Native American Identity in N. Scott Momaday's House Made of Dawn, Leslie Marmon Silko's Ceremony and Sherman Alexie's Ten Little Indians

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IZJAVA

Kojom izjavljujem da sam završni rad naslova Native American Identity in N.Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn*, Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* and Sherman Alexie's *Ten Little Indians* izradila samostalno pod mentorstvom prof. dr. sc., Lovorke Gruić Grmuše.

U radu sam primijenila metodologiju znanstvenoistraživačkoga rada i koristila literaturu koja je navedena na kraju završnog rada. Tuđe spoznaje, stavove, zaključke, teorije i zakonitosti koje sam izravno ili parafrazirajući navela u diplomskom radu na uobičajen način citirala sam i povezala s korištenim bibliografskim jedinicama.

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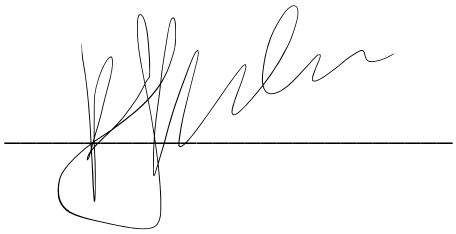

Abstract

This thesis will explore the idea of Native American identity and the identity issues that Native American peoples face, being met with brutality, inequality and racism every day of their lives. By defining what identity is in general, this thesis will move forward to depict the elements of Native American identity. Lastly, upon defining what Native American identity comprises of and what issues Native Americans could face regarding their identity, the thesis will look into how their struggles were portrayed in N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn*, Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*, and Sherman Alexie's *Ten Little Indians*.

Key words: Native Americans, Identity, Cultural Appropriation, Ethnicity, Racism

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Introduction

When Cristopher Columbus discovered America in the 15th century, peaceful days ended for Native Americans - America's indigenous peoples. Since then, they have experienced centuries of violently imposed changes. However, a great deal of the suffering that they experienced was not recorded in the history of The United States, no matter how important their role was in the making of it.

According to Roxanne Dunbar - Oritz (2) "the history of The United States is a history of settler colonialism - the founding of a state based on the ideology of white supremacy, the widespread practice of African slavery, and a policy of genocide and land theft". This quote rules out the fact that the making of The United States was very painfully and very violently executed by the settler white supremacists that have been known to opt for the most vicious ways to get to their desired goals. Most commonly their acts included extreme intolerance towards Native Americans, which would often result in engaging "irregular units to brutally attack and destroy unarmed Indigenous women, children and old people using unlimited force in unrelenting attacks (Dunbar - Oritz, 56). Keeping those facts in mind and putting them in comparison with the historical canon that is taught in schools all over the world and that is believed to be true, it is safe to conclude that we are dealing with two completely different retellings of what happened when the settlers came to the American grounds. Thus, it is very crucial to point out the issue of the historical canon of The United States - the complete ignorance of the Native American genocide that took place in the form of "torture, terror, sexual abuse, massacres, systematic military occupations, removals of indigenous peoples from their ancestral territories and removals of Indigenous children to military-like boarding schools" (Dunbar - Oritz, 9).

When mentioned in the historical canon, Native Americans were portrayed in a completely different fashion. The first wave of settlers that came to the American grounds perceived Native Americans as wild animals and they labelled their oral traditions and early literature as "satanic or bestial gibberish that, unmarked in letters nor bound as books, could never be thought to constitute a literature" (Krupat, 147). Not even taking their time to acknowledge the existence and the values of the Native American orality, settlers decided not to grant its entry into the early American literary canon.

However, that did not restrain Native Americans from keeping up with their culture, traditions, and orality as much as they were able to, and it did not restrain them to express their truth through their art. Times have changed and genocides of those proportions are not that common, but the in-

justice and the wrongdoing are still present. Nowadays Native American communities face racism, intolerance, and "threats to the integrity of their tribal, national and ethnic representation" (Porter, 40). Native American communities that are trying to keep up with their traditions and live within the guidelines of their culture are met with the aggression of the society surrounding them. The most common example is the enforcement of dress codes that forbid Native Americans to style their appearance towards their cultural standards.

Likewise, the society itself, which is predominantly white, is still very racist and intolerant towards anything slightly diverse from their everyday standards, forcing Indigenous people to "fit into" the society, hide their true identity, and throw away their culture. Acknowledging the issues that the urban Native Americans face, it is no wonder that most of the communities and individuals feel confused and lost between the two worlds, slowly losing their identity.

In the mid-1900s Native American writers were finally acknowledged by the American literary canon. Native American literature faced a rapid popularity incline, which allowed Native American writers to tell their stories and express their doubts, issues, and confusion. One such story is Navarre Scott Momaday's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *House Made of Dawn*.

Momaday and his novel were considered to be a breakthrough in the world of Native American literature, as well as in the world of literature in general, and have inspired many other Native American writers to come out with their stories.

Inspired by Momaday, Leslie Marmon Silko came onto the scene with *"Ceremony"*. In their novels Momaday and Silko, just like the majority of the first generation of Native American writers, both put an emphasis on the concept of identity by making their protagonists try to find their place in between the two worlds, basing their arguments on the Native American cultural origins.

Sherman Alexie, belonging to the generation of urban Native American writers, speaks of similar topics but from a standpoint of modern-day Native Americans that have found themselves desperately grasping the concepts of the modern-day, predominantly white, intolerant society for the sake of survival.

Thus, the aim of this paper is to determine what Native American Identity is and what identity issues do Native Americans experience, and ultimately to depict how they were portrayed in N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn*, Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*, and Sherman Alexie's *Ten Little Indians.*

Native American Identity

The process of depicting Native American identity began around 100 years ago when the Indian Citizenship Act was passed, differentiating Native Americans from European immigrants (Carpenter, 141). Since then, numerous questions were posed to define specifically what Native American identity is. Identity is an entity that is highly subjected to change since it is comprised of constituents that are neither biologically nor genetically determined. It is dependent on many other factors, thus making it almost impossible to set specific categories or criteria. Therefore, to fully understand identity as a phenomenon, there are other entities that we need to acknowledge.

According to Hilary N. Weaver, we acknowledge three aspects of identity - community identification, external identification, and self-identification (240). In other words, one's identity is comprised of race (external identification), ethnicity (community identification), and personal perception (self-identification).

Race is a term that implies physical, socially defined characteristics such as the colour of our skin, our hair, and facial features, as criteria to be used when putting people into categories (Fitzgerald, 23). On the other hand, ethnicity establishes sharing a culture, nationality, ancestry, and language as grouping criteria (Fitzgerald, 23). In other words, the first two constituents that determine one's identity are designated at birth and derive from affiliation with certain communities and societal perceptions. There are no doubts about race or ethnicity when an individual belongs to the biggest group that exists in one area. Speaking specifically of the USA as the country in which the focus group of this thesis inhabits, that group is white. However, when an individual of another race or ethnicity finds themselves in that group, they have a hard time getting accepted. That can lead to issues with the third identity constituent - self-identification.

Self-identification is the most important aspect of one's identity because the first two aspects depend on how one is perceived by the community. Because the first two constituents are determined by the community, in most cases it is very common that people have issues with self-identification. When we look at the problems related to external identification, we come across racism as one of the biggest societal problems in our world today. Individuals are met with hate, oppression, and violence solely because they do not fall into the same categories as the general public. Native Americans face racism frequently since "for many decades, whites viewed Native Americans as savages and Native women as "dirty little squaws who slept with married white men, thus threatening white women and their families" (D'Emilio and Freedman in Carpenter, 25).

Colonisers have seen Native people as a threat since day one, towards them and towards their homes and their families, thus, painting them as a target for their hatred. Sometimes that hate extends as far as massive genocides and sterilisation of Native women. Aside from having their land taken, they were stripped of basic human rights, and in the most extreme cases their lives. Nowadays the acts of racism are not as intense. However, they are still present and cause day-to-day issues for Native Americans, most commonly in the form of institutionalised racism.

Cambridge Dictionary states that institutionalised racism is a set of "policies, rules, practices, etc. that have become a usual part of the way an organisation or society works, and that result in and support a continued unfair advantage to some people and unfair or harmful treatment of others based on race" ("Institutionalised racism").

o be specific, certain racial groups that are in numerical advantage, impose sets of extremely unfair rules that make everyday life much harder for the minority groups. For example, we see cases where outdated, extremely strict, and unnecessary dress codes limit minority groups and often make them throw away pieces of their culture or tradition that they frequently express through hairstyles and small accessories. On larger scale, sometimes institutionalised racism prevents minority groups from even getting hired in the first place. Usually the reason behind that are very prejudiced human resources teams that believe that all Native Americans either have issues with alcohol abuse or are savages that do not know how to behave in a work environment. Likewise, young Native Americans that attend schools outside of their reservations, alongside judgemental looks from their peers, are often met with different grading criteria solely because of their race and ethnicity.

When speaking of racism in the urban society one of the biggest problems is the lack of general awareness. Vast majority of people indulge into subtle racism by doing things that are highly offensive and racist toward minority groups without even knowing that they did something hurtful and inappropriate. For example, the most common case when speaking of Native Americans is the cultural appropriation in the form of "Indian costumes." Even though they have been labeled as unacceptable, regrettably, they are still very popular all over the world, no matter whether it is Halloween in America or even across the world at The Rijeka Carnival in Croatia.

One more example of subtle racism is fetishisation. Fetishisation, according to Janice Gassam Asare, is "the act of making someone an object of sexual desire based on some aspect of their identity" (Forbes). In most cases, people are ready to learn from their mistakes, but some view it as an invitation to further oppress minority groups. With acts as such, subtle racism paints a very misleading picture of certain racial and ethnic groups, and as such, creates new sets of presumptions that

only deepen the levels of prejudice. Thus, community identification is also not a firm constituent that the identity process comprises.

Regarding ethnicity, some members of certain Native American tribes do not know their origins primarily because they have lost contact with their tribes or, in some cases, the tribes ceased to exist. Therefore, it is exceedingly difficult to determine what ethnical group some Native Americans belong to. Naturally that creates difficulty for individuals that are trying to identify themselves when their origin is ambiguous.

However, one of the most profound reasons why Native Americans have difficulties with identifying themselves is assimilation. Most commonly, Native Americans are faced with forced assimilations that are pressuring them to throw away their ethnic identity. Because of instances such as institutionalised racism, Native Americans must be the ones to adapt to the society surrounding them. To give an example, they have to choose between losing their job or losing their ethnic identity. If Native Americans try to defy any of the standards that have been set by the predominantly white society, they are ultimately encountered with police brutality, inequality, unemployment, and destitution which inevitably lead to the destruction of both an individual and the ethnic group they belong to. Despite all that, in recent years, as racism slowly dies down, and society is becoming more educated, accepting, and ready to acknowledge diversity, people have been trying to rekindle their relationships with their tribes. Most precisely in the form of identity reclamation, which implies that "many individuals that who formerly viewed themselves as white are now reconnecting with their Native heritage and identify as Native American" (Fitzgerald and Nagel in Fitzgerald, 42-43).

When we take all the above into account, we can say that there is no distinct way of describing Native American identity. What we do know is that it is most certainly tied to their "sacred traditions, traditional homelands and a shared history as indigenous people" (Weaver, 245). But despite all that, the most important part of the identity is how one chooses to see themselves. However, the problem lies within the process of assimilation that is oftentimes forced and driven by racism.

It is widely known that, throughout history, whenever there were hardships and difficulties aboard, writers would turn to what they know the best - writing - to express the pains and troubles they had to cope with. Native American writers are no different, and it is no wonder they turned to literature to express their confusion and disappointment in the process of assimilation to the "modern" society. Thus, the following three chapters will depict how N. Scott Momaday, Leslie Marmon Silko, and Sherman Alexie defined Native American identity, through the experience of their protagonists and the issues they have faced while assimilating into the white, racist, unaccepting society.

House Made of Dawn

Navarre Scott Momaday is a Native American author. Born in Oklahoma in February 1934, he is a son of French and Cherokee woman, Natachee Scott Momaday, and Kiowa man, Alfred Momaday (Encyclopaedia Britannica). *House Made of Dawn* was at the time a breakthrough novel that opened up the world of Native American literature by winning a Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 1969 serving "as a Native voice that refused to remain silent or stoic with little connection to contemporary reality" (Croft, 2). Ever since that immense breakthrough, Native American writers have been progressively emerging onto the scene.

House Made of Dawn is a novel that tells us the story of a young Native American man called Abel whose story of identity reclamation is portrayed through four chapters: The Longhair, The Priest of the Sun, The Night Chanter, and The Dawn Runner. Having his novel formed like that, Momaday hints at the Native American sacred traditions that claim that rituals that are conducted four times are deemed complete, sacred, and efficacious (Scarberry-Garcia, 450).

Throughout the themes of place, healing, and homecoming, *"House Made of Dawn"* gives us an opportunity to look into what life was like for Native American men in the 20th century and what it was like to face forced relocation that entailed "the struggle to enter work force, the isolation of reservations, and the harmful effects of alcoholism" (Croft, 3-5). Claiming that there is no other minority group other than Native Americans that has the knowledge and the experience with living in between two worlds and not having security in either, Momaday uses Abel's story to depict how dangerous living like that can be for one's identity.

Momaday sets the mood of the novel with a prologue that suggests what the protagonist Abel is going to experience :

> "Abel was running. He was alone and running, hard at first, heavily but then easily and well. The road curved out in front of him and rose away in the distance. He could not see the town. The valley was grey with rain, and snow lay upon the dunes. It was dawn…The road verged upon clusters of juniper and mesquite, and he could see the black angles and twists of wood beneath the hard white crust…He was running, running. He could see the horses in the fields and the crooked line of the river below" (Momaday, 1)

He introduces Abel as an individual who is strongly connected to his reservation and who is continuously making efforts to go back to where he belongs. Being estranged from his ancestral grounds

twice, Abel couldn't find happiness and was met with a path full of uncertainty and despair, not wanting to stop running until he was back where his heart was at peace.

"House Made of Dawn" starts in Walatowa in 1945 just after Abel returned from serving in World War II. Reunited with his grandfather Francisco, Abel immediately finds it hard to reconnect with the life back at the reservation solely for the damage that the difficult experience of serving in World War II had left on him, making him turn to drinking:

> "The door swung open and Abel stepped heavily to the ground and reeled. He was drunk and he fell against his grandfather and did not know him" (Momaday, 8).

In his drunk delirium that lasted the first few days after his return, Abel is thinking about his life which reveals that Abel's identity was ambiguous from childhood:

> "He did not know who his father was. His father was a Navajo, they said, or Sia, or an Isleta, an outsider anyway, which made him and his mother and Vidal somehow foreign and strange" (Momaday, 11)

Abel has been an estranged individual since his birth for his father's identity was unknown. Because of that, he was considered an outsider at the Walatowa reservation where he had lived with his grandfather after his mother and his brother had passed away. Luckily, Abel accustomed quickly to leading a peaceful and uneventful life at the reservation, helping around both his grandfather and the other members of the community. His life seemed ideal just like before he went to serve in World War II.

Everything was set in motion when Angela St. John moved from Los Angeles into an estate located at the reservation. Angela needed help with moving in her belongings into the Benevides estate where she would be residing. She asked a local priest Father Olguin for help, thinking that "perhaps one of the Indians" (Momaday, 27) could help her. Father Olguin ends up sending Abel to do the job and they slowly get to know each other. Being of the introverted kind, Abel did not speak much, which Angela thought was one of his mysterious "Indian" charms. Indulging into racial fetishisation, she finds his behaviour irresistible:

> "His reserve was too much for her. She would have liked to throw him off balance, to startle and appall him, to make an obscene gesture, perhaps, or to say, "How would you like a

white woman? My white belly and my breasts, my painted fingers and my feet?" (Momaday, 31)

Bored and left alone by her husband who still had some other business to do in Los Angeles, Angela decided to play with Abel's feelings. Not even realising why Angela is suddenly so interested in him, he falls for her words, and they become lovers.

Although Abel has already struggled with his identity, the real struggle began when he fell under Angela's influence and had begun "playing house" with her, acting like he is her white husband who belongs with her behind the perfect white picket fence. Abel was unable to feel happiness living like that, slowly even starting to resent their life together. That only fuelled his internal hatred toward white people. All of Abel's resentment towards white people broke out one night when, during the events of a large fair, unprovoked, Abel committed manslaughter:

"The white man raised his arms, as if to embrace him, and came forward. But Abel had already taken hold of the knife, and he drew it. He leaned inside the white man's arms and drove the blade up under the bones of the breast and across. The white man's hand lay on Abel's shoulders, and for a moment the white man stood very still….He was sick with terror and revulsion, and he tried to fling himself away, but the white man held him close. The white immensity of flesh lay over and smothered him."(Momaday, 73)

Only after he stabbed the man to death, did Abel fully take in his appearance. Moving closer to his lifeless body, Abel discovered that the man's arms were completely hairless. Blinded by Abel's desperate try to kill his colonisers and to kill off his "whitewashed" self, he realised that he murdered an innocent, unarmed, albino Native American man.

Upon being arrested by the local authorities Abel was relocated to Los Angeles to serve his sentence. When discharged, Abel found himself having to assimilate into society once again, this time his odds being even less in his favour not only because he found himself in a completely different part of America but also because now he was an ex-convict.

Even though it would be expected that Abel regrets his actions, he does not:

"He had killed the white man. It was not a complicated thing after all; it was very simple. It was the most natural thing in the world. Surely they could see that, these men who meant to dispose him of words. They must know that he would kill the white man again if he had the

chance, that there could be no hesitation whatsoever. For he would know what the white man was, and he would kill him if he could. A man kills such an enemy if he can."(Momaday, 90-91)

With that Momaday paints the perfect picture of what it was like to be a young Native American man in the 20th century. Keeping in mind that Native American customs and traditions do not involve any form of violence, the amount of frustration upon being oppressed that Abel felt must have been outrageous to have driven him to take another man's life.

In Los Angeles Abel managed to find three friends - Reverend John Big Bluff Tosamah (also known as the Priest of the Sun), officer Martinez and Ben Benally. Just like Abel, all three of them were Native Americans that found themselves in Los Angeles at the hand of the Indian relocation initiative which forced them to assimilate into the urban society.

When Abel joined their friend group, all of them were in a way, already accustomed and have found their place in the urban society. However, Abel's presence and appearance reminded them of their origins, reopening their wounds. Since all three of them have been spiritually corrupted by the white society they were forced to assimilate into, they have decided to take voice their concerns and take their anger out on Abel, regarding him as an antagonist (Hirsch, 307).

Reverend John Big Bluff Tosamah, the Priest of the Sun, is introduced at the beginning of the second chapter when he is about to hold a sermon in the basement of a storage facility. He is lost between the two religious worlds - the one based on Native American sacred traditions and the one belonging to the society he is trying to assimilate into. Creating his version of "church", Tosamah uses the opportunity to glorify white people using the example of an old man John that was, according to him, sent from God:

"Now, brothers and sisters, old John was a white man, and the white man has his ways. Oh gracious me, he has his ways. He talks about the World. He talks through it and around it. He builds upon it with syllables, with prefixes and suffixes and hyphens and accents. He ads and divides and multiplies the World. And in all of this he subtracts the Truth. And, brothers and sisters, you have come here to live in the white man's world. Now the white man deals in words, and he deals easily, with grace and sleight of hand. And in his presence, here on his own ground, you are as children. mere babies in the woods."(Momaday, 83)

With his sermon, Tosamah differentiates Native Americans from the white world they are trying to assimilate into. He sees John, a white man, as more powerful than the Native Americans and believes that a white man is God-sent. According to Tosamah's beliefs, Native Americans are just like children - inexperienced, helpless, and inferior to the white man.

Even though Tosamah is of Native American descent, he has never lived on a reservation or in a society that is mainly comprised of Native Americans. He does not know anything about Native Americans and what being a Native American means.

> "He doesn't know how it is when you grow up out there someplace…You heard an owl, maybe, or you saw a funny kind of whirlwind; somebody looked at you sideways and a moment too long. And then you know. You just know. Maybe your aunt or your grandmother was a witch…You just know, and you can't help being scared." (Momaday, 132-133)

It is exactly because of the fear of the unknown that is very common in everyday urban life that Tosamah decided to throw away his identity completely. Likewise, the influence that the Catholic church had on him has him see Native American sacred traditions as a form of witchcraft that is a forbidden art in the eyes of Catholicism.

Tosamah is greatly irritated by Abel's presence. His appearance, his long hair specifically, constantly reminds Tosamah of his descent. Because of that, Tosamah is treating Abel horribly and is making his assimilation process even worse. Ultimately, Tosamah's hatred towards his identity got so great that he even started to verbally abuse Abel talking badly of "longhairs" and reservations even saying that Abel is "too damn dumb to be civilised" (Momaday, 131). Because Tosamah badly wants to be perceived as a white, superior man he is indulging in racism and is doing the white man's work by publicly shaming Native Americans (Hirsch, 314).

Abel's relationship with officer Martinez is almost non-existent. However, the experience Abel had upon meeting him left a big scar both metaphorically and physically. Just like Tosamah, Martinez is a Native American man that is ashamed of his identity and is completely throwing it away and because of that is extremely abusive towards Abel.

When going home one night, Ben and Abel ran into Martinez who told them to go to the dark alley. Unlike Tosamah and his verbal abuse, Martinez is physically abusive towards both Abel and Ben. He took all of the money Ben had on him before shifting his focus to "longhair" Abel. Unprovoked, Martinez made Abel lift his hands as if he were a criminal caught in the act:

> “Then suddenly the light jumped and he brought the stick down hard and fast. I couldn’t see it, but I heard it crack on the bones of the hands, and it made me sick. He didn’t cry out or make a sound, but I could see him there against the wall, doubled up with pain and holding his hands”(Momaday, 153)

Once again, just like Tosamah, Martinez did the “white man's work” making Abel experience racism-driven police brutality at the hands of his Native American peer that is, due to the forced assimilation, greatly ashamed of his identity.

On the other hand, Abel experienced a very different approach from his co-worker Ben Benally. Ben and Abel met at the factory where they both worked, and as kind as he was, Ben offered Abel to stay with him in his apartment. Even though Ben Benally is somehow assimilated into the urban society he was put into as a result of the Relocation initiative, he is different from the rest of his forcedly assimilated acquaintances for his “profound spirituality” (Hirsch, 314). In other words, he still believes in Native American sacred traditions just like Abel, which means he has not thrown away his entire identity just yet. However, he is still very ashamed of it and does not want others to know that he indulges in prayers of that sort. For instance, when he wanted to pray on sacred Navajo grounds, Tségihi:

> “The others were singing, too, but it was the wrong kind of thing, and I wanted to pray. I didn’t want them to hear me, because they were having a good time, and I was ashamed, I guess. I kept it down because I didn’t want anybody but him to hear it” (Momaday, 129)

In his essay *N. Scott Momaday: Becoming the bear,* Chadwick Allen argues Ben is an individual that is the perfect example of a traditional healer. But despite that, Ben is very much naïve when it comes to living in another dominant culture (212). Ben Benally thinks that living in predominantly white Los Angeles is a great opportunity, and he glorifies the experience even though he is nostalgic thinking of the land back at his reservation.

However, Los Angeles does not think the same of him. Ben Benally mistakenly takes the words of his white colleagues and acquaintances as words of kindness instead of seeing them for what they are, not understanding that they are making fun of him. Not explicitly addressing the topic of forced assimilation, Momaday uses Ben’s character to denote and put an emphasis on what it takes to be semi-accepted into the urban society without the need for violence:

> "If you come from the reservation, you don't talk about it much; I don't know why I guess you figure that it won't do you much good, so you just forget about it. You think about it sometimes; you can't help it, but then you just try to put it out of your mind… I guess if we all came from the same place it would be different; we could talk about it, you know, and we could understand." (Momaday, 135)

If you want to be accepted, you have to throw away your identity and renounce any notion of diversity because any slight hint of diversity should not be talked about if one is not prepared to face verbal and physical abuse.

Unlike Tosamah and Martinez, who try to break Abel's strong willpower when it comes to keeping his identity intact, Ben tries to "help" Abel adjust by forcing his idea of identity onto him:

> "You could see that he wasn't going to get along around here…You know, you have to change. That's the only way you can live in a place like this. You have to forget about the way it way, how you grew up and all. Sometimes it's hard but you have to do it." (Momaday, 131)

Abel wants to go back to his reservation and give up the assimilation process that is clearly trying to harm his identity. Albeit being nostalgic about returning to his ancestral grounds himself, Ben Benally claims that "if you went home there would be nothing there would be nothing there, just the empty land and a lot of old people, going no place and dying off" (Momaday, 140). He believes that returning to the reservation is equivalent to one's downfall.

In the end, after the hatred and brutality, he experienced and because he simply refused to give up his identity, Abel's spiritual and physical destruction began. No matter how much Ben tried to help him assimilate, Abel's doom was inevitable:

> "He went downhill pretty fast after that. Sometimes he was here when I came in from work, and sometimes he wasn't. He was drunk about half the time, and I couldn't keep up with him. I tried to get him to slow down, you know, but he just got mad whenever I said anything about it, and it made him worse." (Momaday, 142)

Abel just could not assimilate, feeling like a stranger amongst his friends. He decided that he would no longer wait for Ben to go back to the reservation with him and has made his way back to

the reservation broken, both mentally and physically. Because he did not want to throw away his identity like his friends, all of the things that Abel faced and witnessed created a very unhealthy atmosphere for him to live in. Momaday closed off the novel with the same scene that he opened it with - Abel is back in nature and he is running. All of the pain he felt, including leg pains, is now gone, and he is once again in connection with his Native American identity.

Ceremony

Leslie Marmon Silko is a Native American poet, novelist, essayist, and photographer. She was born in March 1948 to a mixed family that is of Laguna Pueblo, Mexican and Anglo-American descent. She grew up on the border of Laguna Pueblo Reservation, having first-hand experience growing up on the margin between the two cultures (Poetry Foundation). Later in life that involvement became the centre motive of her literary work. She claims her homeland so paramount that in her stories Laguna reservation is not just the place where the story takes place but also is worthy of becoming a character on its own. Her adoration and admiration of the Laguna Pueblo Reservation are densely rendered in all of her work, principally in *Ceremony* (Poetry Foundation).

Ceremony is Leslie Marmon Silko's first novel published in 1977 which "describes a world organised by place in which every living being is necessary to the narrative" (Piper, 487). Just like the rest of her literary work, it can be described as "a study in cultural mediation and spirit transformation" (Nelson, 245). Aside from being inspired by her mixed ethnicity when creating Tayo's story, Silko was driven to create *Ceremony* by the revolution that was caused by the Jackpile Mine, a large-scale project dealing with uranium extraction that had taken place on the Laguna reservation right after World War II (Lorenzo, 2). Not only did it change the course of life at the reservation due to the new job positions it provided, but it also caused radioactive pollution that contaminated sacred Laguna land and water.

Having lost a great deal of their land in the process of the colonisation aggrieved and angered Native Americans because the land that they have lost was a commodity they have identified themselves with. It has been a place that provided them with a sense of unity and security where they could practice their customs and cherish their traditions (Lewis, 423-432). The Jackpile uranium project only made their circumstances even more perplexing, putting their sacred traditions, their lives, and ultimately their identities at risk. That drove Native Americans to hold onto the other parts of their ethnicity more vigorously if they wanted to preserve their identity.

It is a well-known fact that whenever difficult times are ahead, peoples all over the world turn to religion and spirituality in order to strengthen their group identity. Naturally, Native Americans are no different. Åke Hultkrantz, a scholar that specialises in Native American religious traditions, claims that Native American "religious convictions are expressed through the medium of dances, songs, and repetitive movements" (51). Indeed, Native Americans practice their spirituality by performing ceremonies with which they praise and celebrate their deities which are most commonly parts of nature.

Leslie Marmon Silko's novel *Ceremony,* through a narration that is alike the craft of Laguna storytelling, follows the story of Tayo, one such individual who experiences sickness caused by the identity crisis and who turns to the old sacred ceremonial traditions in order to restore the group identity as well as to define his own. Therefore, the focus of this chapter will be put on the usage of sacred ceremonial practices as the means of defining individual identity as well as preserving and restoring group identity.

Tayo is a young man that is of mixed descent - Anglo-American and Laguna Pueblo - just like Leslie Marmon Silko. He found himself lost in between the two worlds - the white world and the world at the Laguna Reservation. Being a mix of both worlds, but not really belonging to either, his identity issues started the day he was born. His mother had an affair with a white man and had Tayo with him. Never having met his father, Tayo had no connection to his father's white identity, thus being unable to identify himself with one half of his ethnicity. After spending the first few years of his childhood living in extreme poverty with his mother who had to resort to prostitution to get them by, he got left with her family at the Laguna Reservation. However, Tayo did not have any luck discovering and defining his identity on the reservation either, because both Tayo's existence and his mother's acts were considered a great shame to the family:

> " Since he could remember, he had known Auntie's shame for what his mother had done and Auntie's shame for him." (Silko, 53)

He was raised by his grandmother, his uncle Josiah, and his Auntie, growing up alongside his cousin Rocky. His Auntie was the one that condoned his mother's behaviour the most and has been raising Rocky and Tayo differently, often deliberately mistreating Tayo:

> "She wanted him close enough to feel excluded, to be aware of the distance between them" (Silko, 61-62).

As opposed to not caring about Tayo's future and Tayo's upbringing she put all her pride and work into raising her son Rocky. Wanting the best for him, she taught him to throw away his identity and to forget their sacred traditions:

> "They told him, 'Nothing can stop you now except one thing: don't let people at home hold you back.' Rocky understood what he had to do to win in the white outside world. After

> their first year at boarding school in Albuquerque, Tayo saw how Rocky deliberately avoided the old-time way… But Auntie never scolded him, and she never let Robert or Josiah talk to him either. She wanted him to be a success. She could see what white people wanted in an Indian, and she believed this way was his only chance." (Silko, 47)

The way Auntie brought up Rocky was very common amongst the Native Americans for they have been oppressed for so long and had been stripped of their rights and their land that they had no other choice than to teach their young to depart from their tribes and to leave their Native American identity and customs behind. If they managed to accept the customs of the white world well enough they could have a somewhat better future that sometimes even included high education and stable income.

When the recruitments for World War II started, Native American men were approached with respect and were lured into joining the army under the Army recruiter's false promise of equality:

> "'Anyone can fight for America,' he began, giving special emphasis to 'America,' 'even you boys. In a time of need, anyone can fight for her.'…'Now I know you boys love America as much as we do, but this is your big chance to show it!" ' (Silko, 59)

Rocky being eager to be accepted into the white urban society, as he was taught from a young age, enlisted into the army, dragging Tayo along with him. Sadly Rocky, just like many young Native American men, did not make it back home to their families, but instead, dying for their oppressors. Tayo was one of the "lucky" ones to have survived the war, even though it had affected him greatly.

Being utterly traumatised by the amount of death he had witnessed, by the death of his beloved cousin, and by the illusion of his uncle's death, Tayo was admitted to Veteran's hospital in Los Angeles upon returning from World War II. There Tayo first expresses how he felt as a victim of constant oppression whose identity was ambiguous:

> "The new doctor asked him if he had ever been visible, and Tayo spoke to him softly and said that he was sorry but nobody was allowed to speak to an invisible one…Tayo heard a voice answering the doctor. The voice was saying, 'He can't talk to you. He is invisible. His words are formed with an invisible tongue, they have no sound." ' (Silko, 14)

By having the protagonist declare himself invisible, Leslie Marmon Silko opens up the topic of how Native Americans are invisible in society. David Treuer argued in his lecture *Invisibility, Disappearance and the Native American Future* how "a fraction of the U.S. population and most Americans go through their lives without having had any meaningful or daily interactions with Native folk, and yet, Native Americans occupy vast tracts of imaginative space" (Claremont McKenna College). That invisibility undoubtedly stems from only one source - racism. However, there are many different directions that it branches out into. First and foremost, as mentioned in the introduction, Native Americans are completely invisible in the history of the making of the USA, even though their contributions are immense. According to Stephanie A. Fryberg and Nicole M. Stephens, race ostensibly has a great impact on one's opportunities in urban American society (115). As a result of centuries of racism, Native Americans are invisible in society when it comes to basic day-to-day life - when applying for jobs, when seeking education, and even in some extreme cases when seeking medical attention. Naturally, because of the way they are treated - as completely invisible - they feel like they are worth less than the white population they live amongst.

Just like other Native Americans living in the US after World War II took place, Tayo was treated as disposable and invisible by the white people. Ultimately, he succumbed under the oppression that has been weighing down on Native Americans for centuries. Witnessing his cousin's violent death, how young Native American men were treated, and what his sacred land was utilised for took a toll on his mental health, ultimately resulting in disturbing thoughts and inability to connect to any sort of elements in his surroundings that could bring him comfort (Rice, 116). The doctor that was in charge of Tayo's well-being tried to cure him and help him in any way he could but there was no cure. Running out of options, the doctor decided to send Tayo home in hopes that he would find peace there.

Returning to the reservation, Tayo spent his days wandering around with his childhood friends - Pinkie, Harley, Emo, and Leroy - who were also war veterans. Being unable to deal with the loss of identity as members of the urban society after their services were no longer needed made them turn to drinking. Almost as if performing a ceremony, their every gathering looked the same. They would start the night off by drinking "the beer in big mouthfuls like medicine" (Silko, 36). Just like Rocky, they were taught by their desperate mothers to forget their identity and their customs and were urged to exchange them with the ones of the white society. As a result, they would look back at the days when they served in the army with melancholy because that was the time when they got what they wanted the most - recognition and equal treatment by the white people. Once they got it

all taken away they could not help but blame themselves even though it was not their fault. They did that so strenuously, not realising that the feeling of incomplete and the feeling of loss was because they got a huge piece of their Native American identity taken away:

> "They spent all their checks trying to get back the good times…Here they were, trying to bring back that old feeling, that feeling they belonged to America the way they felt during the war. They blamed themselves for losing the new feeling; they never talked about it, but they blamed themselves just like they blamed themselves for losing the land the white people took. They never thought to blame white people for any of it; they wanted white people for their friends. They never saw that it was the white people who gave them that feeling and it was white people who took it away again when the war was over" (Silko, 39)

Just like the protagonist of N. Scott Momaday's novel "House Made of Dawn" - Abel - Tayo is unable to accept the way his friends were thinking, finding it preposterous to reminiscence the war days so gloriously and to admire white people that much. That almost made Tayo hate his friends:

> "He wanted to scream at Indians like Harley and Helen Jean and Emo that the white things they admired and desired so much - the bright city lights and loud music, the soft sweet food and the cars - all these things had been stolen, torn out of Indian land…" (Silko, 189)

However, on every occasion Tayo just drank with them in silence and refused to participate in recollecting war stories which fuelled Emo to act aggressively and obscenely towards Tayo, taking a dig at his biggest insecurity:

> ' " There he is. He thinks he's something all right. Because he's part white. Don't you, half-breed?' …..
> ' You drink like an Indian, and you're crazy like one too —- but you aren't shit, white trash. You love Japs the way your mother loved to screw white men." ' (Silko, 52-58)

Being unwelcome in the society outside the reservation, in his friend group, and even in his family, prevented Tayo from determining his identity. Not belonging anywhere and being stranded somewhere in between eventually led to Tayo falling even more sick than he was upon his discharge from Veteran Hospital. His state worried his grandmother considerably, prompting her to do

something about it before he gets hospitalised away from the reservation where he will certainly feel even more alienated:

> "That boy needs a medicine man. Otherwise, he will have to go away. Look at him.'… ' If I send for old Ku'oosh, he'll come." (Silko, 30-31)

Tayo's grandmother belongs to the older generation of the Laguna Pueblo that still believe in the healing properties of their sacred ceremonial traditions. She invited the reservation elder Ku'oosh to her home to take a look at her grandson in hopes that Tayo will be cured of his sickness.

When speaking of the ceremony as a sacred spiritual tradition it is hard to simply define it. According to The Britannica Dictionary, the ceremony is "a formal act or event that is a part of a social or religious occasion". It is very difficult to precisely say what one Native American ceremony should comprise of because every reservation has unique customs, and they practice them differently. However, they all strive towards the same objective - appreciating spirituality. In his essay *Themes in Native American Spirituality,* Lee Irwin argues that spirituality derives from engaging in practices that serve the purpose of binding tribe members closer together by encouraging personal affirmation that is essential for sustaining one's identity (311). That makes ceremonies of crucial importance for the Native American peoples at difficult times, especially when their group integrity is at its lowest.

Ku'oosh arrives at the grandmother's house and performs Scalp Ceremony on Tayo. Even though it helps Tayo forget dismembered bodies and other horrible scenes that he wistfully had to witness, it did not cure Tayo completely:

> "There are some things we can't cure like we used to,' he said, 'not since the white people came. The others who had the Scalp Ceremony, some of them are not better either. " (Silko, 35)

Not knowing what else to do, Ku'oosh tells Tayo's grandmother to send him to Gallup to see another reservation elder - Betonie- whom people residing on the same reservation consider crazy. However, Betonie did not lose his faith in his people as he "stands as an example of the evolution and the survival of Indian tradition" (Rice, 126) Upon talking to him Tayo felt very sceptic and did not have confidence when Betonie told him that he needs to perform another ceremony in order to heal. Being aware that Tayo did not believe that his healing is possible through ceremony he took it

upon himself to explain the importance of the ceremonial practice all while trying to break the stigma that was created around it:

> "The people nowadays have an idea about the ceremonies. They think the ceremonies must be performed exactly as they have always been done, maybe because one slip-up or mistake and the whole ceremony must be stopped and the sand painting destroyed. That much is true. (…) At one time, the ceremonies as they had been performed were enough for the way the world was then. But after the white people came, elements in this world began to shift; and it became necessary to create new ceremonies. I have made changes in the rituals. (…) Otherwise we won't make it. We won't survive. That's what the witchery is counting on: that we will cling to the ceremonies the way they were, and then their power will triumph, and the people will be no more " (Silko, 116-117)

Finally starting to trust him, Tayo begins to question what Indian ceremonies can do to battle the "sickness" Native American men picked up as they fought the war for the white people. Betonie assures him once again that the ceremony is important because he is not fighting white people with it:

> "They want us to believe all evil resides with white people. Then we will look no further to see what is really happening. They want us to separate ourselves from white people, to be ignorant and helpless as we watch our own destruction. But white people are only tools that the witchery manipulates…"(Silko, 122)

Realising that he has to fight witchcraft in order to feel whole again, Tayo embarks on a ceremonial journey even though he was not sure what his ceremony should comprise of.

What makes sacred Native American ceremonies so peculiar is the fact that they are incredibly enigmatic because most commonly the instructions come to the Native Americans in their dreams (Hultkrantz, 52). The same thing happened to Tayo:

> "He dreamed about the speckled cattle. They had seen him and they were scattering between juniper trees, through tall yellow grass, below the mesas near the dripping spring." (Silko, 134)

The cattle that Tayo dreamt of was his uncle Josiah's herd that was stolen from his family. Recognising this as an opportunity to bring back at least one piece of flora and fauna that had been stolen from the Laguna Reservation, Tayo embarks on a journey looking for the missing cattle. Walking along the wagon road back to Laguna Reservation he crossed paths with two mystic creatures - prophetess T'aesh and a mountain lion that helped him find the cattle that turned out to have been stolen by a white man called Floyd Lee. Tayo manages to rescue his uncle's cattle from Floyd's steel-wired fence and has safely returned to the reservation. However, he still felt incomplete. Thinking about what the next step in his identity reclaiming ceremony was, Tayo estranged himself from his friends and family deciding to reside out in the open.

On the field, with the cattle, he was once again approached by T'aesh. Suddenly, while talking to Tayo she had a vision revealing Tayo that his future does not bring a happy ending if he does not complete the ceremony. Hurriedly making his way back to the reservation Tayo runs into his drunken friends and he starts drinking with them realising that he needed them to finish the ceremony. Waking up completely hungover, Tayo wandered around searching for answers when he had an epiphany upon reaching the Jackpile Uranium Mine:

> "He walked to the mine shaft slowly, and the feeling became overwhelming: the pattern of the ceremony was completed there. He knelt and found an ore rock. The gray stone was streaked with powdery yellow uranium, bright and alive as pollen; veins of sooty black lines with the yellow, making mountain ranges and rivers across the stone. But they had taken these beautiful rocks from deep within earth and they had laid them in a monstrous design, realizing destruction on a scale only they could have dreamed." (Silko, 229)

Just like their wonderful land was "killed" by the uranium mine, Tayo had to offer a human sacrifice in order to kill the witchery. Returning to his friends with plans of murdering Emo on his mind Tayo suddenly remembered the warning against the bad intentions witchery that T'aesh gave him:

> "The end of the story. They want to change it. They want it to end here, the way all stories end (…) The violence of the struggle excites them, and the killing soothes them (…) And they would end this story right here, with you fighting to your death alone in these hills. Doctors from the hospital and the BIA police come. Some of the old men from Laguna come

too. They drive over there in their patrol cars (…) The doctors have medicine to quiet you. The others bring guns." (Silko, 215)

Tayo decided not to kill Emo, choosing not to condone violence no matter what the purpose was thus identifying himself as Native American, choosing spirituality over cruelty. However, his friends, who have thrown away their Native American identities to the point of no return, chose violence with which they completed the ceremony, stopping the witchery - Leroy and Harley died in a car crash and Pinkie got murdered by Emo.

In the end, Tayo returns to the Laguna reservation for good where he is finally accepted by his family, and his identity is finally defined. Tayo's happy ending proves that when it comes to one's identity, it is of great importance that individuals nurture and practice their traditions no matter how times have changed for it is possible to adjust them to the requirements of the urban lifestyle. No matter what the circumstances are, one cannot forget where one belongs.

Ten Little Indians

In the last two chapters, we have concluded that Navarre Scott Momaday and Leslie Marmon Silko have written novels that follow protagonists who have dealt with isolation and identity loss upon entering society. Those stories. met with immense success, have opened doors to many young, contemporary Native American writers. One such writer is Sherman Alexie, a Native American novelist, screenwriter, comedian, and poet. He was born in 1966 to a mixed family - mother of Spokane and father of Coeur d'Alene descent. Having suffered from hydrocephalus at the age of six months, Alexie's chances of survival were very small (Poetry Foundation). Against all odds, Alexie survived the surgery, and he made a quick recovery. Due to the damage it did to his brain, as a child he was constantly experiencing seizures.

Even though he was born on a Spokane Indian reservation in Wellpinit in Washington, his parents decided that he would find a better future and better education outside the reservation. However, when enrolled in school in Reardon he was faced with bullying from his peers due to the seizures and due to his Native American descent (Webb, 2). Having been exposed to intolerance and racism-driven bullying from a young age and having been a Native American that has moved away from his reservation gave him the first-hand experience of suffering and troubles that Native Americans living in urban society face on a day-to-day basis. That experience was so intense that it fuelled Alexie to turn to literature.

Because he lived on the reservation until the age of eighteen, his earlier works such as *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fist Fight in Heaven* are heavily focused on describing the life Native Americans have led on the reservations. However, in the following years, the focal point of his literary work shifted towards the lives of urban Native Americans and the various ways they try to assimilate into the cities where they have relocated. Hence he created *Ten Little Indians,* a collection of short stories that indeed prove the fact that the base of Alexie's works is established by his beliefs that "being Indian is the primary determinant of his identity" (Grassian, 7) and that "Indians can reside in the city but never live there"(Grassian, 5).

Ten Little Indians introduces us to nine different stories that follow nine Native American individuals who have found themselves stuck and lost in between two lives - the one they have had on the reservation and the one they are trying to build in the urban city of Seattle. Alexie deliberately chose Seattle as the city where the stories will be set, not just because it is the city where he lives but for its indistinguishable cultural margins (Ladino, 37).

With *Ten Little Indians* Alexie is refusing to feed into the overly romanticised image of Native Americans that was created in the mainstream media. He strives for authenticity as he tells stories from a completely different view than his literary predecessors. Aspiring to inspire his readers into thinking about the real issues Native Americans face he left behind the idealised, picturesque descriptions of the reservations and replaced them with the rough and rigid streets of Seattle. Alexie does it so passionately that he does whatever it takes to portray the situation as credibly as possible, no matter how shocking or deranged the scenes might turn out (Grassian, 14).

The collection of stories depicts the lives of urban Native Americans, that question many concepts related to their identity. Just like Abel and Tayo have performed a ceremony for the purpose of Native American identity reclamation, so have some of Alexie's short story protagonists. Therefore this chapter will put focus on the notion of modern-day, urban rendition of Native American sacred ceremonial tradition for the purpose of identity reclamation in the short stories *The Search Engine* and *What You Pawn I Will Redeem.*

THE SEARCH ENGINE

The Search Engine is the story that starts off Alexie's collection *Ten Little Indians* with a special purpose. According to Jennifer Ladino, it is an "instructional tale that teaches readers how to approach the rest of the book by setting up the key issues" (40). *The Search Engine* follows the life of young college student Corliss Joseph. She was born and raised on the Spokane Indian Reservation just like her parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents. Her story is different from the one of her predecessors. Being born into a poor, Native American family it was almost as if her future was already predetermined, fitting into the mould of prejudice:

> "She seemed destined for a minimum-wage life of waiting tables or changing oil"(Alexie, 5)

However, Corliss has decided to take the matters into her own hands and make a better future for herself by collecting cans to be able to afford SAT-prep classes. She did that in order not to be forced to apply for an unsuitable public college. Alongside the classes, Corliss would also contact local prep schoolteachers, whom she described as good white people, trying to find out which books were used in their classes. To spite the centuries of having been stolen from by the white people, she had accumulated the information without paying for it, considering herself "a resourceful thief, a

narcissistic Robin Hood who stole a rich education from white people and kept it" (Alexie, 5). With the classes that she had taken, she managed to achieve a lot of academic success as well as win numerous scholarships that provided her with money to escape the poverty line.

Corliss' story began when she overheard a young couple talk about poetry. The man that was trying to impress the woman he was with was wrongly quoting poets. Since Corliss could be considered a poetry fanatic, the conversation that was taking place at the table next to her got her attention. The woman saw right through the man's lies and she left the man alone. Corliss invited herself into conversation with the man and after having discussed W. H. Auden with him, she was inspired to go to the Washington University library.

The scene that had taken place at the library is considered the most crucial scene in this short story. It perfectly depicts what Corliss' life is like all while being stuck in between the two worlds - the one she left behind when she left the reservation and the one she is trying to build at college - and it introduces the solution as to how to mend those two worlds together. Corliss was looking for W. H. Auden's collection of poems when she accidentally came across a book of poems by Harlan Atwater - a poet that she never heard of - that carried the title *"Reservation of My Mind"*. She was immediately intrigued by the title and upon opening the book and reading Atwater's biography she realised that he is of Spokane descent just like her. Holding this book in her hands is very important to Corliss because for her it was proof that one can keep their Native American identity intact while writing poetry - something that her family considered to be a white people thing:

> "Maybe she wanted to frighten people with the size of her poetic love.
> "I bet you're reading one of those white books again, enit?" the first uncle asked.
> "His name is Gerard Manley Hopkins," Corliss said. "He wrote poems in the nineteenth century,"
> "White people were killing Indians in the nineteenth century," the second uncle said. "I bet this Hopkins dude was killing Indians, too."(Alexie, 13)

Now it was the other way around. Corliss' Native American family, after their ancestors and themselves have been oppressed for centuries, are developing prejudice towards white poets, thinking that they all must have been oppressors for they are white. Instead of accepting poetry as something beautiful they tie it to the notion of torture and killing, thus condemning Corliss for wanting to venture into poetry herself. Corliss has decided to go on a ceremonial quest to search for Harland Atwater. Jennifer Ladino explained that "though the means for undertaking this kind of quest may

have changed, the search for identity, her own identity as an individual, her tribal identity as a Spokane Indian, and even a collective human identity is still at its core."(41) Wondering why has she come across this book just now, even though it was published in 1972, she could not help but think about how Atwater's poetry could have helped her prove that Native Americans can write and enjoy poetry:

> "Maybe this book could have saved her years of shame. Instead of trying to hide her poetry habit from her friends and family, and sneaking huge piles of poetry books into her room, maybe she could have proudly read a book of poems at the dinner table. She could have held that book above her head and shouted, "See, look, it's a book of poems by another Spokane, what are you going to do about that?" Instead, she'd endured endless domestic interrogations about her bookish nature."(Alexie, 12)

In this modern rendition of a ceremonial quest, Corliss starts off the search party by questioning her mother about Atwater. However, even though apparently from the same reservation, her mother had never heard of anyone named Harland Atwater. Corliss continued her ceremonial quest by switching to going through the actual woods with going through cyber woods - the internet. Naming herself "CrazyIndian" she did not manage to find anything about Atwater searching everywhere:

> "She typed "Harland Atwater, Native American poet, Spokane Indian" into the search engine and found nothing. She didn't find him with any variations of the search, either. She couldn't find his book on Amazon. com, Alibris.com, or Powells.com. She couldn't find any evidence that Harlan Atwater's book ever existed."(Alexie, 20)

Upon finding almost nothing on the internet, Corliss began doubting Atwater's existence. After she had found that he lives in Seattle and has found his address and phone number, Corliss took her search one step further - deciding to look for him in person. Corliss dialled the number and was surprised to get an answer. Talking to Atwater, she finds out that is not his real name. Corliss praised Atwater for his poetry and was met with an unexpected answer when she told him that she is Spokane as well:

> "Listen, kid, I'm impressed you found my book of poems. Shoot, I only printed up about three thousand of them, and I lost most of them. Hell, I'm flattered you found me. But I didn't want to be found."(Alexie, 26)

The answer she got from Atwater made Corliss doubt his authenticity even more than before. That made her set out on a journey to Seattle and try to find him at the address that she found on the internet, justifying her decision to travel so far by thinking of and following her ancestor's ways, strengthening her Native American identity:

> "Long ago, as part of the passage into adulthood, young Indians used to wander into the wilderness in search of a vision, in search of meaning and definition. Who am I? Who am I supposed to be? Ancient questions answered by ancient ceremonies. Maybe Corliss couldn't climb a mountain or starve herself into self-revealing hallucinations. Maybe she'd never find her spirit animal, her ethereal guide through the material world. Maybe she was only a confused indigenous woman negotiating her way through a colonial maze, but she was one Indian who had good credit and knew how to use her Visa card." (Alexie, 27)

Because she was slowly starting to separate from her Native American identity and was unable to identify herself as a white person, Corliss began to question her social identity. An individual can only have their social identity determined and set if they are able to relate to "a set of individuals who hold a common social identification or view themselves as members of the same social category" (Stets and Burke, 225). Being stuck between the two worlds, she sees Atwater as a manifestation of her ideal social group - a Native American that is both Native American and white. She wants to identify as a Native American, but she also wants to indulge in traditions and activities that her Native American family condones, and by finding Atwater, Corliss believes that they can form a social group of her preference, and ultimately start belonging once again by merging the two worlds.

Thus, she embarked on a journey hoping to prove to everybody that a mix of both exists, ultimately trying to form a tribe of her own, right there in the urban world. Upon arriving in Seattle she is met with a homeless man that asks her money for food in exchange for directions. She feels sorry for the homeless man, and in a way sympathises with him "because she was Indian, displaced by colonial rule, Corliss had always been approximately homeless. Like the homeless, she lived a dan-

gerous and random life" (Alexie, 29). Both the homeless man and Corliss did not know whom they were anymore, not feeling at home anywhere.

Showing up to Atwater's doors Corliss knocked and, judging by the looks, a Native American man opened them for her. Having imagined a "perfect" Native American man she was shocked and surprised to find out he was an approximately sixty-year-old man that was "smelly" just like her uncles. Corliss started bombarding him with random questions, finding out that Harland does not care for his poetry and had stopped writing, which made her hopes for finding the proof, that she can be Native American and a poet, die. However, according to Corliss, not all hope was gone because Atwater had proposed that they go talk at the local used-book store which in her eyes proved that he still had an interest in books.

Both arriving at the bookstore, they sat down to talk. Confessing his true story, Harland completely broke Corliss' heart - he is not a Spokane Native American:

> "She knew it! He was a fraud! He was a white man with a good tan!
> 'Well I'm biologically a Spokane Indian,' he said. 'But I wasn't raised Spokane. I was adopted out and raised by a white family here in Seattle'"(Alexie, 40)

Even though Atwater was of Spokane Native American descent, being Native American was not a part of his identity. No matter how much he tried to, he just could not identify with Native Americans for he was not taught his culture and traditions. He decided to fake being a Native American when writing his poems. However, he stopped writing because he found himself lost between the world he was raised in that praised him and the world in which he ethnically belonged that had shown him hate:

> "No matter what I write, a bunch of other Indians will hate it because it isn't Indian enough, and a bunch of white people will like it because it's Indian'…
> 'I stared writing poems to feel like I belonged,' he said 'To feel more Indian. And I started imagining what it felt like to grow up on the reservation, to grow up like an Indian is supposed to grow up, you know?" (Alexie, 41)

They ended up talking about what is Native American and what is not. Ultimately, they have concluded that just like Atwater does not know what Native American is, neither does Corliss, even though she was raised on the Spokane reservation. She realised that "she knew the name of her

tribe, and the name of her archaic clan, and her public Indian name, and her secret Indian name, but everything else she knew about Indians was ambiguous and transitory." (Alexie, 52). Their conversation ended the moment Corliss asked Atwater what his real name was. He got up and walked away from the store, leaving Corliss' question unanswered. By doing so, Atwater taught Corliss that "ethnicity is just one component of life, and when one chooses to make ethnicity the focal point of life, the result is a limited experience" (Webb, 50). In other words, Corliss' ceremonial journey of Native American identity reclamation ended with Corliss realising that, even though both she and Atwater are Spokane Indians, they have to find their own identity in the urban world. They can and should hold onto their Native American identity and the traditions that come with it, but they also have to embrace new traditions and customs imposed by the urban world they are assimilating into.

WHAT YOU PAWN I WILL REDEEM

What You Pawn I Will Redeem is a story that follows the protagonist Jackson Jackson in his ceremonial Native American identity reclamation. It is "an implicit antiracist agenda that challenges readers to open their eyes to the historical roots and racial dimensions of ongoing injustice like homelessness and poverty" (Ladino, 40). Just like Corliss, Jackson has found himself on a ceremonial quest to preserve and reclaim his identity.

Jackson Jackson is a Spokane Indian man that was raised on the reservation but has moved to Seattle for college. After realising that he is severely unhappy with the life that he has built with his wife and kids, he decides to become a homeless man, blaming losing interest in everything on the "asocial disorder" he was diagnosed with. Even though he is a homeless Native American, he looks down upon them:

> "Homeless Indians are everywhere in Seattle. We're common and boring, and you walk right on by us, with maybe a look of anger or disgust or even sadness at the terrible fate of the noble savage" (Alexie, 170)

However, it is most likely that Jackson does not have an asocial disorder, rather he is unable to assimilate into the urban world for as soon as he saw a way to reconnect with his Native American identity his life suddenly had a purpose after all.

One day he was walking around with his friends Junior and Rose that are likewise homeless Native Americans. They came across a pawn shop and looking into the window, Jackson recognised

his grandmother's regalia that was stolen from his family fifty years ago. However, he was not completely sure that it belonged to his family, so he decided to enter the pawn shop to try and identify it. At first, the pawnbroker did not believe Jackson and called him a liar. Jackson explained that it was his family's signature to sew in a yellow bead inside. Upon finding the bead inside it was confirmed that it was in fact Jackson's family regalia. Jackson asked for his regalia back because he had only five dollars in his pocket and could not afford to buy it off of pawnbroker. Naturally, he was met with disagreement from the pawnbroker for he had paid a lot of money for it. Even though Junior proposed calling the police, Jackson decided not to call, knowing it would have been useless. Instead, the pawnbroker and Jackson made a deal:

> "How about this? I'll give you twenty-four hours to come up with nine hundred and ninety-nine dollars. You come back here at lunchtime tomorrow with the money, and I'll sell it back to you. How does that sound?"(Alexie, 174)

Pawnbroker gave Jackson twenty dollars as a head start and alongside his friends Rose and Junior, Jackson embarked on a spiritual, ceremonial quest to find nine hundred and seventy-four dollars more.

The first stop of their magical quest was 7-Eleven where they obtained "three bottles of imagination" (Alexie, 174). In this modern rendition of a spiritual quest, Alexie ironically replaced magical potions with alcohol, having a sarcastic take on the alcoholism problems that are very common amongst Native Americans for reasons such as trauma, violence, poverty, unemployment, discrimination, racism, lack of health insurance and lack of education (American Addiction Centres). The results of the 2018 National Survey on Drug Use and Health show how serious the problem is by claiming that over 10% of Native Americans have a substance use disorder, out of which 7,1% is taken up by alcohol use disorder. (American Addiction Centres).

The first one to drop out of their ceremonial quest was Rose that gave up the idea of assimilation whilst reclaiming identity and went back to the Toppenish reservation where she spent the rest of her days living with her sister.

While Jackson was waiting for Junior to sober up so they could continue their quest, he started thinking about his grandmother that died of cancer:

> "I wondered if my grandmother's cancer had started when somebody stole her powwow regalia. Maybe the cancer started in her broken heart and then leaked out into her breasts. I

know it's crazy, but I wondered if I could bring my grandmother back to life if I brought back her regalia"(Alexie, 176).

With this, Alexie emphasises how dangerous losing a piece of one's identity can be. Jackson thinks that his grandmother has gotten cancer because a piece of her identity was stolen from her, ultimately tying the concept of identity loss to death. He believes that by bringing back regalia, he can bring back his grandmother and bring back his own identity.

Going ahead, he went to his old boss "Big Boss" in need of a loan. He asked for one thousand four hundred and thirty papers that he could sell, but he was given fifty free papers. Jackson ended up selling only five papers and the money he made was spent on McDonald's.

The next stop of his was a Korean convenience store where Jackson's love interest Kay worked at. Deciding to try his luck with gambling, Jackson buys scratch tickets and wins one hundred dollars. In his Native American nature he decides to share the money that he won by giving Kay twenty dollars, justifying it by saying that it is tribal:

"No, it's tribal. It's an Indian thing. When you win, you're supposed to share with your family." (Alexie, 181)

Wanting to share his happiness with Junior, Jackson realises that he is gone too, learning later that Junior went to Portland where he died in an alley behind a hotel.
Embarking on the rest of the journey on his own, Jackson stumbled upon "Big Heart's":

"Big Heart's is an all-Indian bar. Nobody knows how or why Indians migrate to one bar and turn it into an official Indian bar."(Alexie, 181)

There, instead of keeping his money to buy off the regalia, elated by the scenery of Native Americans being together in one place, Jackson treated all of the guests with five shots:

"I didn't know any of them, but Indians like to belong, so we all pretended to be cousins." (Alexie, 182)

Getting completely drunk, Jackson passed out. Waking up the next morning, realising that all of his money was gone, Jackson decided to commit suicide. Luckily, he was stopped by his friend Of-

ficer Williams. Begging Officer Williams not to take him to prison to sober up for 24 hours, Jackson explained his story and earned himself thirty more dollars. On the way to the pawn shop, Jackson ran into three Aleut men that were waiting for a ship. Sitting on the bench with them he asked them if they knew any songs, wanting them to sing something sacred:

> ‘ “I’m talking about ceremonial songs, you know, religious ones. The songs you sing back home when you’re wishing and hoping’
> ‘What are you wishing and hoping for?”
> ‘I’m wishing my grandmother was still alive.’”(Alexie, 191)

The three Aleuts sang to Jackson’s request, their sacred songs replacing singing as a very important element of Native American ceremonial ritual. Deciding to treat them too, for they sang so beautifully, he took them to get breakfast. Spending twenty-five dollars left him with five dollars - the same amount he had when he started the quest. Going back to the pawn shop, the pawnbroker asked him how much money he had earned. Jackson admitted that he had only five dollars but that they are not the same five dollars he had yesterday. Upon hearing that, the pawnbroker told him to take the regalia as a gift. Taking his regalia and walking out happily, Jackson felt complete:

> “I took my grandmother’s regalia and walked outside. I knew that solitary yellow bead was part of me. I knew I was that yellow bead in part. Outside, I wrapped myself in my grandmother’s regalia and breathed her in. I stepped off the sidewalk and into the intersection. Pedestrians stopped. Cars stopped. The city stopped. They all watched me dance with my grandmother. I was my grandmother, dancing” (Alexie, 194)

Jackson was no longer lost, and he felt happy reconnecting with the piece of his identity. Even though getting that regalia back was not a sure way for Jackson to reclaim his identity, this ceremonial quest of his is concrete proof of how much he cherished his identity (Webb, 56).

Ultimately, through Jackson and Corliss’ stories, Alexie proved that there are only three ways one’s assimilation into urban society can go. They can give up and go back to the reservation like Rose, refuse to assimilate like Junior and die on the streets, or like Corliss and Jackson they can nourish their identity through ceremonial Native American identity reclamation, all while adapting to the customs and ways of living in the urban cities and forming unique tribes of their own.

Conclusion

After taking a look into what identity is, we can conclude that it is a matter that is heavily subjected to change in accordance with societal standards. Even though identity comprises of personal perception, alongside race and ethnicity, it is difficult for individuals belonging to minority groups to identify themselves when forced to assimilate into a society that is unaccepting and intolerant. Faced with racism and "whitewashing", Native Americans often tend to throw away their cultural identity just so they could belong once again. Many Native American writers took those hardships as an encouragement to create numerous inspirational stories that tell their truth in its unbiased form. Navarre Scott Momaday, Leslie Marmon Silko, and Sherman Alexie belong to three different generations of Native American writers. Yet, they write about the same topics, which proves that Native Americans have been having identity issues for a long time and that it is still ongoing.

N. Scott Momaday's novel *House Made of Dawn* and Leslie Marmon Silko's novel *Ceremony* introduce us to two young Native American men - Abel and Tayo - that have similar faiths, both having to assimilate into the white society upon returning from World War II. They are met with oppression, racism, and brutality that made them desperate, lost, and ultimately left them with the inability to identify neither as Native American nor as white. Abel and Tayo were failing to assimilate, and they almost lost all connections with their Native American identity. Ultimately, that led them to return to the customs of their culture in hopes of identity reclamation - Abel returns to the reservation land where he feels connected to his heritage, while Tayo performs a ceremony. Likewise, identity issues are at the heart of Sherman Alexie's collection of short stories *Ten Little Indians*. Corliss and Jackson - protagonists of the short stories *The Search Engine* and *What You Pawn I Will Redeem* - are two young urban Native Americans that, even though their stories take place over 50 years later than Abel and Tayo's, face similar problems. Corliss searches for a social group with which she can identify, while Jackson embarks on a journey to reclaim a piece of his culture - his grandmother's regalia.

In conclusion, tragic events that took place in Native American history and the way Native American people are treated by the white society created a living space that is highly inadequate and confusing. Lost between the two worlds, Native American people are left with a choice - either give up their culture, their traditions, and their identity, and endure the racism or be completely isolated. Since the latter option leads to complete moral calamity, in most cases individuals opt for blending into society. As the times change, one can only hope that, in the near future, society will become open enough to accept and nurture diversity, which would ultimately prevent minority groups, such as Native Americans, from experiencing identity issues.

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