting the Virginia colony as she was introduced "as a proper English woman" to the King and Queen of England (Roark, et al. 62). The story of Pocahontas prophesied the assimilation of Native Americans and anticipated the future subjugation and exploitation of Native Americans.

Religion also played an important role in assimilating Native Americans. In 1620, aboard the Mayflower, the Pilgrims signed the "Mayflower Contract," a document that outlined the purpose of the Pilgrims' settlement as "having undertaken for the glory of God, and advancement of the Christian faith" (Bradford 64). The religious zeal of the English settlements continued to grow in the Puritan settlements. Aiming at purifying

Christianity from the elaborate ceremonies of the Roman Catholic Church, Puritans believed that they had a covenant with God (Goldfield, et al. 44). In his sermon "A Model of Christian Charity," John Winthrop depicted the mission of the Puritan community to establish "a city upon a hill," an example of a truly Christian community (Winthrop 307). Puritans attempted to Christianize Native Americans, whom, a Puritan missionary John Elliot described as "unfixed, confused, and ungoverned […] uncivilized and unsubdued to labor and order" (qtd in. Roark, et al. 97).

The religious responsibility emphasized by the early settlers, as well as the doctrines of American exceptionalism and manifest destiny which came to define an autonomous "American" identity shaped the outcome of their confrontations with Native Americans. Many Americans considered settler colonialism's hunger for expansion as their country's God-given manifest destiny, and the assimilation and genocide that resulted as an essential requirement for becoming "exceptional" (Dunbar-Ortiz 79). The idea that Native Americans stood in the way of civilization and progress was internalized. Their existence was seen as a barrier to American advancement and a problem to be solved ("The 'Indian Problem'" 00:05:24-00:05:40). With these thoughts in mind, many people, including American presidents George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and Andrew Jackson, called Native Americans "savages," and felt that the US had a responsibility to "civilize" them in order to solve what was referred to as the "Indian Problem" (Calloway, *First Peoples* 363). In the early days of the American Republic, President Washington thought that the most effective way to deal with "Indian Problem" was to "civilize" them (Harless). For him, achieving this was possible only through introducing them to Euro-American lifestyle, converting them to Christianity, teaching them English language and imposing an ownership based economic system on them (Harless). At the beginning of the 1800s, President Thomas Jefferson followed the footsteps of George Washington and focused on the "Indian Problem" which he thought could be solved by civilizing them through forcing them into farming and a sedentary lifestyle ("President Jefferson and the Indian Nations").

The establishment of the reservation system also aimed at assimilating Native Americans (Trennert 1). Without authorization, Native Americans were not permitted to leave their reservations. It was practically hard for them to preserve their culture and

lifestyles on reservations due to the constrained area, since some tribes were relocated to reservations the environment of which was drastically different from their previous lands. For instance, the tribes which had previously been hunters had a difficult time adopting to farming. It was believed that "if Indians owned their own plot of land, they would give up their 'primitive' communal lifestyles and they would assume the American dream of individualism and material success" (O'Neill 13). The General Allotment Act guaranteed US citizenship to Native Americans who accepted the allotment system. Yet, far from what was expected of the act, Native Americans neither integrated into white culture nor could they make a living on the land that had been allocated to them (O'Neill 14). This act became just another manifestation of the colonial ideology that shaped the US government's Native American policy throughout the 19th century, making them lose both land and people while also forcing them into assimilation.

Native Americans were also assimilated through institutes such as the Carlisle Indian Industrial School which had the motto "Kill the Indian, save the man" (Dunbar-Ortiz 143-151). As the motto reveals, the primary objective of such boarding schools was assimilation (Dunbar-Ortiz 151). In them, Native American children who spoke their tribal languages or practiced their religions were subjected to dehumanizing punishments (151). As such, the boarding school system caused generations of Native Americans to be traumatized (151).

The US did not recognize indigenous citizenship until the 1920s. Before the Civil War, only those who had half or less Native American blood could be US citizens (Longley). During the Reconstruction era, Republicans promoted awarding friendly tribes with citizenship, despite state opposition (Longley). Native American women who were married to US citizens became naturalized in 1888 (Longley). Veterans of World War I were granted citizenship in 1919 (Longley). Although some Native Americans were naturalized for various reasons over time, the Congress did not approve of an all-inclusive act until the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924. Even after 1924, Native Americans were frequently denied the right to vote as a result of state laws and regulations which imposed literacy tests and poll taxes (Calloway, *First Peoples* 681).

The assimilationist efforts of the US government extended into the mid- 20th century. Through the Indian Relocation Act of 1956, Native Americans living on reservations were resettled into nine urban centers designated by the government: Los Angeles, Chicago, San Francisco, Denver, Cincinnati, San Jose, Cleveland, St. Louis, and Dallas (Glenn 57). Upon their relocation, Native American men were steered into low-wage, dead-end jobs, while women were directed into domestic work in white households, ensuring that they remained lower class in the service sector and the society in general (Glenn 57). Most of the displaced Native Americans realized that the promised jobs and payments had not been provided to them which made them struggle financially in the cities; hence, some returned to the reservation. The displacement disintegrated the Native American population, which proved to be a colonial policy that aided their assimilation (57).

In the 1970s, settler colonial states started a series of political procedures that aimed at achieving post-settler reconciliation evolving the US policy toward Native Americans (Veracini 107). The US Congress passed the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act in 1975 which granted Native American tribes more self-governance, letting them take control of programs and services that would serve the needs and preferences of local communities ("Self-Determination"). In 1978, The Tribally Controlled Community College Assistance Act provided grants to tribally controlled community colleges for continuing and expanding educational opportunities for Native Americans ("H.R.11104 – 95th Congress"). The Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978 established federal criteria for the placement of Native American children in foster or adoptive families, with priority given to Native American families ("Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA)"). In the same year, the US Government secured Native Americans' right to practice their traditional beliefs under the American Indian Religious Freedom Act (Pevar 231).

In the 1990s, government efforts to protect Native American culture continued. President George H. Bush signed The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) in 1990, which mandated government agencies and organizations to return Native American cultural objects to tribes (Bureau of Reclamation). In the same year, The Native American Languages Act aimed at starting

funds that would encourage the learning and use of Native American languages ("S.2167 – 101st Congress"). In the new century, maintaining a strong and continuous relationship with Native American tribal authorities has become essential. In November 2000, President Bill Clinton issued Executive Order 13175 in order to establish legitimate and substantive dialogue with tribal authorities to engage them into federal policymaking on the issues that have impact on Native American communities ("Consultation and Coordination With Indian Tribal Governments). In 2007, the UN General Assembly adopted "The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)" that highlighted the necessity of respecting and promoting the inherent political, economic, and social rights of Native Americans that they have been deprived of so far (United Nations, 2007). Yet, President George W. Bush, along with three leaders of other settler colonial states – Australia, Canada, and New Zealand – voted against the declaration (United Nations, 2007).

From 2010 to present day, under Obama, Trump and Biden administrations, steps have been taken to improve and solidify the relationship between tribes and the US government, to address the security concerns and to improve the well-being of Native Americans. In order to establish enduring and profound relationships with tribal leaders and acknowledge the fundamental rights that Native Americans have been denied, the Obama administration adopted the "The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)" in 2010, which had been vetoed by former president Bush in 2007 ("Announcement of US Support for the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples"). In 2013, President Obama issued Executive Order 13647 and established the White House Council on Native American Affairs in order to build a more coordinated and effective relationship between the government and the federally recognized tribes (Executive Order 13647—Establishing the White House Council on Native American Affairs). In 2019, PROGRESS for Indian Tribes Act established a committee comprised of government and tribe representatives to oversee the negotiation and rulemaking processes by taking the special circumstances of self-governance and inter-government relations into consideration (Indian Affairs (IA), "Practical Reforms and Other Goals"). In 2021, "Memorandum on Tribal Consultation and Strengthening Nation-to-Nation Relationships" which was signed by President Biden highlighted the sovereign status of Native American tribes and the government's

dedication to uphold tribal sovereignty and self-governance, and the necessity of meaningful and continual consultations with tribal governments in order to address current challenges facing the country—especially those that disproportionately impact Native Americans ("Memorandum on Tribal Consultation"). In 2023, Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies Act was introduced in order to record the long-term effects of Native American boarding schools, find government and religious records, organize culturally-appropriate public hearings to gather testimonies from descendants and survivors, obtain institutional knowledge from authorities in the field and publicly present the findings in a final report with a set of suggestions for restitution and reconciliation ("S.1723: Truth and Healing Commission").

Since the 2010s, one of the issues that the US government has persistently worked to improve has been the security concerns of Native Americans. In 2010, President Obama signed The Tribal Law and Order Act which set a major emphasis on eliminating crime in tribal communities and violence against Native American women, while promoting the employment of more law enforcement personnel and offering extra devices to address essential public safety concerns in Native American territories ("Tribal Law and Order Act"). In 2019, following the murder of the three-months pregnant member of the Spirit Lake Sioux Tribe member Savanna LaFontaine-Greywind who was 22 at the time, the security concerns of Native Americans, especially of Native American women, became a public issue once again. Savanna's Act targeted at increasing federal cooperation between federal, state, tribal, and local law enforcement authorities in order to better address the issue of missing or murdered indigenous persons (Savanna's Act). In conjunction with the Savanna's Act, Not Invisible Act of 2020, which became the first bill in the history of United States to be introduced and passed by four congress members who were enrolled tribe members, aimed at identifying, reporting, and reacting to incidents of missing and murdered Native Americans and human trafficking, as well as formulating legislative and administrative measures required to tackle the nationwide problem using federal programs, properties, and resources ("Not Invisible Act| NIWRC"). Efforts to minimize crime in tribal communities have continued to focus on Indigenous women with the 2022 revision of The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) under the Trump Administration, including a provision allowing Native American tribes "to exercise 'special domestic violence criminal jurisdiction' (SDVCJ)

over certain defendants regardless of Indian or non-Indian status" ("2013 and 2022 Reauthorizations of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA)"). With similar objectives, President Trump signed Executive Order 13898 in 2019 to address tribal governments' continued concerns about missing and murdered members of Native American communities, particularly women and girls ("Establishing the Task Force on Missing and Murdered American Indians and Alaska Natives").

The government has also taken steps to improve the living conditions and well-being of Native Americans. In 2014, Tribal General Welfare Exclusion Act was issued and made provisions for the exemption of payments from income taxation of certain assistance programs provided by a Native American tribal body for the welfare of its people (Tribal General Welfare Guidance | Internal Revenue Service). In 2016, American Indian and Alaska Native Trust Fund Management Reform Act gave tribes the authority to create trust asset management strategies for tribal interests and objectives (President Signs Indian Trust Asset Management Reform Act Into Law). In 2017, the Indian Employment, Training and Related Services Consolidation Act was enacted to simplify the procedure for Native American tribes to apply for and administer federal funding for the purpose of providing jobs, training, and other services to tribal members (Indian Affairs (IA), "Division of Workforce Development"). During the COVID19 pandemic, as a part of the COVID-19 relief efforts**,** The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act was signed into law in 2020, and, through the Coronavirus Relief Fund, it allocated direct payments to tribal governments and the Indian Healthcare Service (Indian Affairs (IA), "2020 CARES Act").

Despite the US government's recent policies for improvement, Native Americans, especially those who live on reservations, are still a significantly disadvantaged group compared to the rest of the US population. Compared to all other racial and ethnic groups, at 24.1 percent, Native Americans have a poverty rate almost twice the national rate (US Census Bureau, "S1701- Poverty Status"). Native American people have an unemployment rate of 6.1 percent, whereas the national rate is 3.7 percent ("Labor Force Characteristics by Race and Ethnicity"). Native American households have a median income that is about twenty thousand dollars lower than the national average (US Census Bureau, "S.1903- Median Income"). Native Americans living on

reservations have housing disadvantages when compared to the general population. 12 percent of homes on reservations lack proper plumbing, 7 percent have kitchen deficiencies, and 6 percent have inadequate heating, while only 1-2 percent of households nationwide lack any of these features ("The National Council on Aging"). Recent studies also indicate that 56 percent of Native Americans across the country reported food insecurity, with 31 percent experiencing extremely low food security (Maillacheruvu). As a result of all of these disadvantages, the average life expectancy for Native Americans is 65.2 years, which corresponds to the life expectancy of the entire population in 1944, while the nationwide life expectancy is 76.1 years at present (Life Expectancy in the US).

Oglala Lakota social worker Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart analyzes the contemporary Native American circumstances in the context of earlier traumas perpetuated by settler colonialist policies. Brave Heart developed the theory of historical trauma in the 1980s while she was working with the Lakota to obtain a broader understanding of why most Native Americans have not fulfilled the "American Dream" ("Remarkable Lakota People"). Correlating her observations concerning the extant situation of Lakota people in the 1980s with retrospective traumatic experiences of Native Americans in general, she defined historical trauma as "cumulative and psychological wounding, over the emotional lifespan and across generations, emanating from massive group trauma experiences" (Brave Heart, "The Historical Trauma Response" 7). A subsection of cultural trauma theory, historical trauma is distinguished from individual trauma in terms of transposition as the psychological repercussions of it are passed down through physiological, social, and environmental channels to succeeding generations creating "an intergenerational cycle of trauma response" (Sotero 95). A distinguishing characteristic of historical trauma is that the groups exposed to it are almost invariably racial or ethnic groups. Indeed, historical trauma has begun to be identified as a precipitating factor impacting racial/ethnic disparities (Sotero 96). A 2003 study by David R. Williams, Harold W. Neighbors and James S. Jackson "identified race-related historical trauma as a large-scale, systems-related macro-stressor" which has a detrimental effect on both the physical and mental health of the afflicted racial/ethnic group (qtd in. Sotero 96).

Historical trauma research also demonstrates that "[t]rauma as the result of deliberate intent produces a profound sense of dismay and alienation. Intentional violence threatens basic assumptions about an orderly, just world and the intrinsic invulnerability and worthiness of the individual" (Sotero 95). Based on the idea that purposeful perpetrations such as colonialism create indelible and transitive mass traumas, Brave Heart coined the concept of historical trauma response to refer to the psycho-somatic symptoms exhibited by people suffering from these traumas. She defined historical trauma response as "the constellation of characteristics associated with massive cumulative group trauma across generations" ("The Historical Trauma Response" 7). Historical trauma response is characterized by transposition, loyalty to and identification with the suffering of deceased ancestors, replicating affliction within one's own life, fixation on trauma, reparatory fantasies, and attempts to undo the tragedy of the past (Brave Heart, "Wakiksuyapi" 247). Related to these characteristics, Brave Heart observed that historical trauma response can encompass a wide range of behaviors, such as alcohol and drug misuse in an attempt to cope with the trauma, as well as other forms of self-destructive behavior, "suicidal thoughts and gestures, depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, anger, and difficulty recognizing and expressing emotions" ("The Historical Trauma Response" 7). Since it bears historical experience of belonging to a group, often racial or ethnic, Brave Heart emphasizes the need to use the term historical trauma response instead of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) which was officially recognized by the American Psychiatric Association in 1980 "as a diagnosis describing the severe and long-term effects of exposure to traumatic stressors like combat, sexual assault, child abuse, motor vehicle accidents or natural disasters" (Brave Heart, "The Historical Trauma Response" 7-8; Sotero 95). Although the diagnosis of PTSD encompasses responses to a diverse range of traumas, it is considered to be insufficient in capturing the impact and characteristics of racial and ethnic historical trauma (Brave Heart, "The Historical Trauma Response" 8). Eduardo and Bonnie Duran argue that the term PTSD covers the struggles of white men, mostly, who traumatize other groups while also determining the prevailing language of science and academia (4). In Frantz Fanon's terminology, the study of these people mostly undergoes a "lactification" so that the produced knowledge can be presented to the academy (Duran and Duran 4, 5). The outcomes of such cross-cultural knowledge

production have been perpetual racism and neocolonialism within scientific and academic circles (Duran and Duran 5).

Historical trauma response is closely associated with "historical unresolved grief that accompanies the trauma (Brave Heart, "The Historical Trauma Response" 7). This grief may be considered "impaired, delayed, fixated, and/or disenfranchised" ("The Historical Trauma Response" 7). Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart and Lemyra M. DeBruyn claim that there are multiple reasons why the responses of Native Americans to historical and contemporary traumas remain unresolved and disenfranchised (66-67). The colonizer's perspective of the colonized, as well as the images it imposes on the colonized, have a significant impact on the grief disfranchisement process (Brave Heart and DeBruyn 66, 67). According to Kenneth J. Doka and Vanderlyn R. Pine, characteristics of the griever affect grief disenfranchisement process which means when a group of people is socially labeled as incapable of grieving, there is little acknowledgment of their sense of loss, need to mourn, or capability to do so (qtd. in Brave Heart and DeBruyn 67). Brave Heart and DeBruyn agree that the reason why Native Americans' historical grief remains unresolved is that the stereotyped past and present image of Native Americans as stoic and savage fostered a pervasive cultural belief that Native Americans were incapable of feeling and denied them the right to grieve (Brave Heart and DeBruyn 67). Another reason for Native Americans' grievances to remain unresolved and disenfranchised is the differences between Native American and Euro-American cultures in terms of grieving (Brave Heart and DeBruyn 62). Native American culture relates people to land, plants, and animals as sacred kin, extending far beyond the concept of property. As a result, the natural devastation that occurred during America's colonization – as with the buffalo slaughter, constant relocation of Native Americans from their lands, and cultural disruption that occurred while all of these were going on – became a source of grief for Native Americans (Brave Heart and DeBruyn 62).

While the interplay between the colonizer's perceptions of the colonized with grief disenfranchisement is prominent, a critical reason why this happens is the prevalence of colonial pursuits in settler societies. Nancy Van Styvendale claims that the term "trans/historical" is crucial for identifying Native American historical trauma and unresolved grief (204). For her, it refers to a trauma that occurs and has been repeated

throughout numerous epochs and thus surpassed its historicity (204). Duran and Duran divide Native American history into six retrospective periods to understand Native American historical trauma and unresolved grief. The first perpetrator of Native American historical trauma was the "First Contact" or a period of early colonization during which their long-known lifeworld was jeopardized and was often systematically exterminated (Duran and Duran 32). The psychological distress caused by such an invasion had a collective impact at the inception of what would become an ongoing process of loss and separation in both material and spiritual terms (Duran and Duran 32). These losses were not given the time for proper mourning and grief processing, adding to the wound in the Native American collective consciousness (32). The "First Contact" was followed by a period of "Economic Competition" during which European settlers seized or damaged land, animals, and other resources necessary for Native subsistence (33). Due to the fact that European utilitarian psychology views the land as foreign in contradiction to Native American cosmology, this period resulted in further traumatization (33). The "First Contact" and "Economic Competition" periods were followed by a period of "Invasion and War" which involved state-implemented extermination and refugee-ization by deploying military action (33). Since many Native Americans were slain or forcibly removed from their ancestral homelands, this type of legislation had a significant influence on their psychology (33). The next period was the "Subjugation/Reservation" period in which confinement and relocation occurred, as did a relationship of forced dependency on the oppressor and a lack of security. The forced removal of Native Americans to territories unfamiliar to them was part of the US scenario that began to be executed during the preceding period. The unfamiliarity of reservations contributed to the subjugation by eliminating the culture, which was built on the traditional land base that the Native American tribes possessed until that time (33). The period after this was the "Boarding School" period during which the government aimed at the destruction of the Native American family system in order to do further cultural harm and execute the objective to eliminate Native American peoples (33-34). Native American children who were forcefully separated from their families and transferred to distant locations were assimilated into white worldviews by tactics such as prohibiting them from speaking their native languages and/or hampering any form of connection with their tribal roots (34). Native American children were

physically and emotionally harassed during the process. The last period perpetuating Native American historical trauma was the "Forced Relocation and Termination" period that emerged in the 20th century during which Native Americans were transferred to urban areas. They were prohibited from religious freedom, suffered from racism, and were viewed as second-class citizens, along with the loss of governmental system and community (34). As Duran and Duran's work demonstrates, Native Americans have been subjected to the colonial imposition of Western values and settler colonial genocide resulting in "a legacy of chronic trauma and unresolved grief across generations" of Native Americans (Brave Heart and DeBruyn 60).

The result of historical trauma and unresolved grief originating from the European conquest of the Americas has contributed to the contemporary social pathology. Racism and oppression, particularly internalized oppression, are manifested as detrimental behaviors such as alcohol and substance abuse and suicide which are prevalent among Native Americans (Brave Heart and DeBruyn 60). Furthermore, researchers have discovered that Native Americans have been facing significant health hazards. High rates of alcohol consumption and consequent death from alcohol-related diseases constitute a major health risk for Native Americans (O'Connell, et al. 107). The study conducted by O'Connell, et al., comparing the alcohol consumption of Native Americans with all groups excluding Native Americans, reveals that the amount of alcohol consumed daily by Native Americans is higher than the reference population. According to the "2018 National Survey on Drug Use and Health," ten percent of Native Americans have an addiction to drugs while four percent of them use illicit substances ("2018 NSDUH Detailed Tables"). Nationwide research conducted by The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration in 2017 revealed that the rate of substance abuse and addiction among Native Americans aged 12 and older was 12.8 percent, while it was 7.7 percent among whites, 6.8 percent among African Americans, 6.6 percent among those who identified as Hispanic or Latino, and 3.8 percent among Asian Americans ("2017 NSDUH Detailed Tables"). In addition to alcohol and substance abuse, Native Americans have greater rates of suicide than any other racial and ethnic groups in the US ("American Indian Suicide Rate Increases"). Suicide has been the eighth highest cause of death for Native Americans of all ages. According to an analysis by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National

Center for Health Statistics, suicide rates among Native American men and women increased by 139 percent and 71 percent, respectively, between 1999 and 2017 (Curtin and Hedegaard). Besides these statistics, research has shown that about twice as many Native Americans do not have a college degree, are jobless, or are in poverty compared to the overall population (Castor, et al. 1483). Similarly, when compared to the white population, it is revealed that Native American people utilize healthcare services less frequently and are less likely to have access to health insurance (Castor, et al. 1484). Lack of education, unemployment, poverty and limited opportunities exacerbate their plight, both as a cause and a consequence of the social dysfunctions that beset Native Americans.

Sherman Alexie has been an author who has depicted his Native American characters as dysfunctional community members who have direct experience with the continuing implications of colonialism on reservations. A closer look into his career and his works would help understand his motivations to do so and his contribution to making the Native American historical trauma visible also to non-Native readers. His works often deal with the mistreatment of Native Americans by addressing issues such as racism, oppression, isolation, alienation, and stereotyping, and historical trauma responses such as alcoholism, substance abuse, suicide and domestic violence (MacGowan 190). Social realism has had an impact on the majority of his writings. Alexie aims at a truthful representation of Native American social reality through his characterization, plots, and social concerns in his works. His social realism is designed to provide the reader with a thorough knowledge of Native American psychosocial conflicts (Hossain and Sarker 385). He uses the term “reservation realism” to describe the harsh realities of reservation life that cannot be disregarded (Vogel 147). His works carry the burden of six centuries of colonization, chronicling the struggle for survival and providing a vivid and sometimes tragic depiction of contemporary Native American life (Cline 197).

Alexie’s unapologetic representation of reservation life has been both appreciated and attacked as some critics have accused him of representing the Native American experience in a way that appeals to the white gaze. One of the reasons he has been the focus of such criticism is that instead of “Native American” or “indigenous,” he prefers the term “Indian,” which is considered by some to be a racist, derogatory, and

stereotypical term ("The Toughest Indian in the World"; Alexie, "The 'I' in BIPOC"; "FAQ — Sherman Alexie"). Alexie argues that the term "Indian" has been claimed and is now theirs and uses it as a synonym for people who have experienced the hardships of colonialism and trauma ("The Toughest Indian in the World"; Alexie, "The 'I' in BIPOC"; "FAQ — Sherman Alexie").

Another reason why some critics think Sherman Alexie appeals to the white gaze is his depiction of the social dysfunctions and unfavorable conditions of reservation life in his works. Yet, it should be noted that Alexie's works are often prompted by his personal experiences. Sherman Alexie's formative experiences on the reservation have become central themes in his fiction and poetry (Berglund xi). The many autobiographical elements in his works add authenticity to his themes and characters (Vogel 161). Like many of his characters, he was born in Wellpinit, "the only town on the [Spokane Indian] reservation" to a Coeur d'Alene father and a Spokane mother on October 7, 1966 (*Reservation Blues* 1; Berglund xi). Alexie grew up "on a reservation surrounded by poverty, alcoholism, and disease" (Cline 197). His father Sherman Alexie Sr. was an alcoholic who frequently disappeared for days while his mother Lillian Agnes Cox made quilts and worked as a clerk at the Wellpinit Trading Post to support her six children (Cline 198). He was born with hydrocephalus, a potentially fatal condition marked by an abnormally large volume of cerebrospinal fluid in the brain cavity. When he was six months old, he had a brain surgery. His doctors did not expect him to survive, and they thought he would be severely handicapped even if he did. Contrary to the predictions of his doctors, he survived with his mental powers not only intact but significantly advanced which was evidenced by the fact that he learnt to read by the age of two (Cline 197). Yet, Alexie was relentlessly bullied by the other children on the reservation who dubbed him "the Globe" because of his enlarged head resulting from the hydrocephalus (Cline 198). He sought refuge in the Wellpinit School Library, where he had read every book on the shelves by the age of twelve (Cline 198). Alexie took refuge in literature from what Adrian C. Louis referred to as "the reservation of my mind," that is, the internalization of colonial oppression and isolation (Berglund xii; Louis line 20). To collect the credits required for college, he attended high school in Reardan, thirty miles away from the reservation, where students were overwhelmingly white. Alexie excelled in Reardan, becoming the school's only Native American star

basketball player, as well as team captain, class president, and a member of the championship debate. His high school diploma won him a scholarship to Gonzaga University in Spokane. However, living among the wealthy white students made Alexie feel inferior, and he started drinking for the first time in his life. His heavy drinking left him in poor health and caused him to have frequent blackouts. He dropped out of college in 1987 and moved to Seattle (Cline 198). When he was robbed at knifepoint while drunk on the night of his 21st birthday, Alexie realized "he had sunk low enough" and quit drinking altogether (Cline 198). He reenrolled as a student at Washington State University where his professor Alex Kuo redirected his life by recognizing Alexie's literary potential (Cline 198,199). Following his graduation, he published his first two books of poetry: *I Would Steal Horses* (1992) and *The Business of Fancydancing* (1992) (Cline 199). He has published nine collections of poetry, three novels, and two collections of short stories in less than nine years, proving himself to be a remarkable and multifaceted author despite all the odds that had been stacked against him since the day he was born (Cline 197).

Among Sherman Alexie's many works spanning various literary genres, *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* (1993), *Reservation Blues* (1995), and *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* (2007) depict the impact of ongoing settler colonialism on Native American identity and the social pathology on reservations. In the light of the historical framework and trauma theories described in this section, this thesis explores the ways in which three different manifestations of realism — "reservation realism," magical realism, and autoethnography — are used by Sherman Alexie to illustrate the historical trauma brought about by settler colonialism and the reservation experience shaped by it in *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, *Reservation Blues*, and *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*.

The first chapter will analyze *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* which is a story collection consisting of twenty-four interconnected short stories. While there is no chronological coherence between the stories, most of them center around the experiences of Victor Joseph, Thomas Builds-the-Fire and Junior Polatkin. The stories depict the harsh realities of reservation life such as extreme poverty, alcoholism, drug abuse, broken families and isolation. One of the stories in the collection, "This Is What

It Means To Say Phoenix, Arizona," was adapted for the screen in 1998 through the film *Smoke Signals* and popularized the collection while exposing the public to the issues it highlights through a new artistic medium. This chapter will analyze how Alexie uses reservation realism to reveal the reservation as an embodiment of settler colonialism and a hub of trauma while revealing the intergenerationality of trauma and challenging misconceptions and stereotypes about Native Americans.

The second chapter will focus on *Reservation Blues* (1995) which is set in 1992 on the Spokane Indian Reservation. The book depicts the lives of Thomas, Victor and Junior who were introduced in *Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*. Creating a connection between the two works, *Reservation Blues* chronicles their experiences on and off the reservation as they form a music band called Coyote Springs. Alexie depicts the poverty and lack of opportunity that bound reservations in the novel. The characters' physical and musical journeys reflect the subtle but profoundly felt biases that Native Americans endure daily, such as microaggressions, stereotyping, and cultural appropriation perpetuated by whites. It reveals the consequences of settler colonization by highlighting the historical trauma that determine characters' perceptions of themselves as Native Americans. The chapter will examine how Alexie's use of magical realism, which is considered to be an important medium for the oppressed to express their experiences, is utilized to reflect and articulate the historical trauma of ongoing settler colonization.

The third chapter will examine Sherman Alexie's 2007 young adult novel *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* the bulk of which is inspired by Alexie's own experiences. The book explores the difficulties on the reservation through the perspective of the 14-year-old Junior and illustrates his efforts to forge an identity and a life above and beyond these problems. Evaluating the book as autoethnography, a sub-genre of life writing, this chapter will illustrate how the genre contributes to a realistic depiction of historical trauma in the work resulting from ongoing settler colonialism. It will scrutinize Junior's double consciousness and acculturation to find out how interracial contacts affect his identity development while analyzing the meanings of leaving the reservation for him. As such, the conclusion will discuss, how, the reservation, as a symbolic extension of settler colonialism and as a hub of historical

trauma, impacts Native American identity formation. It will analyze, how, through different manifestations of realism Alexie portrays the existing Native American reality as a trans/historical phenomenon for both his Native and non-Native readers.

CHAPTER 1

"RESERVATION REALISM" IN THE LONE RANGER AND TONTO FISTFIGHT IN HEAVEN

The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven (1993) is a collection of twenty-four interconnected short stories. Each story portrays the "Spokane Reservation community and […] the systemic problems of unemployment, poverty, hunger, inadequate housing, violence, drugs, alcoholism, and premature death in a culture removed from its traditional mooring" (Slethaug 131). The stories chronicle the daily lives of Spokane Indian Reservation residents as they try to survive in the face of these hostile circumstances through its multiple narrators that challenge stereotypes with their diverse identities that are emblematic of humanity (Palmer 10). As Alan R. Velie articulates, "the feeling of despair, guilt, and helplessness" that overwhelms Native Americans is a major theme throughout the collection (407). The characters are trapped in a cycle of despair and often feel stuck between the past and the future. The historical trauma caused by ongoing settler colonialism is deeply ingrained in characters' psyches, shaping their self-perception. Sherman Alexie provides a broad picture of contemporary Native American life on reservations with his self-coined style "reservation realism."

Alexie states that the stories in *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* "are the vision of one individual looking at the lives of his family and his entire tribe, so these stories are necessarily biased, incomplete, exaggerated, deluded, and often just plain wrong" (*The Lone Ranger and Tonto* 27). He credits reservation realism as the foundation upon which he tries to make his personal vision "true" and "real" (27). Still, he avoids clarifying what he means by reservation realism. He urges his readers to have an understanding of it on their own as they read the book (27). In order to thoroughly understand this concept, it is necessary to analyze the reservation not only as a physical place but also as a symbolic extension of colonialism with which the characters have an ambivalent relationship. This approach reveals the various possibilities that reservation realism offers to both Alexie and the reader.

Native Americans on reservations live under circumstances "comparable to Third World" in communities afflicted also by "high rates of suicide, homicide, accidental

deaths, domestic violence, child abuse" (*The Lone Ranger and Tonto* 16; "Living Conditions"; Brave Heart and DeBruyn 60). As a result of the socioeconomic problems on reservations, residents have been found to have higher rates of mortality resulting from alcoholism and related illnesses such as cirrhosis of the liver, mental illness, tuberculosis, or diabetes than the rest of the US population ("Demographics"; Jacobs-Wingo, et al. 909). Åse Nygren associates the social ills and the corresponding social pathology to the colonization of Americas and thinks that reservations are places "where the effects of what Alexie chooses to call an 'on-going colonialism' still asserts its painful presence" (149). Having witnessed the challenges of reservation life and the repercussions of continuing colonialism and been haunted by historical trauma resulting from it personally, Daniel Grassian and Anna Vacková argue in their individual works that Alexie addresses major issues that affect reservations and his people in a less romantic way than his contemporaries and predecessors (*Understanding Sherman Alexie* 30; 6). Taking the unfavorable conditions of reservations and Alexie's unflinching depiction of them into consideration, Alexie's reservation realism may be presumed to mean portraying the harsh realities of reservation life as they are and reflecting them in connection to almost six-century long interactions between Native Americans and settler colonialists that has led to historical trauma (Vogel 155).

In Alexie's *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, the reservation, as Nygren articulates, is "[p]resented as a demarcated space of suffering, a place where his characters are tormented by collective memories of a genocidal past, of cavalry-approved hangings, massacres, and small-pox-infected blankets" (149). Dwelling on Nygren's argument, it can be said that the reservation plays an antagonistic role as a symbolic extension of colonial authority that persistently subjugates its residents both physically and mentally. As a *de facto* colonial authority, the very existence of the reservation system causes the characters consciously or unconsciously to retain their status as colonial subjects. Reservation residents are, thus, bound by the institution of ongoing settler colonialism, having internalized some of its mores and ideas permeating their psyches as Homi Bhabha postulates (*The Location of Culture* 86). Eduardo Duran agrees with Bhabha viewing such internalization as a historical trauma response (xiv).

According to Nancy Van Styvendale, historical trauma endured by Native Americans "challenge the very assumption of trauma as rooted in event, where 'event' is defined, as it most commonly is, as a singular, recognizable, and chronologically- bounded incident" (203). It is rather "[c]umulative, collective, intergenerational, and intersubjective, […] [and] exceeds any attempt to fix its location or define its event, even as it demands our attention to historically specific atrocities" (203). Styvendale argues that historical trauma should, thus, be considered "trans/historical" since it is a phenomenon that transcend "historical conditions and material realities" (Huminski 1; 204). Due to the idiosyncratic nature of historical trauma that is perpetually transmitted across generations and persistently replicated within the reservation context, the line between the past and the present becomes blurred in works written with reservation realism, and the reservation transcends its role as a spatial entity experienced in a specific time In addition, the experiences of different people become intertwined to create an interpersonal and intertemporal reality that is woven with trauma throughout the narrative. This is why Adrian C. Louis argues that Sherman Alexie's reservation realism is grounded in a reality that is expressed as "the reservation of the mind" (line 20).

Reservation realism also enables Alexie to "break Indians from museums and movies," and provides many people their first glimpse into contemporary Native American life (Walter, qtd. in *The Lone Ranger and Tonto* 12). It is this realism with which he attempts to "write a new narrative of self-representation that critically questions and often radically revises and subverts the dominant culture's conquest narratives and mass-produced misinterpretations of Native Americans" (Cox 52, 53). From this perspective, reservation realism should be understood more broadly as a tool that aims to fairly treat all aspects of Native American identity and life by replacing misconceptions and stereotypes. Through it, Alexie leads his readers to perceive multiple perspectives and create a broader perspective on both retrospective and current Native American circumstances. Reservation realism involves a process of re-writing of the "totalizing accounts" of American history which have a tendency to "silence multiple voices in favor of a single voice" (Kebede 120).

In *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven,* reservation realism prevents readers from concentrating solely on the characters, events, or narrators, allowing them to understand the place and its implications for Native Americans as multifaceted as possible. Multiplying and anonymizing narrators provide a collectively-produced, open-ended, and still-in-progress aspect to the Spokane experience (Dix 158). With its many facets, reservation realism is also crucial in portraying the loss of the right to grief as a result of institutional and internalized subjugation. With it, Alexie questions the credibility of narratives that make up American history and offers the reader a collection of counter narratives on issues such as ethnic identity, loss, pain, and bearing witness.

This chapter will explore how reservation realism authentically depicts socio-economic challenges on reservation, reveals the reservation as a symbolic extension of settler colonialism and a center of historical trauma and historical trauma responses. The discussion will also highlight reservation realism' portrayal of Native American experience as an interconnected, multi-generational, and transhistorical reality. The chapter will discuss how reservation realism addresses the concerns about assimilation and the risk of losing cultural identity to mainstream white culture as well. Additionally, the analyses will demonstrate how stereotypes associated with Native Americans are deconstructed and alternative narratives to counter biased accounts of their experiences are offered through the use of reservation realism that provide many readers with their first glimpse into the contemporary Native American reality. Within this examination, stories in *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight* will be analyzed through a selection of themes that best exemplify the conditions reservation realism intend to portray.

In the book's inaugural story "Every Little Hurricane," reservation realism is used to reflect the impact of personal and collective trauma caused by settler colonialism through the image of hurricane. The story takes the reader to the winter of 1976, when Victor, the narrator, was nine years old. It depicts how the hurricane that hit the reservation affected its inhabitants from young Victor's point of view. Throughout the story, the hurricane serves as a metaphor for the devastation brought to the Native Americans by European settlers' colonial endeavors. The metaphorical aspect of the image becomes evident as young Victor contemplates the act of remembering and the weight it carries, standing in the middle of the hurricane:

> Victor had seen the news footage of cities after hurricanes had passed by. Houses were flattened, their contents thrown in every direction. Memories not destroyed, but forever changed and damaged. Which is worse? Victor wanted to know if memories of his personal hurricanes would be better if he could change them. Or if he just forgot about all of it. Victor had once seen a photograph of a car that a hurricane had picked up and carried for five miles before it fell onto a house. Victor remembered everything exactly that way. (*The Lone Ranger and Tonto* 32)

The "personal hurricanes" Victor mentions allude to his personal and collective cultural memories that trigger historical trauma and its repercussions, bringing out the characters' anger and anguish. The characters in the story, including Victor, cannot change or forget the traumatic memories no matter how much they wish:

> But the storm that had caused their momentary anger had not died. Instead, it moved from Indian to Indian at the party, giving each a specific, painful memory. Victor's father remembered the time his own father was spit on as they waited for a bus in Spokane. Victor's mother remembered how the Indian Health Service doctor sterilized her moments after Victor was born. Adolph and Arnold were touched by memories of previous battles, storms that continually haunted their lives. […] Other Indians at the party remembered their own pain. This pain grew, expanded. […] Indians continued to drink, harder and harder, as if anticipating. (*The Lone Ranger and Tonto* 36-37)

The emotional burden that Victor and the residents of the Spokane Reservation experience stems from their inability to reclaim their losses and withstand the ongoing colonialism which drag them to a state of hopelessness, so much so that, it has almost become the norm for them. This is obvious in "Every Little Hurricane" as Victor observes his father while he examines his wallet, only to find it devoid of anything. He sees his father return the empty wallet to his pocket, then take it out and look inside again, still finding nothing (*The Lone Ranger and Tonto* 33). Paul Beekman Taylor argues that "the essential feature of healing ceremony throughout Native American practices is repetition" (221). Building on Taylor's argument, it can be said that in the scene depicted, Victor's father is attempting to recover from poverty by repeatedly putting the empty wallet in his pocket, pulling it out, and opening it again as if he is performing a healing ceremony. Yet, in the scenes in which the Spokane Reservation is depicted, poverty and despair have become chronic problems with no solution within the characters' reach. Their incapacity to defy the colonial status quo urge many characters to numb themselves in the face of the pain which resurfaces as alcoholism and other manifestations of self-destructive behavior as the story "Every Little Hurricane" illustrates:

> Victor watched his father take a drink of vodka on a completely empty stomach. Victor could hear that near-poison fall, then hit, flesh and blood, nerve and vein. Maybe it was like lightning tearing an old tree into halves. Maybe it was like a wall of water, a reservation tsunami, crashing onto a small beach. Maybe it was like Hiroshima or Nagasaki. Maybe it was like all that. (*The Lone Ranger and Tonto* 34)

Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart emphasizes that employing numbing methods is a response to trauma ("The Historical Trauma Response" 7). In the story, it is also suggested by Victor that employing such methods is as damaging as colonialism itself as compares a sip of vodka mixed with his father's blood to natural disasters and atomic bombs (*The Lone Ranger and Tonto* 34). Like the self-destructive behaviors emphasized, there is also a sense of despondency among the residents of the reservation, as depicted in several stories, including "Every Little Hurricane." While the characters have ample incentive to break the cycle of despair on the reservation, the permanence of the effects of settler colonialism and the antagonistic environment of the reservation prevents them from doing so as expressed by Victor as follows:

> There was enough hunger […] enough movement, enough geography and history, enough of everything to destroy the reservation and leave only random debris and broken furniture. But it was over. The hurricane that fell out of the sky in 1976 left before sunrise, and all the Indians, the eternal survivors, gathered to count their losses. (*The Lone Ranger and Tonto* 39-40)

From Victor's words, one can deduce that his people have every reason to be against the reservation and the social, political, and economic ills surrounding it. Yet, they are unable to change their circumstances, because of the persistence of the impact of the colonial dictate on their lives and minds which renders them feeling impotent. All the characters could do are seeking ways to survive and count their losses while numbing their grief and trapping themselves once more in the trauma cycle.

Reservation realism is also used in the book to demonstrate the interconnectedness of the past and the present and the trans/historicity of suffering that results from the transmission of trauma from generation to generation. Intergenerationality of trauma is the premise of "This Is What It Means to Say Phoenix, Arizona," as it is in other stories. The story chronicles Victor and Thomas Builds-the-Fire's journey to Phoenix and then back to the Spokane Reservation after Victor's estranged father dies of a heart attack in Phoenix, Arizona. The intergenerational transmission of trauma is initially cited as the reason why Victor is still feeling the "genetic pain," despite not seeing his father in

years (*The Lone Ranger and Tonto* 90). Thomas foresees that Victor's father would abandon them before he did (92). According to Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart and Lemyra DeBruyn, colonial practices have rendered Native Americans deficient in behaviors that contributed to high self-esteem, a feeling of family and community belonging, and a strong Native American identity which in turn resulted in dysfunctional families made up of individuals that are ill-prepared to raise forthcoming generations in a traditional Native American demeanor (63-64). Considering the findings of Brave Heart and DeBruyn, it is feasible to conclude that Thomas' foresight is less prophetic and more the outcome of deciphering the mechanism of trauma transmission from generation to generation. The fact that "[e]verybody on this reservation is named Junior" further points out to this transmission (94). On the reservation, many people carry not only their parents' names but also their memories and traumas. Hinting at such transmission and the enduring burdens that memories carry, Sherman Alexie likens memory to a trickster by resembling it to "a Coyote digging at the corners of [their] brains" (Alexie, "Shoes"). In Native American mythology, tricksters are shapeshifters often associated with unpredictability, blurring the line between past and present, death and life, and good and bad (L. Ellis 56-65). Yet, trickster figures can be characterized as "cultural heroes" because, for all the mayhem they create, they teach people lessons and mature the conditions in which individuals or societies can flourish (Carroll 106). From this perspective, Alexie's analogy of a Coyote constantly digging up the memories that haunt them may be meant to emphasize the complexity of the meaning and role of memories, mixing personal memories with collective memories to encourage his characters and readers to look at who they are.

Reservation realism is also used in the book to reveal behavioral patterns that characters have consciously or unconsciously developed as trauma responses. The resurfacing of traumatic memories through nightmares, a sense of responsibility to partake in ancestral pain, identification with deceased ancestors, and developing compensating fantasies are responses of those who suffer from the survivor's child complex that manifests itself with symptoms similar to the historical trauma response such as anxiety and depression (Brave Heart and DeBruyn 66). Identifying with their ancestors who have experienced attempts at genocide and feeling obligated to partake in ancestral pain (Brave Heart and DeBruyn 66) blur the lines between the past, the present and the future. Many characters

in the short story collection frequently feel overwhelmed by this recollective storage. They are "positioned in a social space replete with memories, dreams, and voices" (Denuccio 87). The story "Family Portrait" is based on the memories of an unnamed narrator, which turned into stories "that changed with each telling, until nothing was aborginal or recognizable" (*The Lone Ranger and Tonto* 229). Some of the stories of the narrator "contain people who never existed before [their] collective imaginations created them" (230). Such an occurrence could be explained by the influence of traumatic experiences in their collective consciousness. In the story "The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven," a similar traumatic memory is mentioned. Victor, the story's narrator and main character, lives in Seattle, away from the reservation. He is suffering from insomnia and is plagued by troublesome dreams when he is able to sleep. In this dream, he witnesses three horseback soldiers engaging in a polo match using the severed head of a Native American woman (224). This image is ingrained in his memory. Initially, he believes it to be a manifestation of his own anger and creativity (224). Yet, his subsequent readings reveal similar historical records depicting such malevolence during the days of the Wild West (224). As Victor's dream reveals, some horrific images in his mind are not the product of his own imagination but the accumulation of the suffering that has been experienced by his people prior to his lifetime. Jeffrey C. Alexander notes that "such imagined events, […] can be as traumatizing as events that have actually occurred" ("Toward a Theory" 8). Victor's experience also showcases that even when the character leaves the reservation, the collective memories of colonial atrocities follow him and remain in his mind, regardless of place and time.

Alexie presents his characters in-between past, present and future, and their longing to undo the tragedy of the past. Throughout the stories, the characters' own traumatic memories, as well as those generated by the collective imagination of others, have left them trapped between the past, the present, and future. This situation is elaborated on in the story "A Drug Called Tradition" as follows:

> Your past is a skeleton walking one step behind you, and your future is a skeleton walking one step in front of you. […] Now, these skeletons are made of memories, dreams, and voices. And they can trap you in the in-between, between touching and becoming. […] They ain't ever going to leave you, […] Your past ain't going to fall behind, and your future won't get too far ahead. […] The past, the future, all of it is

> wrapped up in the now. That's how it is. We are trapped in the now. (*The Lone Ranger and Tonto* 51,52)

Trapped between both heroic and traumatic memories of the past and the uncertainty of the future, the characters feel trapped in a bleak present. As they are unable to change the past and alter the future in a significant way, they frequently engage in compensating fantasies in the present, as depicted in the same story. "A Drug Called Tradition" presents Victor, Thomas, and Junior, while under the effect of a hallucinogenic drug. The characters narrate their visions among which there are significant similarities in terms of their perceived notion of the "true" Native American identity and of a longing for the pre-colonial past. "It'll be very fucking Indian. Spiritual shit, you know?" says Victor, referring to the effect they expect to have while high on drugs (*The Lone Ranger and Tonto* 43). This line implies that the use of alcohol and drugs is not only utilized to conceal the mental stress of the trauma generated by colonialism, but it is also presented as giving the characters a false hope they desperately need to reclaim the Native American identity that has been lost due to colonialism. Their visions provide insights into their communal perception of ethnic identity, heroism, and loss.

In Thomas's vision, Victor turns into a Native American warrior who steals a horse from a white settlement to earn his name (*The Lone Ranger and Tonto* 43, 44). Junior's vision, in which Thomas dances naked around a fire, can be interpreted as Thomas' reclamation of his people's lost sovereignty through performing the Ghost Dance (45, 46). Each dance step of Thomas brings Native Americans closer to recovering their losses (46). As Thomas continues to dance, his tribespeople join him, and the dancing circle spread until all of the European settlers board their ships and return to Europe, and not a single white colonist remains (46, 47). When Junior has finished describing his vision, it is Victor's turn to experiment with the drugs and narrate his. It involves a scenario in which Native Americans triumph against European colonizers. In his vision, Junior is a famous singer, and even the American president, Mr. Edgar Crazy Horse, who is also the great-grandson of the great Lakota warrior Crazy Horse, comes to listen to him. Junior sings his song:

> *Crazy Horse, what have you done?*
>
> *It took four hundred years*

and four hundred thousand guns

but the Indians finally won.

Ya-hey, the Indians finally won

Crazy Horse, are you still singing?

Crazy Horse, are you still singing?

I honor your old songs

and all they keep on bringing

because the Indians keep winning

Ya-hey, the Indians keep winning. *(The Lone Ranger and Tonto* 48)

As Eduardo Duran and Bonnie Duran articulate, it is possible to shed light on trauma and its repercussions by interpreting dreams and visions (151). The visions of all three characters under the influence of drugs exemplify compensatory fantasies as symptoms of the survivor's child complex. In all three visions, instead of loss and subjugation, there is a state of valor and victory. The urge to alter the course of history and reverse events is inherent in all of them. In other words, the characters seek to recover from their traumas and compensate for their losses through these visions. When characters are confronted with the bitter reality of the present, they turn to these fantasies:

> *It is now*. Three Indian boys are drinking Diet Pepsi and talking out by Benjamin Lake. They are wearing only loincloths and braids. Although it is the twentieth century and planes are passing overhead, the Indian boys have decided to be real Indians tonight. They all want to have their vision, to receive their true names, their adult names. That is the problem with Indians these days. They have the same names all their lives. Indians wear their names like a pair of bad shoes […] The boys sit by the fire and breathe, their visions arrive. They are all carried away to the past, to the moment before any of them took their first drink of alcohol. The boy Thomas throws the beer he is offered into the garbage. The boy Junior throws his whiskey through a window. The boy Victor spills his vodka down the drain. Then the boys sing. They sing and dance and drum. They steal horses. I can see them. *They steal horses*. (*The Lone Ranger and Tonto* 50)

As the quotation above demonstrates, Victor, Thomas, and Junior collect "bits and pieces together from their pasts" in the hope that they return to a pre-colonial past, but they are "painfully aware that the days of stealing horses and making war are over" (Barreto Martins 766; Velie 407). Not only has the glorious pre-colonial period passed, but Native Americans are also well aware that they are subjugated beings living a life of hopelessness in the present. As the story "Imagining Reservation" implies, Native Americans often find themselves asking many "what if" questions which remain

unanswered, such as what Native Americans would be doing now if Columbus had died before reporting to the Spanish emperor and the empress, that he had discovered a new continent (*The Lone Ranger and Tonto* 185).

In the aforementioned stories, reservation realism is used to portray characters' experience with trauma triggers —stimuli that remind them of their personal traumas, the collective memories of their people, ongoing colonialism, and the hostile conditions of reservation— and their responses to them. The cycle of trauma and trauma responses that the characters struggle to break is so rooted on the reservation that, even if times and people change, the place and events do not, and the characters remain "trapped in the now" (*The Lone Ranger and Tonto* 50) unable to return to the past or move to an altered future. The story "The Only Traffic Light on the Reservation Doesn't Flash Red Anymore" highlights such repeated patterns of experience and history and is a prime example of "reservation realism." It is a story that depicts the narrator Victor and his friend Adrian as they observe life on the reservation and witness the passage of trauma from generation to generation. The story opens, rather ominously, with Victor and Adrian sitting on the porch, pretending to shoot themselves with a BB pistol (*The Lone Ranger and Tonto* 73). Although Victor and Adrian's attempts to commit suicide remains metaphorical, they represent an appalling reality for their people because inherent reservation problems have been associated with high suicide rates on many Native American reservations (Long 247). After several failed suicide attempts, Victor reminds Adrian, who asks for a beer, that they are sober (*The Lone Ranger and Tonto* 73). As they sit and observe the reservation, they realize that the only traffic signal on the reservation has stopped working, but neither knows how long it has been out of order (74). Meanwhile, the pair's attention is drawn to a group of Native American teenagers roaming about the reservation, including the reservation's basketball star Julius Windmaker. Victor offers a foreshadowing insight regarding reservation youngsters at this very early point in the story:

> We watched a group of Indian boys walk by. […] They were off to cause trouble somewhere, I'm sure. Little warriors looking for honor in some twentieth century vandalism. Throw a few rocks through windows, kick a dog, slash a tire. Run like hell when the tribal cops drove slowly by the scene of the crime. (*The Lone Ranger and Tonto* 74)

The fact that a group of young Native Americans may have a proclivity for vandalism might be interpreted as a breach of colonial status, which is emphasized by the fact that these young people are referred to as "little warriors." They substitute such activities for demonstrating their "Indianness." Their actions can be interpreted as a trauma response, as Brave Heart suggests that anger management issues are related to historical trauma ("The Historical Trauma Response" 7). Historical trauma and despair are mutually intertwined throughout the story, each one triggering the other. Victor and Adrian attribute the soaring success of Julius Windmaker to the fact that he has not started drinking "yet" (*The Lone Ranger and Tonto* 74,75). The word "yet" is chosen here to emphasize the gravity of problems with alcohol on the reservation.

As Alexie points out throughout the story, being a basketball star equates to being legendary on the reservation. Victor, however, adds that "there's a definite history of reservation heroes who never finish high school, who never finish basketball seasons" (77). Victor is one of those who has experienced the all-encompassing nature of this vicious cycle. As he recounts it, Victor's inclusion on the list of failed reservation heroes happens during his senior year of high school, the year they made it to the state finals (*The Lone Ranger and Tonto* 76). As Victor and his teammates skim through the first aid manuals before the match, they are exposed to images of death and destruction which lead them to lose their sense of immortality (77). After such a loss, Victor misses every shot and feels as though he has lost everything in life (77). The loss of the sense of immortality, as well as their loss of the match, are significant in terms of revealing historical trauma and responses to it. The reason for their loss of the sense of immortality is not the pictures they saw that day, but the memories that those pictures created in their collective memory. The images of death and destruction invoke the memories of his ancestors' death and destruction by settler colonists. As William E. Hartmann and Joseph P. Gone establish, the collective experience of colonialism, with its cumulative repercussions, can aggregate over generations and exacerbate lifelong traumas (281). Consciousness, whether acquired from personal experience or collective memory, is integrated in one's identity (Strozzi-Heckler, qtd. in Beaulieu-Banks et al. 35). Although Victor and his teammates have not personally witnessed death or destruction, their ancestors' memories buried in their subconscious due to the transitory nature of historical trauma. As such, he thinks there is little, if any, hope of getting rid

of the trauma imposed by colonialism. This sense of hopelessness resurfaces near the end of the same story in Victor's words:

> It's hard to be optimistic on the reservation. When a glass sits on a table here, people don't wonder if it's half filled or half empty. They just hope it's good beer. Still, Indians have a way of surviving. But it's almost like 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. (*The Lone Ranger and Tonto* 80)

As Victor mentions, the ongoing colonial status discussed before has a direct bearing on how hard it is to remain positive on the reservation. Colonial practices, which Victor referred to as "big stuff," inflicted wounds on the psyche of Native Americans that are turned into belated and fixated bereavement (Brave Heart, "The Historical Trauma Response" 7). In addition to Native Americans' ongoing subjugation because of the improbability of returning to a pre-colonial past, the frequently dictated inferiority by the white people and the media, as in the case of Tonto and the Washington Redskins mascot, both of whom are examples of stereotypical and degrading portrayals of Native Americans in popular culture, trigger collective traumas. As described in "The Only Traffic Signal on the Reservation Doesn't Flash Red Anymore" and the other stories in the collection, when such triggers combine, trauma responses caused by "implicit unresolved, fixated, or anticipatory grief" such as alcohol and substance abuse can be seen (Brave Heart and DeBruyn 68). At the end of the story, Victor and Adrian are sitting on the same porch a year later. Once again, Adrian asks Victor for another beer, but Victor is again forced to remind him that they are sober. The cyclicality of the plot emphasizes the monotony of reservation life. It is Julius Windmaker's plight that distinguishes the beginning of the story from its end. Victor and Adrian see Julius drunk on the gameday a year after praising Julius' prospective basketball character. Julius, as anticipated, fails to do well in the basketball game due to alcohol intake in order to alleviate the ache of subjugation which leads him to join the ranks of failed reservation heroes. Meanwhile, Victor and Adrian, and the others from the reservation are talking about a new basketball star named Lucy. The story ends with Victor and Adrian discussing whether Lucy will succeed and hoping for the best. Meanwhile, the only traffic signal on the reservation still does not flash red, representing the circumstances on the reservation that remain unchanged across time.

In addition to the individual and collective emotional weight of surviving genocidal colonial acts, the fear of disappearing into white culture is one of the most debilitating and persisting ramifications of transgenerational trauma that is portrayed with reservation realism in the stories (Palmer 9). The short stories "Because My Father Always Said He Was the Only Indian Who Saw Jimi Hendrix Play 'The Star-Spangled Banner' At Woodstock," "Amusements," and "Distances" address the fear of disappearing into white culture through the various behaviors of the characters. In "Because My Father Always Said He Was the Only Indian Who Saw Jimi Hendrix Play 'The Star-Spangled Banner' At Woodstock" and "Amusements," characters intentionally or unintentionally imitate white people and feel victimized or guilty as a result. In "Distances," characters completely reject anything connected to whiteness in any way.

This fear of disappearing into white culture is rather humorously illustrated in "Because My Father Always Said He Was the Only Indian Who Saw Jimi Hendrix Play 'The Star-Spangled Banner' At Woodstock." As Gizem Barreto Martins highlights, in the story, Alexie "handles the issue of hippies trying to be 'American Indians' ironically, and Victor's father becomes a representative of the assimilation of the American into 'American Indian' culture" (771). The story opens with the narrator, Victor, describing his father as a great hippie in the 1960s and as the only Native American at the Woodstock (*The Lone Ranger and Tonto* 54-56). Victor's father not only gets to listen to "The Star-Spangled Banner" live at Woodstock, but he also drinks to the recording of it (56). While Victor's father's repeated listening to the national anthem of a state formed by settler colonists may be an indication of assimilation, his behaviors, such as his frequent abandonment of his family, reveal deeper evidence of assimilation. In this context, Alexie makes the following observations: "On a reservation, Indian men who abandon their children are treated worse than white fathers who do the same thing. It's because white men have been doing that forever and Indian men have just learned how. That's how assimilation can work" (65). The idea that Native American men learn to abandon their families by observing whites do so is a testament to how assimilation can disperse Native American community, and is, thus, a reflection of the fear of disappearing through assimilation.

Another story, "Amusements," discusses the fear of assimilation and the unease that comes with being mentally intertwined with the colonizer. During a carnival, Victor and his friend Sadie took Dirty Joe, one of the reservation's occupants who is always drunk, to a spinning roller coaster with them for fun. Meanwhile, Victor and Sadie "sat there beside Dirty Joe and watched all the white tourists watch [them], laugh, point a finger, their faces twisted with hate and disgust" (*The Lone Ranger and Tonto* 86). Victor, realizing how mean humiliating Dirty Joe was, finds himself surrounded by crazy mirrors as he rushes to escape the scene (88) Being surrounded by crazy mirrors and seeing distorted versions of himself functions as an epiphany for Victor. He realizes the damage he causes his own people after seeing his own distorted image in the mirrors, which may be paralleled to the impacts of colonialism that alters perceptions of Native American identity (Barreto Martins 771). Victor's humiliation of Dirty Joe for his personal entertainment is no less heinous than the humiliating actions of white people against Native Americans. His eventual remorse stems from his anxiety of losing his Native American identity through assimilation into white culture and thought.

The story "Distances" can be read as a more dystopic illustration of this fear of disappearing into white culture. The story is told by an anonymous narrator and "describes the contemporary realization of Wovoka's late nineteenth-century Ghost Dance prophecy" (Farrington 522). The story revolves around the major theme of what would have occurred if the Native Americans had triumphed against white settlers, implying the compensatory fantasies as a result of previous losses. By creating an alternate reality with "reservation realism," it paints a dystopian vision of Native Americans adapted to city life while emphasizing the anxiety of becoming lost in white culture. Tom Farrington argues that the story mimics "a state of enforced racial purification and intracultural segregation" by highlighting evident disparities between Native Americans living on reservations and those embracing city life (522). In the story, Native Americans living in the city are referred to as "Urbans," while those living on reservations are referred to as the "Skins." The unnamed narrator of the "Distances" describes Urbans' demise and underlines the racial segregation between the two groups as follows:

> Urbans are the city Indians who survived and made their way out to the reservation after it all fell apart. There must have been over a hundred when they first arrived, but most

> of them have died since. Now there are only a dozen Urbans left, and they're all sick. The really sick ones look like they are five hundred years old. They look like they have lived forever; they look like they'll die soon […] The Skins, Indians who lived on the reservation when it happened, can never marry Urbans. The Tribal Council made that rule because of the sickness in the Urbans. One of the original Urbans was pregnant when she arrived on the reservation and gave birth to a monster. The Tribal Council doesn't want that to happen again. (*The Lone Ranger and Tonto* 138-139)

Although the origin of the Urbans' sickness is not mentioned in the "Distances," the circumstance of Urban woman Tremble Dancer, whom the narrator falls in love with, hints at the disintegration of Native Americans who have acclimated to city life:

> Sometimes her skin will flake, fall off, float to the ground. Sometimes I taste parts of her breaking off into my mouth. It is the taste of blood, dust, sap, sun. "My legs are leaving me," Tremble Dancer told me once. "Then it will be my arms, my eyes, my fingers, the small of my back. "I am jealous of what you have," she told me, pointing at the parts of my body and telling me what they do. (140-141)

As mentioned by Farrington, "there is no explicit indication that the 'Urbans' are any more or less biologically indigenous than the reservation 'Skins'" (528). However, the distinction here is in the anticipated implications of urbanization for Native Americans. What distinguishes Urbans from Skins is the idea that "the catastrophic diseases and violence brought about by European settlers, as well as the policies of Americanization that legally deprived (and continue to deprive) indigenous peoples of their lands, cultures, and lives" can function more prominently as they adapt to city life and move away from their traditional lifestyles (Farrington 528). In addition to the dismemberment and extinction of the Urban Native Americans, the Tribal Council's destruction of everything regarded as "white" is an expression of the fear of being dissolved into white culture.

"The Trial of Thomas Builds-the-Fire" may be used to demonstrate Alexie's reservation realism as it perforates the hegemonic narrative of history with counter narratives embellished with multiple perspectives. As its title reveals, the story depicts the trial of Thomas, one of the three recurring protagonists of the story collection. It begins as Thomas is waiting alone in a cell as the Bureau of Indian Affairs officers discuss his future, present, and past (*The Lone Ranger and Tonto* 125). Thomas is known to have "held the reservation postmaster hostage for eight hours with the idea of a gun and had also threatened to make significant changes in the tribal vision" years ago (125). The crime Thomas is charged with is unknown (126). Although the Bureau of Indian Affairs

officials have no legitimate grounds to charge Thomas, one of the primary reasons they are holding him is his dangerous and extreme need to tell a story and tell the truth (125). When asked to defend himself in a case in which he is the perpetrator, lawyer, and witness, Thomas begins to narrate a story:

> "It all started on September 8, 1858. I was a young pony, strong and quick in every movement. I remember this. Still, there was so much to fear on that day when Colonel George Wright took me and 799 of my brothers captive. Imagine, 800 beautiful ponies stolen at once. It was the worst kind of war crime. But Colonel Wright thought we were too many to transport, that we were all dangerous. In fact, I still carry his letter of that day which justified the coming slaughter". (128)

Following Thomas' remarks, an actual report submitted by Colonel George Wright on September 10, 1858, with the title "HEADQUARTERS EXPEDITION AGAINST NORTHERN INDIANS, Camp on the Spokane River, W.T., 16 miles above *'the Falls*,' September 10, 1858" is included in the story. The account details the slaughter of captive horses as well as the movement of troops toward the Coeur d'Alene Mission. "The Trial of Thomas Builds-the-Fire" continues as Thomas diversifies the conflicts between Native Americans and American soldiers, as well as the crimes committed against Native Americans. The story is resolved when Thomas confesses killing two American soldiers in a shootout while impersonating a Native American named Wild Cayote. Towards the end of the story, it is read:

> *Article from the* Spokesman-Review,
>
> *October 7, 19—.*
>
> Builds-the-Fire to Smolder in Prison
>
> WELLPINIT, WASHINGTON—
>
> Thomas Builds-the-Fire, the self-proclaimed visionary of the Spokane Tribe, was sentenced today to two concurrent life terms in the Walla Walla State Penitentiary. His many supporters battled with police for over eight hours following the verdict.
>
> U.S. District Judge James Wright asked, "Do you have anything you want to say now, Mr. Builds-the- Fire?" Builds-the-Fire simply shook his head no and was led away by prison officials. Wright told Builds-the-Fire that the new federal sentencing guidelines "require the imposition of a life sentence for racially motivated murder." There is no possibility for parole, said U.S. Prosecuting Attorney, Adolph D. Jim, an enrolled member of the Yakima Indian Nation. "The only appeal I have is for justice," Builds-the- Fire reportedly said as he was transported away from this story and into the next. (*The Lone Ranger and Tonto* 135-136)

The dialogue between Thomas Builds-the-Fire and the BIA officials is reminiscent of the ever-tumultuous interactions between colonists and Native Americans. Following Thomas' arrest, in the end of the story, the tribal people's fight with the police might be seen as a metaphor for the repeated patterns of history. The fact that Thomas was charged with racially motivated murder, which is exempt from parole, exemplifies the irony that Sherman Alexie routinely employs to satirize the institutional racism of and the resulting injustices committed by the US government. Most crucially, the story challenges the US government's version of history and presents an alternative to it. It can be said that in "The Trial of Thomas Builds-the-Fire," reservation realism is used as a means for creating a counter narrative that challenges the hegemonic historical accounts as well as a means to counter US government' promotion of the reservation system as a paternalistic gesture.

With "reservation realism," Alexie presents historical events from an indigenous perspective, while also deconstructing Native American stereotypes and confronting the reader with images of authentic Native Americans. Stereotypes are cognitive structures that pertain to a group's knowledge, beliefs, and expectations about another person or persons (Dovidio et al. 133). Yet, these structures are often biased. Alexie's attempt to challenge "the Indians of American imagination" in Vine Deloria's terms (*God is Red* 24) begin with the choice of the title and continues throughout the book.

To comprehend how the author challenges long-held Native American stereotypes, it is necessary to first recognize the character, Tonto. Tonto is a character from the radio show *Lone Ranger,* which debuted in 1933 on WXYZ radio station in Detroit, Michigan ("Lone Ranger"). Not an original part of the story, Tonto was included in the *Lone Ranger* series in the 11th episode to provide the protagonist with someone to talk to ("Tonto"). He is portrayed as a Potawatomi tribal member who speaks pidgin English, and is "principled, virtuous, fiercely loyal […] intelligent [and] wise" ("Tonto"). Although there are various accounts for the origin of the Lone Ranger and Tonto's relationship in the stories, most of them feature a scene in which the Lone Ranger saves Tonto from racist villains ("Tonto"). One of the most popular Native American characters of the 20th century, Tonto accompanies the Lone Ranger on his escapades and is a prime example of the "loyal sidekick" stereotype ("Tonto"). As the intention of

his inclusion in the story reveals, “Tonto is only present to serve the white hero/master, the Lone Ranger” (Cox 55). His sole purpose is to serve the white hero, whom he is subordinate to. Yet, he is reworked in Alexie’s work, through a mutiny against the representation of Native Americans in the US media.

In his June 28, 1998, *Los Angeles Times* article entitled “I Hated Tonto (Still Do),” written five years after the release of the short story collection, Alexie once again emphasizes his frustration with Native American portrayals in mainstream media and indicates to his motivation behind his decision to give his first short story collection the name *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*. In the article, Alexie recounts how he was exposed to Native American imagery prevalent in mainstream culture as a young Native American boy and how these portrayals altered his racial consciousness (Alexie, “I Hated Tonto”). In the imagination of Alexie and of millions of Americans, Native Americans are fabled either as wise and brave mythic warriors who climb mountains, wade into streams, and sing songs or as outraged savages (“I Hated Tonto”). The very limited depiction of Native Americans endures a remarkable process of “lactification,” in the words of Frantz Fanon (47). The “lactified” Native American image that has been circulated by the media has led to a desertification of the racial consciousness of Native Americans, as they are exposed to these images. As he explains in this article, Alexie remembers dreaming of himself as the “steroidal Indian warrior,” aspiring to be like white movie stars such as John Wayne who fights “Indian savages” (“I Hated Tonto”). Sherman Alexie has always despised Tonto, since he is nothing like the Native Americans in such movies, as he is neither a Native American warrior fighting heroically to prevent whites from advancing on their lands nor a romanticized figure pleasing to the eye (Alexie, “I Hated Tonto”). Thinking that he would also never be “as brave, as strong, as wise, as visionary, as white as the Indians in the movies,” Alexie has hated Tonto because he is a minor figure in a predominantly white America who cannot challenge subordination or subjugation, just like Alexie himself (Alexie, “I Hated Tonto”).

By depicting the Lone Ranger and Tonto in a metaphorical feud in his title, Alexie illustrates the “struggle for self-definition and self-representation against the oppressive technological narratives that define Native Americans as a conquered people, as

decontextualized, romanticized, subservient Tontos, and Native America as a conquered landscape" (Cox 56). Sherman Alexie's vision of Native American representation refuses to accept the inferior social status imposed on them by white authority figures (Cox 55). Similarly, his rejection and subversion of the meaning attributed to Tonto is an example of reservation realism in that it defies the promoted hierarchy between Native Americans and whites which is akin to a master-slave relationship. Instead of Native American stories circulated by whites, Alexie writes his own ones in attempt to subvert stereotypical representations, portraying authentic characters and allowing them to be viewed through a multiple perspective.

Sherman Alexie's reservation realism confronts long-standing stereotypes firmly established in both popular culture and academic circles. Still, after the publication of the story collection, Alexie was notably chastised for the repeated use of the negative Native American stereotypes like the "drunken Indian" on the grounds that it is "inappropriate and dangerously misleading" for the reader (Evans 47). For instance, Louis Owens states that Sherman Alexie's frequent use of the negative stereotypes fortifies the image of the romantic, unthreatening, "vanishing Indian" and justifies the colonial perception that Native Americans should be held responsible for the prevailing Native American condition, instead of the settlers (79, 82). Yet, stereotypes, such as the frequently used "drunken Indian," are not derided or used as a means of depicting the process of vanishing in the stories; rather, they are employed to provide a realistic depiction. In reference to his use of stereotypes, Sherman Alexie asserts:

> [I]n writing about drunk Indians, I am dealing with stereotypical material. But I can only respond with the truth. In my family, counting parents, siblings, and dozens of aunts, uncles, and cousins, there are less than a dozen who are currently sober, and only a few who have never drunk. When I write about the destructive effects of alcohol on Indians, I am not writing out of a literary stance or a colonized mind's need to reinforce stereotypes. I am writing autobiography. (24)

Although Alexie's remarks hint that his deployment of stereotypes is not intended to entirely eradicate an existing stereotype, it is nonetheless deconstructive since it explains a phenomenon founded on colonial mentality via the narratives of people who have been subjugated. As expressed by Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz and Dina Gilio-Whitaker, those who shape the US social narratives attempt to explain the origins of

Native American alcohol consumption from a biased colonial viewpoint claiming that Native Americans are genetically predisposed to such addictions:

> [They are] deeply woven into US social narratives—perpetuated both in popular culture and in scholarly circles and it plays out in a number of ways. For instance, the drunken Indian male (a version of the degraded Indian) is often seen as morally deficient because of his inability to control himself, making him a menace to society. Or he has become alcoholic because of his tragic inability to adjust to the modern world—he is the Indian stuck between two worlds, and he is pitied. More recent explanations of Indian alcoholism hold that it is genetically inherited. (152)

In response to such biased assumptions, Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart reads alcoholism, as well as a number of other dysfunctions seen in Native American communities, as historical trauma responses ("The Historical Trauma Response" 7). In other words, the stereotyping of Native American behaviors patterned by trauma once again proves the devastating effects of the settler colonial mentality on Native Americans. As Joseph L. Coulombe argues, to perceive the trauma that haunted Native Americans and understand the social ills on reservations, Alexie urges readers to interpret his characters' actions in the light of the cultural reality he depicts (103), shaped by the individual and collective cumulative experiences of those who dwell on reservations, befitting the agenda of reservation realism.

As the close readings of specific sections from the short story collection in the light of historical trauma theory reveal, Sherman Alexie depicts his own version of Native American reality through what he calls reservation realism to counter the racial hierarchies, prejudices, stereotypes, and selective historiography that have been taken for granted in American society for so long. He employs reservation realism also in other works selected to be analyzed in this thesis. Yet, he incorporates it with other manifestations of realism to offer alternative narrations of Native American experience to make sure his stories fulfill their aim. The next chapter will demonstrate how he utilizes magical realism with all its cultural and political potential in *Reservation Blues* for the same purposes.

CHAPTER 2

MAGICAL REALISM IN *RESERVATION BLUES*

Reservation Blues (1995) elaborates on the lives of three characters from the Spokane Reservation, Thomas Builds-the-Fire, Victor Joseph, and Junior Polatkin, who were introduced in Alexie's 1993 short story collection *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*. This book also provides a detailed account of reservation life, characters, and the effects of Native American colonization and trauma. It opens with the blues musician Robert Johnson's arrival at the Spokane Indian Reservation. Johnson, who made a Faustian bargain with a mysterious white man referred to as "Gentleman" years ago to be the best guitarist of the world, leaves his enchanted guitar in Thomas' van in order to rid himself of the curse that comes with it. Lured by the magicality of the guitar, Thomas persuades Victor and Junior to form a music band, which they name Coyote Springs. Thomas, the storyteller of the reservation, becomes the bass guitarist and vocalist, hoping to reach out to a large audience with his stories that mirror Native American experience. He hands Robert Johnson's magical guitar to Victor, who, as frequently stressed in the author's previous work, lives in a state of dullness caused by historical trauma and reservation circumstances. By entrusting him with the guitar, Thomas hopes that the instrument can redeem Victor from his cycle of despair. Junior becomes the drummer of Coyote Springs with the hope that the band may render their existences more meaningful. Once Coyote Springs gains popularity on the reservation, they start performing in neighboring towns and reservations. Eventually, Chess and Checkers Warm Water join the band. As the band members struggle to make a name for themselves, they face trauma, poverty, and racism. People from their own community and those outside of it question the group's ability to succeed, and if they can, sustain their success in the music industry while maintaining their Native American identity. Against all odds, they manage to gain a following. They are discovered by Phil Sheridan and George Wright, homonymous with the two generals who led massacres against Native Americans in the 19th century, just to fail the audition in New York and lose their chance to secure a record deal. They begin to encounter ghosts that confront them with the harsh realities of their past and present following their acquaintance with Sheridan and Wright. Frightened and disillusioned, they return to the reservation just to

hear about a white duo named Betty and Veronica. The two white girls have no Native American heritage but falsely claim it to their advantage and manage to land a record deal with Cavalry Records. The juxtaposition of the success of the "pretindians" Betty and Veronica with the failure of a band that was genuinely Native American, Coyote Springs, demonstrates that in the hands of advantaged groups, the idea of race is open to individual construction and exploitation for advantage. Coyote Springs' inability to challenge this exploitation resulting from inequalities leads to feelings of hopelessness among its members which manifest themselves in a set of symptoms that Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart identifies as historical trauma responses. Victor struggles with depression and turns to alcohol, while Junior commits suicide. With little hope for a future on the Spokane Indian Reservation, Thomas leaves the reservation for the city with Chess and Checkers.

Reservation Blues, similar to *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, employs reservation realism to depict the lives of Alexie's characters. Throughout the novel, characters' refusal to confront traumatic memories from the past and the tragedies from the present and their belief in the improbability of returning to a pre-colonial past together with their persistent colonized identity weigh on their psyche and are reflected through their historical trauma responses. As the title suggests, reservation has a remarkable impact on characters' mental states serving as an antagonist that creates a cycle of trauma as in *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*. Early in *Reservation Blues*, Thomas contemplates all the hopes killed on the reservation and how those hopes were buried in the foundations of government-built HUD houses (7). Similarly, one of Thomas' stories in the first chapter mentions a mythic belief that the turtles dwelling in Benjamin Pond and Turtle Lake on the Spokane Indian Reservation feed on dreams that died on the reservation (27). Government policies deliberately make independence and self-sufficiency almost impossible for Native Americans. The novel's protagonist, Thomas Builds-the-Fire, recognizes that this dependence leads to a cycle of despair and government abuse on the reservation: "[T]ribal tears [are] collected and fermented in huge BIA barrels. Then the BIA poured those tears into beer and Pepsi cans and distributed them back onto the reservation" (*Reservation Blues* 100). The cynical depiction of the function of the BIA highlight how settler colonialism

perpetuates its control over Native Americans, diminishing their sense of agency and independence as part of Alexie's attempt to achieve reservation realism.

The characters, who have a diminishing sense of agency and independence, experience a sense of "unhomeliness" as described by Homi Bhabha. The term "unhomeliness" is a state of in-betweenness characterized by "an estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world" (Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* 13). In the Native American context, it is a feeling that is further compounded by settler colonialism's reduction of Native Americans to colonial subjects and their isolation through the reservation system. Louis Tyson highlights that characters in these situations experience a sense of disconnection due to their struggle with identity and belonging. She describes them as psychological refugees (403). Such characters internalize and mimic the oppression they have experienced (Tyson 403) and refuse to acknowledge their traumas which result in violent and self-destructive trauma responses directed toward others or oneself, affecting a person's psychological and physical health. The negative impacts of the characters' circumstances on their physical and mental health are depicted in a variety of examples throughout the novel. Some characters suffering from historical trauma seek to numb their pain through violence, psychic numbing, and substance abuse (Sotero 96), which create another vicious cycle caused by trauma.

One of the three protagonists, Victor Joseph is a solid illustration of this circumstance. He is portrayed as impulsive and vulgar in the *Reservation Blues* as in *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, and his mental instability caused by historical trauma is often emphasized. The first encounter between the main characters, Thomas and Victor, serves as an example of Victor's impulsiveness as he quickly grabs Thomas into a chokehold for the simple reason that he refuses to tell him the name he had given his guitar (14). Thomas analyzes Victor's impulsive propensity for violence as follows:

> These little wars were intimate affairs for those who dreamed in childhood of fishing for salmon but woke up as adults to shop at the Trading Post and stand in line for U.S.D.A. commodity food instead. They savagely, repeatedly, opened up cans of commodities and wept over the rancid meat, forced to eat what stray dogs ignored. Indian men like Victor roared from place to place, set fires, broke windows, and picked on the weaker members of the Tribe. (*Reservation Blues* 14)

Given Thomas' interpretation, it is transparent that colonialism plays a significant role in Victor's violent tendencies. When those, who as children aspire to the heroic ideals

of the past, are confronted with the reality of reservation life and subjugation, their anger toward the settler colonial hierarchy either shows itself in acts of vandalism or is directed toward one's own community because one cannot direct it to the colonizer. It has been observed that both the victim and the perpetrator have rationalized violence in Native American communities as an act adopted from the colonizer or as an act committed out of despair, anger, and desperation (Poupart 93). From this point of view, Victor's capacity for aggression can be assessed as a historical trauma response (93).

Adrienne J. Huftalen and Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart establish a connection between violence and forgiveness. They argue that some Native communities may find it challenging or impossible to extend forgiveness towards those responsible for their pain because of early traumas (Huftalen and Brave Heart 183). Anger management issues resulting from the inability to forgive, internalized aggression, oppression, unresolved grief and trauma may cause violent acts as well as a negative self-perception which might end up in self-destructive behavior such as alcoholism (Brave Heart and DeBruyn 69-70). Confirming the claims of Huftalen and Brave Heart, it can be observed that Victor tries to drink away his anger for both personal and communal wrongs that he has difficulty in forgiving (*Reservation Blues* 203). As the book delves deeper into Victor's life, it is revealed that Victor starts drinking at an early age after his father abandons them and things get worse when he is confronted with his stepfather, a substitute white patriarch (*Reservation Blues* 57). Based on this, one may say that Victor is unable to forgive his father's abandonment and the patching of his absence with a white man who may represent the colonizer, and, as a result, he is prone to violence both against others and against himself. It is possible to consider this abandonment not only on a personal level, but also on a social level, and to argue that Victor is actually not only angry with his father, but also at the subjugation of Native Americans in general, because, as it was discussed in Chapter One, it was settler colonialism that left Native Americans ill-equipped to nurture future generations, and as a result, making absent father figures common occurrence, just as it was in Victor's case. Additionally, it is emphasized that white patriarchy has been absorbed by Native Americans as a result of colonial dynamics, and its dominance is justified and upheld in these societies (Poupart 91). Given the circumstances, Victor's father's disappearance primarily signifies the absence of a traditional Native American masculine role model.

As Easton and Dixon assert, “stripped of recognizable traditional gender roles during colonization, [Victor] flounders in his attempts to enact warrior practices” and tries to compensate for this inadequacy by acting violently, both against himself and the people around him (11).

Details about Victor’s personal life also show that Victor experienced abuse during his childhood by a Catholic priest (*Reservation Blues* 148), which contributes to his traumatic past and difficulty in forgiving. Although the details of the abuse are not specified in the text, it is implied that the abuse has had a profound and lasting impact on Victor, causing him to struggle with feelings of anger, guilt, and shame throughout his life. Even though this single incident and the associated feelings that Victor experiences may seem quite personal, historical trauma literature suggests that Victor’s feelings may not only be rooted in his personal experiences, but also in the collective tragedies that Native Americans have had to endure. Studies on this subject demonstrate that:

> Maladaptive behaviors and related social problems such as substance abuse, physical/sexual abuse, and suicide directly traumatize offspring and are indirectly transmitted through learned behavior perpetuating the intergenerational cycle of trauma. Secondary and subsequent generations also experience “vicarious traumatization” through the collective memory, storytelling and oral traditions of the population. Traumatic events become embedded in the collective, social memories of the population. (Sotero 100)

As Michelle M. Sotero’s research shows, even Native Americans who do not personally witness the traumatizing event have aspects of it stored in their collective memory. So, it can be argued that Victor’s personal experience of being abused may once again demonstrate his helplessness in the face of authority, just as his ancestors in the face of colonial violence. His personal and historical traumas could then connect, enhancing his sense of shame, anger, and powerlessness. To cope with these emotions, he drinks and seeks to numb his grief.

In the novel, characters carry psychological burdens that influence how characters relate to themselves and the society. In this respect, a significant finding regarding historical trauma responses in the characters of *Reservation Blues* is their disconnection from their cultural roots or their misinterpretation of their cultural practices. This disconnection can lead to a sense of loss of identity and disorientation. Victor is introduced as the John Travolta of the reservation because he still wears disco clothes (*Reservation Blues* 12).

Even though it is claimed that Victor still wears the 1970s clothes because he lacks the money to buy new clothes, when a thorough character analysis is done, it is feasible to make a connection between Victor's conduct, attire, and cultural displacement. Victor's cultural displacement, according to Easton and Dixon, is a result of colonialism and resurfaces as colonial mimicry (12). From this viewpoint, Victor's continued adherence to the white pop culture's masculine fashion is a subtle but notable example of mimicry. Additionally, there are even more striking instances of Victor's disconnection from his own culture and imitation of the colonizer's norms rather than his own. Throughout the book, Victor expresses a preference of white women over Native American women (*Reservation Blues* 56, 223, 290). This can be viewed as his attempt to regain his masculinity, degraded by white patriarchal and colonial forces, by seeking validation from white women, and by disrespecting Native American women. Victor tries to impress white women, perceiving them as superior, while reflecting the internalized oppression caused by historical trauma, on himself and Native American partners alike. Victor's mimicry of the colonizer's perspective leads him to accept the colonizer's view of the "savage/civilized" binary and societal structure, and to reject his own ethnic and cultural heritage (Easton and Dixon 12). This separates him from Native American beliefs and practices, as demonstrated by his disbelief in Big Mom, who serves both as a spiritual guide and mentor helping the band connect with their cultural roots, and his rejection of Thomas's offer of an eagle feather for protection on the trip to New York, shouting "get that Indian bullshit away from me!" (Easton and Dixon 12; *Reservation Blues* 218). As shown in the examples, Victor attempts to distance himself from Native American culture. Like his proclivity towards violence against himself and those around him, his cultural detachment can be seen as a response to historical trauma since "internalized oppression and identification with the aggressor induced by historical forces […] [and] traumatic history influences psychosocial pathology" (Brave Heart and DeBruyn 70).

For characters who have not completely detached themselves from their culture, there is often a misinterpretation or misappropriation of cultural practices in the book due to the influence of colonialism and historical trauma. These characters' exposure to and adoption of Western cultural norms and values cause them to resort to imitating stereotypical or superficial versions of their culture. In this regard, it can be argued that

Junior's interaction with his culture is not well-formed because Junior is vulnerable to stereotypes. His comparison of his own identity to prevalent Native American stereotypes occurs early in the novel: "Junior always expected his visions to come true. Indians were supposed to have visions and receive messages from their dreams. All the Indians on television had visions that told them exactly what to do" (*Reservation Blues* 18). In response to Junior's fixation with clichéd images of Native Americans in popular culture, Blythe Tellefsen claims that television produces and displays a picture of Native Americanness that Junior, to be authentic, must then imitate (128). She employs Jean Baudrillard's terminology to analyze Junior's position, arguing that the nature of the simulation would blur the boundary between true and false, real and imaginary, and therefore the simulator's identity would be compromised by the nature of simulation (Baudrillard 5). As Tammy Wahpeconiah articulates, Junior "struggle[s] to find a viable tribal identity that encompasses past, present, and future but is not overly determined by one or the other. The false images of the Indian and 'Indianness' that Hollywood and American history portray are internalized by [him], so much so that he is unable to define what 'Indian' means" ("Postmodern Magic, Traditional Rage" np).

In Junior's experience, the Native American identity he aspires to imitate does not exist. Instead, he is confronted with racial disparities that stereotypical fiction does not acknowledge. Junior is the character who is most exposed to interracial interactions. It is mentioned in the novel that he attended college in Oregon for a brief time. His college experience is shaped by his "class and race" as the only Native American on the campus, which makes him feel isolated and alienated from his peers (Easton and Dixon 9). Furthermore, his interracial romance in college, which resulted in pregnancy, turns out to be traumatizing for him as his girlfriend Lynn says she could not have a half-Native American child and chooses abortion (*Reservation Blues* 240). Already tormented by painful memories of his own and his community's past and further traumatized by Lynn's decision, Junior drops out of college. He returns to the reservation, where there are limited chances for him to encounter interracial relationships. Despite his rejection of urban acculturation, the image of Native Americans conveyed by popular culture and the media infiltrates Junior's consciousness. Although he embraces Native American culture, his vulnerability

towards stereotypical expectations establishes a dichotomy between reality and fantasy in his mind by idealizing the archetypal Native American image and jeopardizes his association with authentic Native American identity.

Chess and Checkers Warm Water, likewise, have a conflicting relationship with Native American culture. The sisters' paradoxical relationship with their cultural heritage can be attributed to racial inequalities. With their past, emblematic of the historical trauma experienced by many Native American people, it is apparent that their ethnic identity has significantly influenced their psyches. Easton and Dixon argue that Chess and Checkers are aware of the implicit disadvantages that come with being Native American, and vice versa (16). Chess reveals in a candid conversation with Thomas that their brother Backgammon died as an infant, causing a domino effect of following family tragedies as Luke Warm Water, the father of the family who had never drunk alcohol before his son's death, started drinking; while the mother, Linda Warm Water, killed herself (*Reservation Blues* 62-69). The tragedies that have befallen on the Warm Water family result from the negligence towards Native Americans as revealed by Chess' following remarks about Indian Health Service doctors: "Ain't no IHS doctor going to come driving through the snowdrifts and ice to save some Indian kid who was half dead anyway" (*Reservation Blues* 62). Because of the claimed apathy of Indian Health Service doctors, the anticipated arrival of tragedy leads to even further family tragedies compounded by the pain and discomfort of poverty and violence (Easton and Dixon 16). The perception of racial inequity they absorbed at an early age prompted conflicting ideas about being Native American in their minds. While the sisters find whites inimical, they also emulate whiteness. As an illustration of these conflicting ideas, two of Chess Warm Water's remarks can be cited. Chess sees Victor and Junior sleeping with white women as a betrayal of their DNA, as he is the only full-blood Native American on the reservation (*Reservation Blues* 82). Still, towards the end of the novel she says, "All you can do is breed the Indian out of your family" (284). Although it may appear contradictory, Chess' desire to cleanse future generations of Native American blood might be interpreted as a desire to end the inequality and injustices resulting from settler colonialism. She explains:

> Those quarter-blood and eighth-blood grandchildren will find out they're Indian and torment the rest of us real Indians. They'll come out to the reservation, come to our powwows, in their nice clothes and nice cars, and remind the real Indians how much we

> don’t have. Those quarter-bloods and eighth-bloods will get all the Indian jobs, all the Indian chances, because they look white. Because they’re safer. (284)

As the text above illustrates, Chess associates whiteness with confidence and privilege, and believes that half Native children will inherit white privileges so that they may make use of all the opportunities that Native Americans living on reservations are denied. Through the parts analyzed with historical trauma theory so far, Sherman Alexie’s efforts at achieving reservation realism is obvious. Having shown his readers the physical and psychological conditions of his characters in the face of ongoing settler colonialism, Alexie deepens his discussion through another manifestation of realism in this work, that is magical realism.

In *Reservation Blues*, Sherman Alexie turns to magical realism not only to portray the struggle of Native Americans at the heart of the settler colonial relationship but also to showcase the “power of colonialism” through magical objects (Belcher 25- 36). Blues music is incorporated into magic realism by Robert Johnson’s appearance at a crossroads, which is believed to be a place between worlds where magical events, encounters, or decisions often take place, in the beginning of the book, which takes the narrative to a magical realm while giving Alexie a new manifestation of realism to address themes such as settler colonialism, historical trauma, and Native American identity. Both magical realism, a literary genre that originated primarily in Latin America, and the blues, which originated in the American South, derive from cultural and political tension. It can be argued that both genres articulate realities that are usually unspoken by the colonizer or the master from the perspective of the colonized and the enslaved. From this point of view, both genres are instrumental in articulating feelings, memories, and experiences that would otherwise remain unexpressed. With such qualities of these genres in mind, this chapter will discuss Sherman Alexie’s efforts to invert the colonial paradigm through the use of magical realism and examine how he adapts blues to the Native American context as an act of storytelling to demonstrate the ability of the oppressed to vocalize their experiences. To fully grasp how Sherman Alexie incorporates magical realism to offer a critique of colonialism, it is important to acknowledge the principles and concepts that underpin the genre.

Magical realism can be defined as a narrative mode that blends supernatural elements with everyday reality, creating a coherent and equal representation of both (Warnes 3).

In this style of writing, there is no hierarchy between the real and the supernatural, since both are equally valid and true within the context of the story (Warnes 3). Yet, magical realism cannot be reduced to a simple genre that combines supernatural and natural elements or definitive and ambiguous features as it allows for a range of possibilities including multiplicity, hybridity, and heterogeneity, creating a space for diverse perspectives and voices (Stephen 2).

Magical realism focuses on the "ex-centric," who speaks from a marginalized or peripheral position, from a place that is distinct from the center (D'haen 194). This focus paves the way for a re-evaluation of cultural, social, and political conventions, as well as a re-imagining of the world in new and diverse ways (D'haen 194). Magical realism can, thus, be viewed as a strategy for subverting and gaining control of dominant literary discourses. It serves as a means of entry for authors who, due to language, class, race, or gender differences, do not share the viewpoint of the privileged Western literature. Such a means allows authors to access the central body of literature while refraining the adoption of the views held by hegemonic forces and their discourses (D'haen 195). For many scholars like Frederic Jameson and Gabriel García Márquez, magical realism originated from the clash between Western colonial structures and indigenous traditional structures, in which the center dominates the margin (Jameson and Marquez, qtd. in Belcher 26). As a result of this power dynamic between the colonizer and the colonized, magical realism emerged as a way to challenge the dominant Western narrative and assert the agency and perspectives of marginalized groups (Belcher 26). With a similar line of thought, Homi Bhabha points to magical realism as the literary language of the emerging postcolonial world since it allows for a potent decolonization initiative to envision alternative histories and gives a voice to the subjugated while also bringing attention to non-canonical texts (Bhabha, "Introduction: Narrating the Nation" 7; Stephen 3).

Magical realism does not adhere to the rational and materialistic ideas of Western modernity. Instead, it employs unconventional techniques that challenge the norm and expand Western ontological comprehension (Zamora 498). The genre employs "authorial reticence" to challenge Western ontological understanding, which entails withholding clear opinions on the accuracy of events and the credibility of the characters' worldviews expressed in given texts. Magical realism can be interpreted as a

reaction to the process of othering that is inherent in Western colonialism, which is further reinforced by the universal claims of reason in the modern era. It aims to break away from the violence, whether it be epistemic or physical, that rational truth imposes by challenging the post-Enlightenment assumptions about the nature of reality and what is considered legitimate knowledge (Warnes 152).

Magical realism also opposes the tendency of Western ideology to create a binary that associate magic with the allegedly "primitive, ancient, indigenous, mythical, and tribal past (the negative half of the binary)" while associating realism with the "modern, advanced, and Western present" which constitutes the "positive half of the binary," based on the idea that Westerners are intellectually more sophisticated than the rest of the world (Belcher 27). Instead, magical realists draw on hybridity by juxtaposing opposites such as urban and rural, ancient and contemporary, and Western and Indigenous cultures (Moore). The theme in magical realist works often revolve around issues of borders, mixing, and transformation through which authors aim to reveal a deeper and more authentic reality than what can be portrayed through conventional realist techniques (Moore).

In *Reservation Blues*, Robert Johnson's appearance at a crossroads shifts the narrative to a magical realm. In African folklore, crossroads are believed to be a division between the material and spiritual worlds (Lipsitz 41). They are also believed to be "sites of danger and of opportunity […] where the paths that come together can cause collision and confusion, but [they are] also […] place[s] where decisions need to be made and where choices matter" (Lipsitz 40). While it is evident that crossroads has a potential to be assessed within the framework of magical realism, Alexie's decision to take Johnson to the Spokane Indian Reservation—where "not one person, Indian or otherwise, had ever arrived […] by accident" (*Reservation Blues* 3) — is not a trivial one. Robert Johnson has been the subject of "various myths and legends, most notably for having sold his soul to the devil in exchange for his musical skills" (Schroeder, qtd. in de Vos 119). George Lipsitz criticizes the fact that "the circulation and reception of the story about Robert Johnson at the crossroads hides the hard facts of life and labor in the segregated south in Johnson's day" (40). In line with Lipsitz's criticism, in *Reservation Blues*, Sherman Alexie reverses the West's mystification of others while establishing its own intellectual supremacy and reveals the colonial paradigm that subjugates, mystifies

and otherizes African and Native Americans by relating everything about magic in the story to whiteness, Western cultural hegemony, and colonialism (Belcher 30).

In this work, Alexie bridges African American and Native American mythologies. Deriving from the crossroads that holds a significant place in African mythology as the place of in-betweenness that separate physical and metaphysical realms, trickster figures from Native American mythology penetrate characters' lives. In the novel, these tricksters are objects and people connected with magic. In Native American mythology, tricksters are believed to reflect some of the basic conflicts of human existence: the dichotomy between freedom and restraint (Babcock-Abrahams 161). In line with the dichotomy they reflect, they are exhibited in an array of ways throughout the novel, utilizing "white magic" to sustain their colonial power over the characters diminishing their personal agency. Larry Ellis relates the trickster figure to colonialism by saying that it "creates through destruction and succeeds through failure; his mythic and cultural achievements are seldom intentional" (55). It should also be emphasized that tricksters succeed in the realms of in-betweenness where "ambiguity, paradox, and confusion" constitute natural order (L. Ellis 56; Babcock-Abrahams 160). Throughout the novel, the realm of in-betweenness corresponds with reservation circumstances while characters' eventual failure cannot be separated from their encounters with such figures.

The initial introduction of the trickster figure in the novel comes in the form of Johnson's enchanted guitar. To expand on Alexie's revelation of power dynamics by Westernizing magic and associating it with trickster figures, it is important to understand how Robert Johnson's guitar gained its magic. It should be remembered that the guitar is not part of traditional African or Native American cultures. Rather, it is a secular, Western instrument brought to the Americas through colonization (Belcher 30). As Belcher stresses, what relates the guitar with whiteness is not only its Western heritage, but also its oppressive implications throughout the novel (29). The guitar itself is neither inherently magical, nor does it acquire its powers "through any African talisman or Indian ritual performed by a shaman" (Belcher 30). Johnson's guitar obtains its abilities through a Faustian bargain with the gentleman, a "handsome white man" who asked him for his favorite item in exchange for a magical guitar, which means freedom for Johnson (*Reservation Blues* 264). With the introduction of the guitar into the lives of the characters, including Johnson, it begins to dominate characters in

different ways. It is possible to say that the guitar and its player have a connection akin to that of the slave and master, or colonizer and the colonized in terms of the Native American experience. Johnson's experience shows that the guitar enslaves its owner. As Belcher argues, "Johnson knows what this [bargain] means: he will gain mastery over a powerful object by giving up mastery over himself" (30). Johnson recalls that he "felt the whip that ripped apart the flesh of his grandfathers' backs, as he made the sinister contract with the gentlemen (*Reservation Blues* 264). He heard the creak of floorboard as the white masters moved inside his grandmothers' bedrooms" (30; *Reservation Blues* 264). After the bargain, Johnson's palms become "burned [and] scarred" as he plays the guitar (*Reservation Blues* 6). As indicated by Johnson's feelings during the negotiations and the wounds on his hands, by being part of this sinister contract, Johnson turned into an unabolished slave to the white power (Belcher 30).

In Coyote Springs' experience, Johnson's guitar colonizes the band. According to Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, the colonizing power seeks to establish economic and political dominance by exerting control over the cultural environment, which includes domains such as education, religion, language, literature, music, and other artistic and cultural expressions for regulating the self-image and worldviews of the colonized people, thereby maintaining their subservience to the colonizing power (8-9). Drawing from this perspective, it can be inferred that the introduction of the guitar to the reservation is a strategy to exert control over the Native American cultural environment similar to the efforts of the US government to assimilate Native Americans by placing them on reservations to disempower them politically and culturally. Having limited opportunities on the reservation, the band members entrust the guitar with the expectation of achieving success. To the contrary, the guitar ends up further subjugating them in several ways, serving as a tool for perpetuating their dependence on the colonizing power. Belcher counts the unrealistic promises the guitar makes, such as promising the band to appear on the cover of *Rolling Stone* to lure Victor and Junior into Thomas's house as part of its efforts to exert control over Coyote Springs (30; *Reservation Blues* 28). Under the allure of these false promises lies the internalized oppression of being subjugated, since, as Belcher argues the ultimate desire for the marginalized is recognition (31). The accepted marginalization of Native Americans was expressed by Thomas. He says: "I've spent my whole life being ignored. I'm used to it" (*Reservation*

Blues 212). As Thomas's remark indicates, the guitar has a great promise for disregarded Native Americans: "the marginalized can leave the shadowy, unseen world and enter the 'real' Western world. They become visible, believable selves, and this feels like triumph to the subjected individual" (Belcher 31). With such promises, the guitar makes the guitarist dependent on itself, but the instrument, in turn, wounds the players (Belcher 30). Contrary to its false promises, Belcher contends that the guitar abandons its player, condemning him to either suffering or death as demonstrated by the severe depression experienced by Victor and Junior which eventually leads Junior to commit suicide (30).

The second group of trickster figures in *Reservation Blues* comprises the ghosts of George Wright and Phil Sheridan. The use of ghosts in magical realist works, as noted by Lois Parkinson Zamora, can reveal important insights into the "metaphysics, politics, and poetics" of the author (497). She argues that ghosts can "carry the burden of tradition and collective memory, […] as reminders of communal crimes, crises, and cruelties" and may represent internalized terrors (Zamora 497). Drawing on Zamora's argument that literary ghosts can represent collective memory, dangers, and fears, one can make inferences about why Alexie chooses to bring Wright and Sheridan into the lives of the group members in *Reservation Blues*. Notably, George Wright and Phil Sheridan are the names of two officers who fought against Native Americans on behalf of the United States in the 19th century (Crank 222). By invoking these ghosts, Alexie is able to confront the legacy of violence and oppression that Native Americans experienced at the hands of the United States government and its military forces: "Wright looked at Coyote Springs. He saw their Indian faces. He saw the faces of millions of Indians, beaten, scarred by smallpox and frostbite, split open by bayonets and bullets. He looked at his own white hands and saw the blood stains there" (*Reservation Blues* 244). As the quotation illustrates, the ghosts serve as powerful symbols of historical trauma and collective memory.

Zamora's analysis also highlights how magical realist apparitions, such as ghosts, challenge the linear histories "as they float free in time" (498). Rather than being tied to a specific moment in time, ghosts exist outside of temporal constraints, existing not just in the present moment but also in the past and the future (Zamora 498). An illustrative instance of this can be seen in the dream encounter of Checkers with Sheridan's ghost,

which offers a poignant account of the lineage of settler colonialism. The scene encapsulates two elements of American history: the way colonization has justified the subjugation of the other and the use of physical force by men to dominate women (Easton and Dixon 17).

> *That's what you Indians always say. The white men did this to us, the white men did that to us. When are you ever going to take responsibility for yourselves?* […] *You had a choice, Sheridan said. We gave you every chance. All you had to do was move to the reservation. We would've protected you. The U.S. Army was the best friend the Indians ever had […] This is just like you Indians* […] *You could never stay where we put you. You never listened to orders. Always fighting. You never quit fighting. Do you understand how tired I am of fighting you? When will you ever give up?* (*Reservation Blues* 236-237)

Checkers' interaction with Sheridan's ghost not only validates Zamora's assertion that ghosts disrupt the linear flow of time and create a cyclical pattern in history, but it also serves as evidence that settler colonialism continues to operate and influence the thoughts of Indigenous people. The dream sequence also suggests that Sheridan attempted to sexually assault Checkers as he "reached across the years and took Checkers' face in his hands" contributing to this idea (Easton and Dixon 17; *Reservation Blues* 238).

The magical components such as Johnson's enchanted guitar and Wright and Sheridan's ghosts in the novel serve to depict the colonial authority that cause historical trauma as magical elements have damaging effects on the characters' mental well-being (Belcher 30). This idea is supported by the inexplicable appearance of flasks belonging to generals Sheridan and Wright in Junior's coffin at the end of the novel. Despite Victor's refusal to drink and his throwing the whiskey-filled flasks into Turtle Lake, they continue to appear on Junior's coffin as he continues to hand them over to Victor like an "alcoholic magician" (*Reservation Blues* 291). Victor eventually gives in to his addiction and opens a beer can, which "sounded exactly like a smaller, slower version of the explosion that Junior's rifle made on the water tower" (293). Belcher believes that the link between addictive Western goods and detrimental impact of colonialism underscores the everlasting impact of settler colonial authority (35).

Even though Robert Johnson's appearance at the crossroads with his enchanted guitar propels the story into a magical realm and reveals and even reinforces the characters' colonization and traumas, Johnson's gifting his guitar to Thomas is not an entirely

sinister incident. It is Johnson and his guitar that stimulate the protagonists' interest in the blues. According to K.V. Sateesh, Coyote Springs, the blues band, and blues music can function as a metaphorical "vehicle for the liberation of Native Americans from their troubled identity and cultural conundrum" amidst their systematic suffering and vulnerability to interracial power equations (91). Blues music, with the stories it reminds and spreads, serves to make the characters reconsider what they take for granted. It contributes to the platform Alexie opens up through his employment of magical realism to help characters face their pasts. In order to understand how Alexie utilizes blues as an outlet for the historical trauma of the characters stemming from settler colonialism, it is necessary to first recognize the foundations of blues and Alexie's appropriation of a predominantly Black genre into Native American culture.

The dictionary meaning of blues is "depressed spirits, despondency, melancholy" ("Blues Definition & Meaning"). Over time, the term has evolved to designate a type of music originated by African Americans, with lyrics that encapsulate the term's original sense of melancholy. Referring to the genre's tragic origins, Ralph Ellison argues that blues may be considered an "autobiographical chronicle of personal catastrophe" (78). Yet, he also believes that blues functions as a means by which Black people survive and maintain their fortitude throughout a substantial period in which they were denied their most fundamental rights (257). At its epitome, blues can be considered a protest against the plight that was placed on African Americans (qtd. in Murray 62). It may be argued that Alexie's appropriation of blues into Native American culture may be rooted in its capacity to be a voice for the silenced in opposition to settler colonialism's ubiquitous subjugation. Thus, it is possible to say that the potential of both magical realism and the blues to reflect the experiences of the oppressed provides Alexie with two different but parallel ways to narrate the experience of colonization of Native Americans in *Reservation Blues*.

Martin Moling highlights that, besides providing a certain degree of agency to oppressed peoples, blues may also be regarded as a form of storytelling and "rememory," which is the expression of traumatic memories to reclaim one's identity (Moling 2-5; Koolish 169). Given the importance of storytelling and collective memory for Native Americans, treating the blues as a form of storytelling and "rememory" makes Sherman Alexie's adaptation of a predominantly Black musical genre to Native

Americans plausible. According to the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, there may be a historical connection between blues musicians and West African storytellers known as "griots" or "jeli," whose "role has traditionally been to preserve their people's genealogies, historical narratives, and oral traditions" (Stanley and Tyrell, qtd. in Moling 3; "griot"). When blues musicians are associated with griots and given the role of storytellers, a very coherent connection is formed between blues musicians and Native American storytellers. Storytelling in Native American cultures, as in West African societies, serves for the transmission of histories, traditions, and values, as well as, and most notably, collective memory from generation to generation. As noted by anthropologist Robin Horton, storytelling, with the memory load it bears, serves as a "storage device" in oral cultures and memories handed down from generation to generation to teach "people who they are and who they have always been" (Horton qtd in Ballenger 792). Because "the merging of tribal and personal memory […] means that the reach of the storyteller's memory extends beyond his own lifetime, [and] own experience […] the memory of a past never directly experienced can, in a sense, become lived experience" (Ballenger 793). Through the knowledge attained by storytelling, listeners earn the potential for reconnecting and identifying with past tribal realities (Hodge, et al. 6). This aggregates a part of "racial memory," which is a form of knowing that transcends "both time and individual consciousness" (Ballenger 793). The blending of the past and the present, as well as the act of remembering through storytelling, endows people with the ability to anticipate and maybe alter the future by gaining insight from previous experiences (Ballenger 790).

Memory's interconnected and transitive nature (Blaeser 76), and the potential of storytelling are critical for Native American "survivance" which the Anishinaabe scholar Gerald Vizenor views as the continuation of stories (1). Vizenor argues that "survivance, in the sense of native survivance, is more than survival, more than endurance or mere response; the stories of survivance are an active presence […] that must be heard" (Vizenor, qtd. in Breinig 39). He also claims that "survivance stories are renunciations of dominance, detractions, obtrusions, the unbearable sentiments of tragedy, and the legacy of victimry" (Vizenor 1). Considering Vizenor's thoughts on the vital importance of storytelling to Native American survival and resistance to settler colonialism's tyranny, oppression, and subordination of Native Americans, Alexie's

incorporation of magical realism and blues together into the Native American context as a form of storytelling makes more sense. Both magical realism and blues as a mode of storytelling intertwine the past, present, and future, downplaying the boundaries of time and highlighting the enduring nature of experience and memory. From this viewpoint, both storytelling forms bend time to establish a reflective stream of memories spanning from past to future which is crucial for preserving and expressing traumatic memories.

Given the potential of blues to preserve collective memories, and even oppose tyranny, it is vital to address Moling's claim that the blues is a form of "rememory." The term "rememory" was used by Toni Morrison in her novel, *Beloved*. In Morrison's terms, "rememory" is a process that necessitates access to traumatic memories of the past and the articulation of those in the language to recover one's identity and achieve mental integrity (Moling 5; Koolish 169). Moling draws parallels between the post-slavery African American characters of *Beloved*, who are unable to recover from the trauma of enslavement, and the Native American characters of *Reservation Blues*, who are deeply traumatized by settler colonialism's persistent subjugation and applies Morrison's concept of "rememory" as a tool for recovering from trauma (5). Based on this parallelism, blues, with its lexicality and affinity to storytelling, might thus be viewed as an instrument. As Moling points out, in vision of Alexie, the blues band Coyote Springs can serve as a communal storyteller and reminder as Robert Johnson's guitar confirms it by declaring, "blues always make us remember" (6; *Reservation Blues* 22). Through the blues of Coyote Springs, a process of tribal "rememory" may be initiated by excavating memories disregarded by Spokane Reservation residents.

Although it is of great importance for subjugated peoples to achieve mental integrity, "rememory" is a painful process. Yet, as Sateesh states, Alexie aims to bring the past and the present together and wants to utilize the past to create opportunities in the present (92). Reimagining traditional Native American storytelling by infusing it with the sounds and emotions of blues music in order to create new opportunities for Native Americans, Alexie assigns the protagonist Thomas Builds-the-Fire who "observes the despair of the reservation and wants to save his people from the ravages of colonization" to the narration and publicization of Native stories through the music of Coyote Springs (Easton and Dixon 14). Scott Andrews claims that Thomas perceives the combination of blues music and reservation stories as a solution to the problems

faced by his troubled community and believes that this approach could provide a new perspective to see their problems, enabling the community to overcome them (137). Thomas, as a Spokane Indian Reservation resident and a keen observer, is well aware of the traumas and socioeconomic challenges that Native Americans face. As articulated in the book, he wants a story that will heal the wounds of his people (*Reservation Blues* 6). Therefore, as the band's founder, Thomas aspires to use the band to better the Native American experience by amplifying the challenges faced by his community (*Reservation Blues* 13). He hopes that Coyote Springs' blues may provide a "new road" for his community to overcome the misery of the reservation (Andrews 141).

When songs of Coyote Springs are scrutinized, it is seen that the lyrics are emblematic of the Native American experience with settler colonialism and historical trauma in the US, and therefore have the potential to initiate a tribal process of "rememory." The song "Reservation Blues," for instance, represents the unfavorable reservation conditions and lack of opportunity described throughout the novel through its lyrics: "*My heart is empty and I've been so hungry/ All I need for my hunger to ease/Is anything that you can give me please*" ve "*And if you ain't got choices/ What else do you choose? / And if you ain't got choices/ Ain't got much to lose.*" (*Reservation Blues* 2). Similarly, the song "Wake" depicts the cycle of despair on reservation through the lyrics:

> *"Sweetheart, I know these car wrecks are nearly genetic/ Sweetheart, I know these hands have been shaking for generations/ And they shake and shake and shake and shake/ Sweetheart, I know these suicides are always genetic/ Sweetheart, I know we have to travel to the reservation/For the wake and wake and wake and wake/And sweetheart, all these wakes for the dead/Are putting the living to sleep." (Reservation Blues* 275*)*

Lyrics of the song "Small World" portray the reservation as isolated and neglected for by the outside world:

> *"INDIAN BOY TAKES A drink of everything that killed his brother/ Indian boy drives his car through the rail, over the shoulder/ Off the road, on the rez, where survivors are forced to gather/ All his bones, all his blood, while the dead watch the world shatter/ But it's a small world/ You don't have to pay attention/ It's the reservation/ The news don't give it a mention/ […] Indian girl disappeared while hitchhiking on the old highway/ Indian girl left the road and some white wolf ate her heart away/ Indian girl found naked by the river, shot twice in the head/ One more gone, one more gone, and our world fills with all of our dead." (*245*)*

In the song "My God Has Dark Skin," the assimilationist persecution of Native Americans is depicted as follows:

> "*MY BRAIDS WERE CUT off in the name of Jesus/ To make me look so white/ My tongue was cut out in the name of Jesus/So I would not speak what's right/ My heart was cut out in the name of Jesus/ So I would not try to feel/ My eyes were cut out in the name of Jesus/ So I could not see what's real.*" (132)

Although Thomas has a desire to utilize Coyote Springs as a "new road," since its inception, the group has experienced challenges in amplifying Native American experience with colonialism and trauma as the characters have a generic prejudice towards storytelling which is later manifested through their skepticism towards Coyote Springs' songs. Because of his repeated stories, Thomas Builds-the-Fire, "the misfit storyteller of the Spokane Tribe," is deemed disturbing by Victor, Junior, other tribe members and even the white people on the reservation (*Reservation Blues* 15). Victor and Junior even exert physical violence on Thomas to curb his irresistible urge to tell stories (15). Because of the antipathy toward his stories, Thomas had always told them to a passive audience, such as bird eggs, and lamented that no one actively listened (212). He knows why his stories receive such negative responses. It is because of the "weight of those stories" which "bowed his legs and bent his spine a bit" (6). The reason for this overwhelming weight of the songs is the suppression of collective memories for so long. The story Thomas tells his girlfriend Chess later in the novel illustrates the burden carried in his stories:

> We were both at Wounded Knee when the Ghost Dancers were slaughtered. We were slaughtered at Wounded Knee. […] There was a part of every Indian bleeding in the snow. […] Can you feel the pain still, late at night, when you're trying to sleep, when you're praying to a God whose name was used to justify the slaughter? (*Reservation Blues* 167)

Despite the indifference of Spokane Reservation residents, Thomas's persistent storytelling may be construed as a rejection of denying and forgetting history (Sateesh 94). Regarding the challenges that Coyote Springs confront within the reservation, Joel J. Janicki argues that "[t]he pent-up anger and anxiety induced by past collective experience and present life on the reservation are reflected in the attitudes of a defeated people: marked by a general apathy and lack of faith, the local denizens falling into the ruts of old routines, even by the way they listen to music without really listening" (31). In line with Janicki's argument, Spokane Tribal Council Chairman David WalksAlong criticizes the band for "disturbing the peace" and being "too loud" (*Reservation Blues* 37). No matter how persistently Thomas wants to address the power of blues in terms of articulating the trauma, the people around him, as Easton and Dixon highlight, are in

denial and they refuse to consider new possibilities as "they 'buried all of their pain and anger deep inside' until it festered" (*Reservation Blues* 175; Easton and Dixon 15). As Robert Johnson articulates, "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" (*Reservation Blues* 174).

Through the experiences of its characters, *Reservation Blues* reveals historical trauma inflicted by settler colonialism, racism, and cultural erasure and the complex ways intergenerational–trauma is manifested in the lives of Native Americans. To examine and challenge the effects of settler colonialism and the historical trauma Alexie turns to magical realism. Maggie Ann Bowers argues that the cultural politics that surround the development of magical realism mirror the political challenges faced by Indigenous communities (49). Magical realism can be utilized as a means of "translating" Western ideologies and the prevailing outlook into a Native American framework, with the intention of presenting the Native American perspective to a wider audience who may be uninformed or biased towards it, and to express the destructive repercussions of settler colonialism (Mudrovcic 9). By incorporating magical realism, Alexie creates a socio-political context that emphasizes the ongoing impact of settler colonialism and conveys the intricacies of Native American experiences. In this way, he engages in a powerful socio-political commentary on the ongoing struggles of Native American communities in the face of colonialism and cultural erasure. In addition to having political undertones, magical realism is significant in the expression of traumatic memories. Victims and survivors may find their experiences too horrible to describe in a realistic narrative when trauma or traumatic events are depicted in literature (Abdullah 1). Therefore, Jo Langdon claims that magical realism has a remarkable and unique potential to convey traumatic experiences that are exceedingly difficult to correctly or truly express using objective or realistic narrative styles (22). Using magical realism, writers transform horrible atrocities into stories that are as hard to forget as they are to remember (Abdullah 1). Viewed from this perspective, Sherman Alexie's *Reservation Blues* reflects, contests and challenges the dominant settler colonial paradigm that pervades the Native American experience, by revealing its underlying harm and exposing its role in sustaining historical trauma among Native Americans. Alexie's

adaptation of blues to Native American culture is used as a means of storytelling in the novel which offers a medium for initiating the process of “rememory” by “preserving memories” and “keeping the ghosts alive” in Alexie’s own words (“Sherman Alexie on Living Outside Borders” 00:34:04-00:34:19).

CHAPTER 3

THE ABSOLUTELY TRUE DIARY OF A PART-TIME INDIAN AS AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

Sherman Alexie's first young adult novel *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* (2007) centers around the fourteen-year-old cartoonist Arnold Spirit Jr., who is often referred to as "Junior" by his family and fellow tribe members. A collaboration between Sherman Alexie's words and Ellen Forney's drawings, the story unfolds through Junior's diary entries, which are enhanced by his cartoons. Like Alexie's other works analyzed so far, the book includes autobiographical elements. Yet, in comparison to them, a larger portion of the work, roughly seventy-eight percent, is based on Alexie's personal encounters (Alexie, "2008 BGHB Fiction Award Speech"). With such authentic essence narrated using reservation realism to describe the unfavorable circumstances on the Spokane Indian Reservation, the book depicts Junior's life as he "struggles with adapting to both white and Native American societies" (Donovan 41). It touches upon a vast array of issues including the ongoing process of settler colonization on reservations, socio-economic problems, the intricate process of identity formation in the face of historical trauma and the meaning of being "Indian" in the contemporary world, which is depicted to be a clash between multiculturalism and tribalism (41). This chapter will read *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* as an autoethnography that intersects with Alexie's personal, cultural and political memory taking autoethnography's therapeutic and political potentials into consideration. It will also explore how the concepts of double consciousness and multiculturalism are reflected through the self-referential lens Alexie uses to depict the contemporary Native American experience with settler colonialism and historical trauma.

The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian, like Alexie's earlier works, refrains from romanticizing Native Americans as "mystic naturists" (Korsmo 4). It presents a reservation life marked by poverty, alcoholism, and dreariness (4). The book begins with Junior introducing himself, his family, and his surroundings. He is born with a medical condition called hydrocephalus, which he simply describes as being "born with water on the brain" (1). He undergoes a critical surgery at six months which brings a

high risk of serious brain damage, if not death. However, he survives with lingering effects such as seizures, speech impediments, visual impairments, and a larger head. With his "enormous head," ugly glasses, and skinny figure akin to a "capital L" because of his big hands and feet contrasting his "pencil body," Junior is bullied on the reservation and called the "Globe" (2-3). Alienated by his peers because of his physical attributes, Junior also strongly feels the chronic burden of being "a poor-ass reservation kid living with his poor-ass family on the poor-ass Spokane Indian Reservation" (7). They are so poor that when the family dog Oscar gets sick, Junior's father shoots him to end his agony since they do not have the means to take him to the vet (9-11). Although he is outraged by his father's decision to kill Oscar, he inwardly knows that it is an act of pure desperation. In such an environment, Junior stands out as a promising young cartoonist. His cartoons provide him with a hope to "grow up to be somebody important […] [and] escape the reservation" to help himself, his family and community (6). Still, he is aware that "[his] cartoons will never take the place of food or money" (7). Similar to Victor's father in *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, who repeatedly opens and closes his wallet in the hopes of finding money, and Thomas in *Reservation Blues*, who repeatedly opens and closes the refrigerator expecting to find food, Junior naively wishes "[he] could draw a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, or a fist full of twenty dollar bills, and perform some magic trick and make it real" (7) just to understand that there is not a miraculous solution to poverty, as it is passed down through generations on the reservation like a chronic illness. Despite his young age, Junior is a keen observer who can notice the virtually tangible hopelessness surrounding the reservation. He understands that the adults around him are deprived of chances to achieve a better life because of racial discrimination. He believes that if given the opportunity, his "drunk" father could have been a good jazz saxophonist, while his "ex-drunk" mother could have gone to college and become a teacher (11-13). Junior knows that "reservation Indians don't get to realize [their] dreams. [They] don't get those chances. Or choices. [They are] just poor. That's all [they] are" (13). Junior also understands that poverty not only hinders his community from maintaining a decent standard of living, but it also exacerbates the social ills that afflict his people by creating a sense of internalized oppression and self-worthlessness. He thinks:

> It sucks to be poor, and it sucks to feel that you somehow deserve to be poor. You start believing that you're poor because you're stupid and ugly. And then you start believing that you're stupid and ugly because you're Indian. And because you're Indian you start believing you're destined to be poor. It's an ugly circle and there's nothing you can do about it. (*The Absolutely True Diary* 13)

Junior's observations show that Native Americans face "low self-esteem, emotional pain, and high stress" (Room 189), due to the absence of adequate financial resources. Similarly, Michelle M. Sotero argues that Native Americans can experience historical trauma through recollective stimulators, as well as proximate, first-hand experiences such as poverty and social inequity (100). Such encounters validate ancestral historical trauma knowledge and reinforce the experience and response to historical trauma which, in turn, result in alcoholism and other social vices, forming a vicious cycle that perpetuates their overwhelming sense of despair (Sotero 100). This despair is not only a constant, but in some cases, it becomes almost tangible. Junior's encounter with his mother's geometry book is a prime example of when despair becomes palpable. As he waits for his first-year geometry book to be passed down in class, he becomes frozen with shock upon seeing his mother's old geometry book being handed to him (*The Absolutely True Diary* 31). Seeing his mother's name on the book, Junior feels as if he is hit by a nuclear bomb causing his "hopes and dreams [to] float up in a mushroom cloud" (31). The fact that Junior is supposed to use his mother's book reveals that it has been in use at the reservation high school for over thirty years. This instance indicates that despair and a lack of opportunity are passed down from generation to generation in a "cycle of eternal return, leading to failure" (Ralijevic and Sivric 1739). On the spur of the moment, Junior throws the book, accidentally hitting his geometry teacher Mr. P. with it, which results in his suspension.

An unexpected confrontation with Mr. P. during his suspension serves as an epiphany for Junior. Even though he senses the gravity of despair on the reservation and has the inchoate initiative to break this cycle, he does not yet know when or how he can break it until Mr. P's surprising visit to his home, which would turn into a confrontation between the colonizer and the colonized. Mr. P nearly confesses the sins committed by the United States government against Native Americans. He acknowledges the racism that pervades reservations, aiming to internally assimilate, if not physically eliminate, Native Americans (35). As Raljevic and Sivric underline, even though Mr. P's visit

catalyzes Junior's decision to leave the reservation, he also bears the weight of white guilt for the ongoing injustices caused by settler colonialism (1739). While he aims at saving Junior from a future marked by the lingering effects of colonialism, he also tries to save himself from a "life of postcolonial darkness" (1739). It can be argued that even though Junior believes that his parents' chance for a better life have been taken away by the whites who created reservations, he thinks his generation may have a different life. Mr. P "painfully confesses the only thing Indians are being taught from their childhood is how to give up" (Ralijevic and Sivric 1740). Using Junior's sister Mary as an example, Mr. P proves that "the past […] repeats itself in historic recurrence" on the reservation (1740). After observing how his parents and sister have either given up on improving existing conditions or faced deliberate discouragement from an early age, Junior comes to the realization that Native Americans living on the reservation "were supposed to be happy with [their] limitations" (*The Absolutely True Diary* 112). Mr. P also encouragingly reminds Junior that he has survived against all odds and kept his hope since the day he was born with hydrocephalus. He highlights the hostility of circumstances surrounding the reservation and insists that Junior must leave it to escape the imminent dangers on it, such as alcoholism and drug addiction (42-43).

Junior decides to leave the reservation and transfer to a high school in Reardan which is a small farm town with an overwhelmingly white population. Junior's decision to transfer to Reardan is a choice that requires him to choose between a future that may offer new opportunities and a future that that draws on the recurrent past. He decides to embrace new possibilities and overcome the limitations imposed by the dominant settler colonial norms. Alexie claims that Junior's experiences are based on his own (Alexie, "2008 BGHB Fiction Award Speech") which allows the work to be read as a work of life writing—particularly as an autoethnography.

Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson use the terms narrating "I," and narrated "I" and ideological "I," to depict identity formation in life narratives including autoethnographies. The narrating "I" refers to the author/subject and the narrated "I" is the one whose life is being narrated (58). The ideological "I" is "everywhere and nowhere in autobiographical acts" defining the social, cultural, ethnic, religious, and political elements shaping the self (62). It is through the lens of the ideological "I," the

narrated “I” sees itself. Smith and Watson think, reading works of life writing through these “I”s could lead one “to problems of remembering and forgetting” (64). They help the reader recognize how “the narrator organizes the times of past, present, and future in the telling of the story as a way of teasing out narrated versions of the ‘I’ presented and the ideological stakes of those representations in the present of narration” (Smith and Watson 64). With them, a life narrative can be read “for what it does” in terms of identity formation, as life narratives “encode or reinforce particular values in ways that may shape culture and history” (Couser, 146). Autoethnography, as a sub-genre of life writing, is closely associated with the roles of ideological “I” and an ideological “we,” both of which matter so much in understanding *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian.*

Autoethnography is a form of life writing that “seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno)” (C. Ellis 26). Autoethnographic writing “challenges canonical ways of […] representing others and treats [writing] as a political, socially-just and socially-conscious act” (C. Ellis, et al. 273). From this perspective, it is important to recognize how the genre serves Alexie with the avenues it opens up for reconciling the devastating repercussions of genocide and colonialism through his depiction of Junior’s “migration” which is based on his personal experiences (J. Johnson 224).

According to Mary Louise Pratt, in the autoethnographic mode of life writing, “colonized subjects undertake to represent themselves in ways that engage with the colonizer’s own terms” (7). It focuses on understanding how individuals are shaped and defined by their relationships with one another in the “contact zone” of cultural encounters (7). It examines how the identities of both the colonizer and the colonized intertwine and interact in the face of significant power imbalances throughout history (Pratt 7; Smith and Watson 186). According to Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, autoethnography “has been an important means of asserting cultural agency for both colonial and postcolonial subjects in many parts of the world” (45). Aware of this potential for agency, Sherman Alexie says “I’m a colonized man ….] The United States is a colony, and I’m always going to write like one who is colonized” emphasizing that his works cannot be treated in isolation from his subjugated identity (Alexie, qtd. in Giles). John Newton argues that Alexie’s autoethnographic writing

confronts the colonizer's most racist and harmful stereotypes to confront and addresses the construction of indigenous identity reflecting their anticolonial self-expression (416). Given autoethnography's focus on the "contact zone" and the creation of a new, transcultural identity, it can be argued that Reardan serves as a "contact zone" for cross-cultural interactions for Junior that shape and define his identity.

To understand how his interactions in the "contact zone" impact Junior's identity, who is the narrating "I" of the narrative," one must first examine his relationships with his tribe outside the "contact zone" as well as his attitude before initiating intercultural relationships. Although Junior is truly seeking to take advantage of the chances leaving the reservation can provide, leaving the reservation "[is] a difficult decision to make, and is an uncertain path to follow" (Chang, et al. 5). As Junior puts it: "Reardan was the opposite of the rez. It was the opposite of [his] family. It was the opposite of [him]. [He] didn't deserve to be there. [He] knew it; all of those kids knew it. Indians don't deserve shit" (56). Using life writing terminology, Junior's remarks on Reardan's white students is the product of an ideological "I" that has internalized white superiority, causing Junior suffer from profound self-devaluation. Borrowing Lisa Poupart's thoughts on historical trauma and internalized oppression, it can be argued that Junior's self-perception showcases his internalization of inferiority and otherness by seeing himself in and through structures that racially and culturally define him as subhuman, incomplete and inferior (87). Having taken the discursive practices of the colonizer for granted, which create, reflect and reproduce oppression (Poupart 87), Junior has become self-subjugated, making it difficult to leave the reservation and face the white world, or to enter the "contact zone" in Pratt's terminology.

In addition to Junior's self-deprecating beliefs about white people, one of the factors that makes it difficult for him to leave the reservation is the reaction he receives from his tribespeople. Mark Vogel argues that as Junior progresses into the "contact zone", he "must go in a battle with alter egos (old friends) who stay on the reservation" (161). Junior's hardest battle during this process may have been with his best friend Rowdy. In the beginning of the book, Junior describes him as "a big, goofy dreamer [...] just like [him]" who prefers the world of comic books to his, in which he feels happier (23). When Junior tells Rowdy of his plan to leave the reservation and offers him to join him

to Reardan, Rowdy not only rejects Junior's offer but also accuses him for feeling superior to his own people and of being a "white lover" (53). Rowdy actually serves as a mouthpiece of the community or as the ideological "we" of the reservation. At this point, it is vital to analyze the reservation as an aspect of identity rather than a mere place.

As the book frequently demonstrates, reservations, which are dominantly comprised of Native Americans, are thought to be crucial for the preservation of Native American identity. Alexie criticizes this and believes that "[some] Native Americans have turned reservations into sacred places," which he thinks is problematic, if one takes into consideration the fundamental objective of forming reservations ("Sherman Alexie on Living Outside Borders" 00:26:06-00:26:11). Junior thinks reservations were designed as "prisons" and says: "Indians were supposed to move onto reservations and die. We were supposed to disappear. But somehow or another, Indians have forgotten that reservations were meant to be death camps" (216-217). Junior's decision to leave causes him to be labeled as a "traitor" by some reservation residents who seem to have forgotten the original purpose of the reservation system. On multiple occasions, he mentions others' reaction to his decision. People on the reservation refer to him as an "apple" because they accuse him of being white on the inside and red on the outside (132). He adds that "some Indians think you have to act white to make your life better. Some Indians think you become white if you try to make your life better, if you become successful" (131). He suggests that it is an embedded idea that interaction with white culture will whiten Native American identity, and, thus, erode it.

Taking Junior's ostracization by his tribespeople for not meeting the expectations of the ideological "we," it is plausible to interpret the centralization of the reservation for preserving Native American identity as a sign of historical and collective trauma. As Duran and Duran argue, the establishment of the reservation system was one of the colonial practices that caused Native Americans to suffer from historical trauma (33). Traumatizing colonial practices persisted during the relocation period, which intended to assimilate Native Americans into the greater population by dissolving the reservation system and relocating Native Americans to larger urban centers (Brave Heart and DeBruyn 65). This exacerbated Native Americans' historical trauma because it caused

additional distresses on the relocated Native Americans economically, socially, and spiritually (65). Upon seeing what urban life had to offer, many relocated Native Americans returned to their reservations (Deloria, *Custer Died For Your Sins* 157). Native Americans who returned to their reservations possibly regarded this decision as a means to resist assimilation. They might have also viewed their return as a way to prevent the dissolution of the federal recognition and the potential loss of resources and lands provided through the reservation system. From this point of view, it may be argued that reservations harbor a unique set of socio-cultural factors and networks that lead those who live there to consider it the center of Native American identity. While the significance of reservations for Native Americans cannot be underestimated, it must be recognized that they are "a source of both risk of and resilience to psychological distress for tribal members" (Huyser, et al. 2-11). Such distress together with the socio-economic dysfunctionality on reservations render reservations hubs of trauma. As Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart contends, "ensuing fixation to trauma" is also an outcome of trauma ("Wakiksuyapi" 247). Thus, sanctification of a place where the colonial dictum continuously recreates itself and impacts its residents may be seen as a response to historical trauma.

Kai Erikson, Duran and Duran and Brave Heart argue that trauma operates through transmission of the memory of traumatized communities and individuals within that community (Erikson 184; Duran and Duran 43; Brave Heart "The Historical Trauma Response" 7). They believe places such as reservations, which have the capacity to operate as trauma stimuli, reproduce the trauma and its subsequent symptoms, while at the same time creating an unhealthy attachment between the community and the place where it is clustered. Yet, Erikson's argument is based on the belief that collective trauma disrupts the concepts of self and community by "blow[ing] to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bond attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of communality" (187). He adds that a group subjected to collective trauma comes to the realization that:

> [T]he community no longer exists as an effective source of support and that an important part of the self has disappeared. "I" continue to exist, though damaged and may even permanently changed. "You" continue to exist, thought distant and hard to relate to. But "we" no longer exist as a connected pair or as linked cells in a larger communal body. […] And if the whole community more or less disappears, [...] people

> find that they cannot take advantage of the energies they once invested in the communal store. They find that they are almost empty of feeling, empty of affection, empty of confidence and assurance. It is as if the individual cells had supplied raw energy to the whole body but did not have the means to convert that energy back into a usable personal form once the body was no longer there to process it. (Erikson 187-188)

Erikson details his argument by saying that in places that have become centers of trauma, "the community in general can almost be described as the locus for activities that are normally thought to be the property of individual persons" (188). The community offers sustenance for pain, a context for intimacy, and a reservoir for binding traditions (188). When the community is deeply affected by trauma, one can speak of a damaged social organism in the same way one speaks of a damaged body (188). Even those who did not experience the actual traumatic event are wounded by the loss of a sustaining community (188). Borrowing Erikson's perspective, it can be argued that the narrative reveals the centuries of settler colonial practices having distorted Native Americans' sense of community and identity as they have been relocated, assimilated, and even exterminated. Elaborating on Erikson's argument, Tammy Wahpeconiah argues that "Junior is the damaged 'I,' and the others living on Spokane reservation are the 'You' to whom he can no longer relate" ("Navigating the River of the World" 41). She further claims that Junior is able to make the decision to leave, because the notion of "we" has dissolved (42). Nancy Van Styvendale argues that this loss of connection between Native American individuals? and the community is not caused by a singular "discrete event" in the past, but it is "cumulative, collective, intergenerational, and intersubjective" and the assumption that Native Americans' traumas are a relic of the past erases colonial culpability, which is a desirable conclusion for the colonizer (203-207). Settler colonial authority render Native American experience "unreadable" in Derridean terms. As Jacques Derrida argues, the unreadability emerges from:

> . . . the violence of foreclosure, exclusion, all of history being a conflictual field of forces in which it is a matter of making unreadable, excluding, of positing by excluding, of imposing a dominant force by excluding, that is to say, not only by marginalizing, by setting aside the victims, but also by doing so in such a way that no trace remains of the victims so that no one can testify to the fact they are victims. (389)

Invoking Van Styvendale and Derrida's explanations, it can be argued that the colonial mindset perceives Native American trauma as a legacy of the past and functions in such a way that it is arduous for victims to acknowledge their status as victims. These victims

are marginalized in society so that the colonizers are not held accountable. Native Americans on reservations are marginalized both socially and spatially, which, in turn, makes it impossible for them to develop agency to express their victimization. Jeffrey C. Alexander argues that for a community that did not directly experience the original traumatic event to be traumatized, a symbolic extension and psychological identification with the original event(s) is necessary ("On the Social Construction" 199). From this perspective, one can safely argue that reservations as symbolic extensions of settler colonialism, serve for such psychological identification. Therefore, it can be said that the sacralization of the reservation as a means to preserve Native American identity makes the condition even worse for them.

Going back to the *Diary*, Junior's choice to leave the reservation may be explained by the fact that the concept of "we" is no longer organic but is instead embedded in a web of traumas that traps each new generation. Junior does not want to be a part of this imposed "we." In Anurag Chauhan and Akanksha Kesharwani's words, he "realizes that it's not belongingness but rather the external factors that decide one's identity" (4). As Vanja Vukicevic Garic puts it, Junior comes to realize that:

> . . . he and his people are victims of the historical forces and others' discourses of power and, secondly, of the fact that they are also victims of their own acceptance of those discourses that help preserving their status quo (since any move from the reservation in search for a better life is seen as betrayal, at least by the majority). (191)

In the quotation given, Junior offers as the gist of the problem the lens through which Native Americans see themselves, that of the colonizer. At this point, remembering that Junior himself has also depicted himself and his people from the same lens earlier in the narrative could be helpful to recognize the current change in his perspective. Considering Junior's realization, one could argue that the tribe members who cast Junior as a traitor reject being in the "contact zone" in order to prevent themselves from incorporating with a majority that would disregard their experiences and traumas. Unwilling to acknowledge that reservations are places that symbolically subjugate and traumatize them, their attitude reinforce their victimry. Despite all the criticism he has faced, Junior seeks the acknowledgement that leaving the reservation does not necessarily mean giving up on his identity and community for a better life, and that living in the white world does not ensure an easy success (Chang, et al. 5). Chang, et al.

claim that, although leaving the reservation might entail assimilation or "losing touch" with Native American culture to a certain degree, both for Alexie and Junior, "it is the only way to escape a killing despair" (2)

Even though Junior anticipates that leaving the reservation and stepping into the "contact zone" will benefit him, it turns out that establishing oneself in this zone is a challenging process that involves "continual self-questioning and painful building of self-awareness" (Garic 192). Junior's initial experiences in Reardan echo the circumstances described by W.E.B DuBois as double consciousness. DuBois introduced the concept of double consciousness in 1903 to provide insight into the African American experience at the time. DuBois described double consciousness as the constant awareness of how one is perceived by others and the struggle to reconcile conflicting identities (8). According to him, "[o]ne ever feels his two-ness [...] two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one […] body" (DuBois 8). Despite the fact that it is frequently attributed to African Americans, the concept of double consciousness mirrors the Native American psyche as well. Having been taught at boarding schools, which aimed at assimilating the indigenous population, Native Americans experienced double consciousness, being torn between the culture they were born into, and the culture imposed on them. Sherman Alexie mentions a similar process and highlights the homogeneous nature of the reservation community, where everyone is related ("Sherman Alexie on Living Outside Borders" 00:02:56-00:03:30). This limited cultural diversity becomes evident when Alexie attends a predominantly white high school outside the reservation borders, where he feels like an "immigrant" (00:02:56-00:03:30). Moving from a monocultural environment to a multicultural one raises questions of double consciousness for Alexie and Junior, as different racial groups interact.

At Reardan, Junior finds himself in an ambivalent situation because he is the "other" for both his tribespeople and the people in his new school. His first days in his new school are marked by alienation, since he is "the other" to white people, being the only Native American except for the school mascot. He is also marginalized within his own group as a "traitor" (Ralijevic and Sivric 1740). The basketball match between Reardan and Wellpinit, in which Junior plays for the opposing team, reveals his ostracization from

the reservation community. Fans from the reservation boo him, and even throw a quarter at him, cracking his head open. The reaction he receives makes him feel "like one of those Indian scouts who led the U.S. Cavalry against other Indians" (182). After his confrontation with Rowdy and the spectators from the reservation, Junior experiences a stronger sense of his own identity breaking apart, as he is alienated by his white peers and his fellow tribespeople accuse him of becoming white simultaneously. Junior's "part-time" identities at Reardan make him feel "caught between the whites and the Indians as he goes back and forth between the reservation and his school" (Chang, et al. 2). As Garic argues, during his time at Reardan, he leaves one battleground of "fear and violence, deprivation and helplessness" for another (191). From his first interactions with white people, the split in his identity and consciousness becomes visible. Although he presents himself at school as Junior, people at Reardan call him by his legal name Arnold, causing him to feel "like two different people inside of one body" (Ralijevic and Sivric 1740; *The Absolutely True Diary* 61). This contrast between being Junior on the reservation and Arnold in Reardan marks the initial stages of his identity's fragmentation. Junior elaborates on his experience by saying "I woke up on the reservation as an Indian, and somewhere on the road to Reardan, I became something less than Indian. And once I arrived at Reardan, I became something less than less than less than Indian" (*The Absolutely True Diary* 83). Between the reservation and Reardan, Junior always feels like "a stranger," being "half Indian in one place and half white in the other" (*The Absolutely True Diary* 118). The missing pieces of Junior's part-time identity that prevent him from constructing a whole and stable identity isolate him in both places. As mentioned previously, reservation residents accuse Junior of actively attempting to adopt a "white" identity, while he will never be considered "white" enough by the whites no matter how much he tries.

As Junior's experience illustrates, being caught between two cultures and managing demands from both cultures can be challenging. Yet, embracing double consciousness can offer some benefits, such as a deeper understanding of one's own identity and the capacity to comprehend both minority and wider cultures (DuBois 11; Schulhoff 17). This process of embracing double consciousness aids in the acculturation process in which individuals or groups adopt cultural traits from another culture while retaining their own cultural identity ("Acculturation"). Acculturation can encompass syncretism,

which involves the creation of a unique blend of cultural elements that differ from the original cultures involved while it can also involve adoption, where an entirely new cultural element is incorporated into the existing cultural repertoire ("Acculturation"). Although acculturation is a demanding process in and of itself owing to the "acculturative stress" it can generate, studies have shown that it may have beneficial outcomes for both groups coming together in the "contact zone."

The term "acculturative stress" refers to the anxiety triggered by events that originate from the process of multicultural confrontation (Berry, "Acculturative Stress" 294). It stems from the recognition that individuals encounter difficulties resulting from interactions between different cultures, which cannot be readily or swiftly resolved solely by adopting or assimilating (294). There is consensus that the stressors associated with cultural disintegration caused by colonialism have significant social and psychological repercussions, and that the acculturation stress experienced by indigenous communities when confronted with the dominant group can have a detrimental influence on their mental health (Robertson 4). Junior experiences acculturative stress at Reardan because, despite his efforts to adapt or assimilate, he cannot eliminate the racial identity markers that are associated with him. Penelope's comment on Junior's reservation accent as "funny," exemplifies this point (*The Absolutely True Diary* 61). Although it is neither possible nor necessary to eliminate Junior's racial identifiers, it should be noted that acculturation is a two-way interchange of cultures that may eventually result in both cultures integrating elements of each other. John W. Berry acknowledges that acculturative stress can have negative effects on the mental health of the dominated group, but he thinks acculturation is pathologized in literature because researchers neglect whether the individual participates in this process willingly or not ("Conceptual Approaches", 33, 34). He refers to the research according to which individuals who experience acculturation do not lose or diminish their ethnic identity but discover possibilities and achieve objectives such as eliminating prejudices and improving relations between different ethno-racial groups (Berry, "Conceptual Approaches" 33). Analyzing Junior's experience at Reardan reveals similar outcomes that assist him in "bridg[ing] many gaps in his fragmented and 'halved' styles of living," and constructing a mosaic of multiple identities within the transitional and transcultural spaces of multicultural interaction (Garic 192; Palmer 40).

First and foremost, as Garic emphasizes, "a great part of [Junior's] inner duality is reflected in his awareness that he himself is also a prey to common and stereotypical modes of thinking" both about himself, his community, and the white people (191). Although the existence of stereotyping of Native Americans by white Americans cannot be denied, Junior consistently demonstrates throughout the book that Native Americans also see white people in stereotypes. Before being transferred to Reardan, Junior already thinks that the students there are "magnificent," "smart," "epic," and "filled with hope," even though he has not met any of them yet (*The Absolutely True Diary* 50). Although Junior sees hope as "some mythical creature," he unconsciously links it to whiteness (50-51). Poupart relates such hyper-idealization of whiteness to internalized oppression and sees as a manifestation of the historical trauma resulting from colonialism:

> Like colonized groups throughout the world, American Indian people learned and internalized the discursive practices of the West-the very codes that created, reflected, and reproduced our oppression. [...] we internalize Western meanings of difference and abject Otherness, viewing ourselves within and through the constructs that defined us as racially and culturally subhuman, deficient, and vile. (87)

Despite all the internal degradation that comes with being a subjugated minority, Junior's understanding of whiteness begins to change as he gains a broader awareness that students at Reardan also experience pain and fear despite the privileges associated with being white (Palmer 44). This change in Junior's viewpoint becomes evident through his interactions with his three white friends who occupy a prominent place on his "list of the people who had given [him] the most joy in [his] life" (*The Absolutely True Diary* 176).

Seventh on the list is Roger, who has expressed derogatory views about both Native and African Americans by rhetorically asking Junior, "Did you know that Indians are living proof that niggers fuck buffalo?" (*The Absolutely True Diary* 64). Nonetheless, the progression of Roger and Junior's friendship illustrates that individuals from diverse backgrounds can forge robust friendships based on mutual understanding when biases and preconceived notions are eliminated. Despite Junior's initial expectation of hostility due to their previous altercations, Roger's display of civility and respect challenged Junior's assumptions and opened the possibility for a different type of interaction between them. This unexpected turn of events served as a catalyst for Junior's reassessment of his preconceived notions about Roger and potentially shifted their

relationship towards a more positive and understanding direction. During the evening after the winter formal, when Junior reluctantly accompanies Penelope, Roger, and other friends, it is Roger who comes to his aid when he has no money to pay the bill (126-127). Roger not only lends him money but also encourages Junior to join the basketball team which significantly enhances Junior's sense of belonging and ability to adjust to life in Reardan.

Eighth on the list, Gordy interacts with Junior after an unfortunate geography class. Junior knows that he is "way smarter than 99 percent of the others. And not just smart for an Indian" (*The Absolutely True Diary* 84). However, some white teachers at Reardan underestimate Junior's intelligence. In one instance, during a geography class, Junior corrects his teacher, Mr. Dodge, about petrified wood not being actual wood (84). This correction infuriates Mr. Dodge, who condescendingly asks Junior, "Where did you learn this fact? On the reservation?" and goes on "Yes, we all know there's so much amazing science on the reservation" (85). Gordy, the Reardan genius, intervenes and confirms that Junior's correction is accurate. Following this incident, Junior starts to observe Gordy more closely and realizes that he is also an outcast, and that they have a lot in common. At this point, Junior defines himself "an Indian kid from the reservation [who is] lonely and sad and isolated and terrified. Just like Gordy" who is alienated from his peers because of his nerdiness (94). He elaborates on their friendship and says: "[a]nd so we did become friends. Not the best of friends. Not like Rowdy and me. We didn't share secrets. Or dreams. No, we studied together. Gordy taught me how to study. Best of all, he taught me how to read" (94). As evident from his remarks, Gordy expands Junior's horizons by introducing him to the world of books and helps Junior broaden his understanding of the world. Gordy's guidance not only plays a significant role in Junior's academic success but also contributes to the alteration of his perception of himself. For instance, regarding Junior's ostracization on the reservation, Gordy wisely remarks that "life is a constant struggle between being an individual and being a member of the community" highlighting that being part of a community necessitates compromising one's individuality, just like maintaining individuality may require compromises (132). Realizing they are both outsiders that are "tossed out on [their] own," Junior decides that they "have a tribe of two" (132). While Junior initially believes that he and Gordy were just "regular friends" (94), one could argue that Gordy

might actually be Rowdy's white doppelganger, as the similarity between the names of the two characters suggests. Gordy, a socially unadjusted farm boy, challenges Junior's biased ideas and stereotypes about white people which helps whom? understand that individuals should not be judged based on superficial characteristics such as race or socio-economic status.

"Penelope, even if she only partially loves [Junior]" ranks ninth in Junior's list. Even though he immediately develops a crush on her, Junior's first meaningful interaction with her occurs on Halloween when she dresses up as a homeless woman and Junior as a homeless man. The reason Penelope dresses as a homeless woman is to protest how the homeless are treated, and to that end, Penelope decides to collect money instead of candy during Halloween night to donate to the homeless. In appreciation of Penelope's dedication, Junior says that he is also dressing up as a homeless man to protest how homeless Native Americans are treated – even though this does not reflect reality (77-78). Although Junior's attempt fails because his money is stolen by bullies on the reservation, Penelope still appreciates his effort (*The Absolutely True Diary* 78,81). This is the first time Junior and someone from a different culture have met for a meaningful cause by emphasizing similarities over differences. As Joye Tompkins Palmer notes, prior to this experience, Junior "initially objectifies Penelope" mesmerized by her physical features, especially by her skin: "pale white. Milky white. Cloud white. She was white on white on white" (Palmer 44; *The Absolutely True Diary* 114). However, as time passes and their relationship develops, it becomes evident that Penelope is not just a beautiful young woman, but she also has a complex personality. An incident that demonstrates one facet of Penelope's complex personality occurs when Junior is overwhelmed in Mr. Sheridan's history class and makes up the excuse that he needs to use the restroom to skip class. When he gets to the restroom, he hears a "weird noise" coming from the women's restroom next door (104-105). He comments, "[i]t sounds like somebody is vomiting. Nope. It sounds like a 747 is landing on a runway of vomit" (105). Just as Junior is about to ignore the noise and return to class, he feels urged to help; knocks on the bathroom door and it turns out that it is Penelope who is vomiting (106). Penelope tells a shocked Junior, who thinks she is anorexic, that she is bulimic (106). "Anorexics are anorexics all the time, I'm only bulimic when I'm throwing up," she says to a confused Junior, who asks about the difference between the two (107).

This moment is a significant epiphany for Junior because he notices that Penelope is using a similar excuse as his father, who claims to be an alcoholic only when he is drunk (107). He realizes that "[t]here are all kinds of addicts […] We all have pain. And we all look for ways to make the pain go away. Penelope gorges on her pain and then throws it up and flushes it away. My dad drinks his pain away" (107). Even though he thinks it's a phony advice, Junior tells Penelope not to give up, making her cry and confess "how lonely she is, and how everybody thinks her life is perfect because she's pretty and smart and popular, but that she's scared all the time, but nobody will let her be scared because she's pretty and smart and popular" (108). Penelope's bulimia is the evidence that she is not who she appears to be on the inside. Junior sees that like Native Americans "white girls from small towns weren't supposed to dream big, either" (112). Penelope is not only victimized by her racist father Earl, but also suffocated by the confines of a small town. As she confides in Junior, she confesses:

> I hate this little town. It's so small, too small. Everything about it is small. The people here have small ideas. Small dreams. They all want to marry each other and live here forever. […] I want to go to Stanford and study architecture. […] Because I want to build something beautiful. Because I want to be remembered. (111-112)

Penelope's complexity reminds Junior that there is more to a person than how they look. This encourages him to look beyond appearances. He concludes that even though being white brings undeniable advantages compared to being a member of a minority community, it does not always guarantee success or happiness (*The Absolutely True Diary* 112). Junior gradually recognizes that Reardan is not that different from the reservation in terms of its boundaries and limitations.

As Palmer underlines, self-recognition in opposing identities through friendships helps Junior to understand his own humanity more deeply (45). She observes that when Junior transfers to Reardan, his goal is not to acculturate, even though he does so because of his "affinity for the white students' intellectual curiosity and visions of possibility" (Palmer 48). Junior gains greater understanding of both urban and tribal life as he becomes a part of the "contact zone" and goes through the acculturation process. He has had the experience of viewing himself and his community from the outside, drawing on his multicultural experience, while he simultaneously observes white people from the perspective of an outsider. Despite he initially blames Rowdy and his tribespeople for

ostracizing him and even wants to take revenge on them, Junior eventually realizes that it is not Rowdy, or his tribespeople, who are hostile against Junior but rather it is the reservation, as the embodiment of settler colonialism:

> I knew that two or three of those Indians might not have eaten breakfast that morning. No food in the house. I knew that seven or eight of those Indians lived with drunken mothers and fathers. I knew that one of those Indians had a father who dealt crack and meth. I knew two of those Indians had fathers in prison. I knew that none of them was going to college. Not one of them. And I knew that Rowdy's father was probably going to beat the crap out of him […] I suddenly wanted to apologize to Rowdy, to all of the other Spokanes. I was suddenly ashamed that I'd wanted so badly to take revenge on them. I was suddenly ashamed of my anger, my rage, and my pain. (*The Absolutely True Diary* 195-196)

Scholars of historical trauma are of the opinion that the reservation system is a prime instance of racial segregation, and that the inequality of opportunity and resources brought about by this segregation leads to high rates of poverty, unemployment, diabetes, trauma, alcohol and drug use, and lower life expectancy (Marley 50). From this perspective, each of Junior's tribespeople is has experienced historical trauma and has been the victim of people who have demonstrated historical trauma responses, such as alcoholic parents or those committing domestic violence and is likely to experience similar dysfunctions in the future. Realizing the pattern of trauma and trauma responses, Junior weeps "because so many of [his] fellow tribal members were slowly killing themselves and [he] wanted them to live. [He] wanted them to get strong and get sober and get the hell off the rez" (216). As Chang, et al. emphasize, there is no way for Junior to turn the whole reservation into a good place and save everyone; he can only save himself (2). Palmer adds that his "survival may disrupt the acceptance of hopelessness and inspire a desire for more than merely existing" (44). Junior gradually develops the realization that he is only capable of saving himself:

> I wept because I was the only one who was brave and crazy enough to leave the rez. I was the only one with enough arrogance. I wept and wept and wept because I knew that I was never going to drink and because I was never going to kill myself and because I was going to have a better life out in the white world. I realized that I might be a lonely Indian boy, but I was not alone in my loneliness. There were millions of other Americans who had left their birthplaces in search of a dream. I realized that, sure, I was a Spokane Indian. I belonged to that tribe. But I also belonged to the tribe of American immigrants. […] It was a huge realization. And that's when I knew that I was going to be okay. (*The Absolutely True Diary* 217)

At this point, Junior realizes that saving himself does not mean renouncing his tribal roots and that he can be in peace with his multiple identities. Junior is not the only one to experience this realization. As the book ends, he is also coming to terms with Rowdy on this basis. Rowdy affirms his efforts as follows:

> "Hardly anybody on this rez is nomadic. Except for you. You're the nomadic one." […] "No, I'm serious. I always knew you were going to leave. I always knew you were going to leave us behind and travel the world. I had this dream about you a few months ago. You were standing on the Great Wall of China. You looked happy. And I was happy for you." (*The Absolutely True Diary* 229)

Rowdy's remarks not only also demonstrate that "navigation" of "self" is "necessarily a mediation between self and the other" but also confirms that Junior's Native American "identity remains intact, complemented by new intersections of commonality" (Garic 195; Palmer 47). Junior's experience in the "contact zone" showcases that one's identity is shaped by connecting their present experiences to their past, without needing to give up their indigenous identity but necessitating the formation of a new, multicultural self by combining multiple identities into a new identity that pays homage to the past while adapting to the broader and more diverse context (Palmer 42,47).

Given autoethnography's position at the intersection of personal and political remembrance, and its emphasis on comprehending cultural experience by analyzing personal experience, it could be argued that Alexie's autoethnographic narrative, through Junior's "migration," comments on an "authentic" Native American identity in contemporary times. At the end of the book, as he reconciles with Rowdy, Junior moves past the divisions of being an insider or outsider and seems to embrace all aspects of his identity. Through the "migration" of Junior, Alexie offers "a 'new' American Indian […] who mediates between old and new, liberates himself and then moves beyond the boundaries of his world(s)" and highlights the possibility of leaving the reservation while remaining intact with the community (Raljevic and Sivric 1738-1740). To better understand this new Native American identity analyzing Gerald Vizenor's definition of "postindian" would be helpful, as it is a term broad enough to speculate about "capturing the nature of what it means to be a 'real' American Indian in the twenty-first century" (Barker 4). Vizenor argues that "*the* indian *is a simulation*" and an invention of colonialism (Vizenor, qtd. in Miles 35; Vizenor and Lee 84-85). For him, the term

"postindian stands for an active, ironic resistance to dominance, and the good energy of native survivance" (Vizenor and Lee 84-85). In Vizenor's terms, the postindian:

> . . . [r]epresents 'resistance and survival, native survivance beyond tragedy, victimry, and the simulations of the 'indian' […] In other words, the postindian signifies the return of the repressed, the return of the vanishing Indian as an uncanny specter of empire, or, in the Derridean terms Vizenor also invokes time and again, as a trace of suppressed cultural difference. (Ganser 22-23)

John D. Miles argues that Vizenor's "postindian" is tasked with deconstructing "fabricated versions" of Native people and presenting their definitions of who they are (47). That is, the "postindian" can disrupt the wrong beliefs and impressions that circulate in public discourse (47). Comparably, autoethnography is founded on allowing individuals to reclaim narrative authority by telling their own stories, drawing on personal experiences to challenge and reshape existing cultural narratives. In Vizenor's terms, "*Indian* […] is the absence of the real natives and the simulation of tragic primitivism. Natives, on the other hand, are the actual stories of motion and presence" (Yu 93, 94). Vizenor's "postindian" is not a solitary effort to revert preconceptions, nor is it a raging rant to identify enemies for historical outrage (Lockard 210). Instead, survival emerges from hybrid, syncretic mixed-blood stories where conscious cultural borrowings draw strength from multiple sources. Survival stories may begin within an indigenous narrative tradition, but they do not stop at cultural barriers declared by the guardians of narrative authenticity (Lockard 211). Similarly, autoethnography often involves examining the intersection of personal and cultural identities, which allows for the exploration of hybrid identities and the ways in which they evolve. Both the term "postindian" and autoethnography as a genre embrace cultural hybridity and fluidity in terms of identity, recognizing the impact of historical and contemporary influences. From this perspective, it is possible to say that Alexie's autoethnography is a "postindian" effort as a survivance story centering around an "authentic" Native American self.

In addition to addressing issues such as transculturality and identity, the process of remembering in autoethnographic writing also serves as a bridge to reconcile the collective memory and foster healing. Smith and Watson contend that individuals who experience traumatic events may find therapeutic relief through expressing or documenting these traumas which allow the narrator to articulate and give voice to

previously unspoken experiences leading to a potential catharsis (39). These accounts possess the potential to provide therapeutic benefits for the reader as well, as such narratives can initiate a shared process of remembering, creating a sense of community and connection for them (40). As Arthur P. Bochner articulates, "[a]utoethnographic stories call for engagement, identification, and resonance" (75). Autoethnographers document their lived experiences through written accounts that depict their desires, hardships, grief, and traumas (Bochner 70). Through this process, readers can sense and recognize an open and authentic voice that seeks to connect with them, urging them to analyze themselves (Bochner 75). Such authenticity invites readers to engage with the story fully, using all their senses to immerse themselves in its tensions, dilemmas, and contradictions and allow them to experience a sense of validation and/or enhance their ability to alter or desire to alter their situations (Bochner 75). This presents an opportunity for the formation of a therapeutic connection between the narrated "I"/narrated "we" and the reader, wherein the reader and the writer can establish a bond that holds the potential for healing.

Upon receiving the 2008 Boston Globe Horn Book Fiction Award, in his "speech about the power of literature," Alexie highlights the therapeutic connection between the writer and the reader, and the healing potential of writing an autoethnography (Alexie, "2008 BGHB Fiction Award Speech"). He thinks leaving the reservation for him has been a "crazy, wonderful, heroic, insane, cross-cultural, cross-racial, cross-class decision" (Alexie, "2008 BGHB Fiction Award Speech"). As Junior's experience in the *Diary* illustrates, such a decision can bring with it both ostracization from one's own society and alienation in the new one. Upon receiving positive commentary about the book, Alexie "feels like [his] story, [his] choices, have been validated by this huge group of people" (Alexie, "2008 BGHB Fiction Award Speech"). In this case, one could argue that the reader's appreciation serves as a sense of validation mitigating the effects of alienation and exclusion from both his own society and the wider world for the author, which may impart a healing quality. Autoethnography, as genre, provides a platform for the non-Native readers to reflect on and recognize the complexity of Native American identities. *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian,* as an autoethnography, can also be validating, therapeutic and potentially healing for the Native American reader, with which Alexie also agrees ("2008 BGHB Fiction Award Speech").

CONCLUSION

Since the discovery of the Americas, Native Americans have been subjugated by various acts of colonialism. In the territory that is today known as the United States of America, colonialism has taken the form of settler colonialism. Colonists drove Native Americans out of their lands; separated them from the settler population; socio-culturally assimilated them; or genetically bred them white in order to obtain a homogenous population and engaged in genocidal acts against them (Wolfe, "Elimination of the Native" 388). As a result of these practices, they have suffered from historical trauma (Brave Heart, et al. 283). The mirroring pathology caused by this wounding is termed historical trauma response and is analogous to the survivor syndrome and survivor's child complex observed after the Holocaust (Brave Heart, "Wakiksuyapi" 247). Historical trauma response is characterized by transposition, loyalty to and identification with the suffering of deceased ancestors, replicating affliction within one's own life, fixation on trauma, reparatory fantasies, and attempts to undo the tragedy of the past (Brave Heart, "Wakiksuyapi" 247). High rates of suicide, homicide, accidental deaths, domestic violence, alcoholism and substance abuse, as well as other social problems, are frequently observed among Native Americans as historical trauma responses (Brave Heart and DeBruyn 60).

Sherman Alexie's *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* (1993), *Reservation Blues* (1995), and *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* (2007) represent the subjugation of Native Americans by ongoing settler colonialism and the resulting historical and cultural trauma and show how his characters and their sense of identity are shaped by their relationship to the reservation system as an echo of settler colonialism. The three books employ recurring characters often in the same setting. Although Junior, the protagonist of the *Diary*, alternates between reservation and Reardan, which is largely a white community, the Spokane Indian Reservation is at the heart of all three narratives. In all three works analyzed within the scope of this thesis, the reservation is frequently described by its hostility and dysfunctionality, and it is portrayed as a kind of prison where being optimistic proved to be difficult. As a consequence, residents console or numb themselves with alcohol in an environment of hunger and poverty, where generations of people had practically the same painful

experiences. Alexie's characters in all three works exhibit generic historical trauma responses such as fixation on trauma, compensating fantasies, identification with the suffering of ancestors, admiration for idealized pre-colonial lives, and identity fragmentation caused by being subjugated by colonial actions. In these works, the colonial legacy of the reservation system leads the characters to imitate the colonizers' perspective, internalize oppression and degradation, and display self-destructive behaviors including suicide.

These three works depict the contemporary Native American reality through different manifestations of realism. In *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, analyzed in the first chapter, Alexie uses his self-coined style "reservation realism." Through it, he illustrates the struggle of Native Americans to exist in an unfavorable setting that is characterized by a multitude of challenges, including poverty, unemployment, and lack of opportunities and resources. By using reservation realism, Alexie unveils the reservation as a *de facto* colonial authority that treats its inhabitants in an antagonistic manner. Despite the government's advocacy of reservations as a gesture for preserving Native American identity, culture, and traditions from racial lactification, the reservation is depicted as a symbolic extension of settler colonialism which perpetuates and harbors historical trauma and historical trauma responses such as prevalent alcohol and drug abuse, and frequent occurrences of suicide. Alexie's reservation realism highlights the trans/historicity of Native American experience with settler colonization and trauma as he turns to it to depict the cyclical and repetitive pattern of occurrences on reservations that leads the experiences of each generation to be interconnected and intergenerational. Through reservation realism, Alexie challenges and contests biased narrations of the Native American experience and provide "realistic" accounts that deconstruct stereotypes and put an emphasis on pluralism in perspective.

In *Reservation Blues*, analyzed in the second chapter, magical realism is used as another manifestation of realism to portray contemporary Native American circumstances. Alexie adheres to reservation realism to portray the atrocities of settler colonialism and the resulting historical trauma in the characters' minds and to emphasize the arduousness and dysfunctionality of reservation conditions. Yet, he incorporates it with magical realism to portray the intricacies of ongoing settler colonialism and Native

Americans' struggle at the heart of it. Magical realism is a manifestation of realism that has traditionally been associated with "the other" and has often been regarded as a medium for "the other" to articulate the experience of being subjugated. It often serves as a medium to resist against the oppressive political norms and allows authors to challenge the status quo. Alexie's association of magic with white, colonial, and patriarchal forces of power lends a historical and socio-political context to the narrative. Magical realism's incorporation of alternative facts allows the author to convey the ferocity of power holders towards the oppressed in a way that does not simplify or trivialize the experiences. Alexie also turns to blues music in the novel by introducing a magical guitar and the idea of starting a blues band. Just like magical realism, blues is also related to the experience of the oppressed as a means of telling stories of oppression. Alexie regards it as a medium for sharing stories that would potentially initiate the process of "rememory."

In the last book discussed within the scope of this thesis, *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, Alexie also adheres to reservation realism to convey the unfavorable circumstances of the reservation as vividly as possible. Yet, its most notable aspect is its self-referentiality since Alexie stresses the story's authenticity by emphasizing that almost eighty percent of the events depicted are based on his own experiences. It includes an autobiographical aspect like the previous two works, but in a larger proportion. Addressing the indigenous protagonist's interactions with white people, the book can be read as an autoethnography as it deals with the confrontation between the colonizer and the colonized in the "contact zone." Utilizing the literary and political prospects of autoethnography, Alexie employs his personal experiences to portray the contemporary Native American experience with settler colonialism and historical trauma and to comment on the complexities of Native American identity formation, multiculturalism and double consciousness. Raising a socio-political consciousness, this work can be considered to be a "postindian" effort which aims at replacing to the attempt at replacing the narratives of victimry with stories of survivance, reclaiming individual agency, and creating an authentic Native American identity. By conveying an autoethnographic narrative, Alexie creates a sharing platform for people with similar experiences and a therapeutic bond between the reader and the writer.

Despite Alexie's use of three different literary manifestations of realism in these works, the essence of Native American reality is the same in each of them. Each work underscores the colonization and trauma experienced by Native Americans and depicts them as enduring phenomena that extend beyond specific times and places. In the works, cultural and historical trauma experienced at different times, by different characters and through different manifestations of realism emphasize the continuing existence of settler colonialism, as well as the persistence of trauma and trauma responses in spite of the assertion that today's world is post-colonial and post-apartheid.

Although the manifestations of realism differ in the works, the reservation is depicted as a setting that symbolically subjugates its residents. It is shown to have an impact on various situations, including how the characters view themselves, how they perceive ethnic identity, how they interact with people of their race and other races, and how they shape their lives. The characters' self-hatred, double consciousness, and internalization of the colonizer's ideology are shown to complicate their perception of themselves, which is exacerbated by the dysfunctionality of reservation life and its *de facto* authority over their physical and emotional states. In all three works, through different manifestations of realism, it is shown that Native Americans' attempt to create an "ideal" Native American identity, which is akin to that of pre-colonial past, is not due to the inherent flaws of their culture, but rather to the unrealistic expectations imposed on them in the face of settler colonialism and its lasting consequences.

Alexie, through his choice of different realisms in these three works, aims to present Native American reality authentically to both Native and non-Native readers. His thorough treatment of settler colonialism and historical trauma offer readers who may not be familiar with or have little knowledge about the Native American experience in the US an immersive and engaging reading experience. His selected works present cases that parallel factual findings of scholars working on settler colonialism and Native American trauma in a comprehensible and empathetic way for a lay audience and paint an insightful depiction of Native American life.

Sherman Alexie's use of different manifestations of realism also enables him to portray his characters as complex individuals who transcend racial hierarchies, prejudices, and stereotypes. Each of these narratives replace the mainstream images of Native

Americans with authentic ones and offer counter narratives to conventional historical narratives, which defy the selective nature of historiography. This both helps the Native reader remember and acknowledge their own reality, encourages them to articulate their traumas to achieve mental integrity while introducing the non-Native reader to the frequently overlooked realities of Native American lives. While these works deal with the challenges around the formation of Native American identity, the author does not offer a formula to end Native American struggle. It is difficult to say that he is concerned with conveying a message in his works, nor can there be simple solutions to offer for those who have been living with historical trauma. Instead, Alexie depicts Native American experiences openly to defy misconceptions and to provide an avenue for both him and the reader to confront reality and, if possible, recover from it.

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HACETTEPE ÜNİVERSİTESİ
SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ
AMERİKAN KÜLTÜRÜ VE EDEBİYATI ANABİLİM DALI BAŞKANLIĞINA

Tarih: 16/02/2024

Tez Başlığı: Sherman Alexie'nin *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven, Reservation Blues ve The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* Eserlerinde Travma ve Gerçekçiliğin Görünümleri

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GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
DEPARTMENT OF AMERICAN CULTURE AND LITERATURE

Date: 16/02/2024

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HACETTEPE ÜNİVERSİTESİ
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