

2023. január

“There’s something about him that feels like family”: (Re)interpretations of Family in
Tommy Orange’s *There There*

1. Introduction

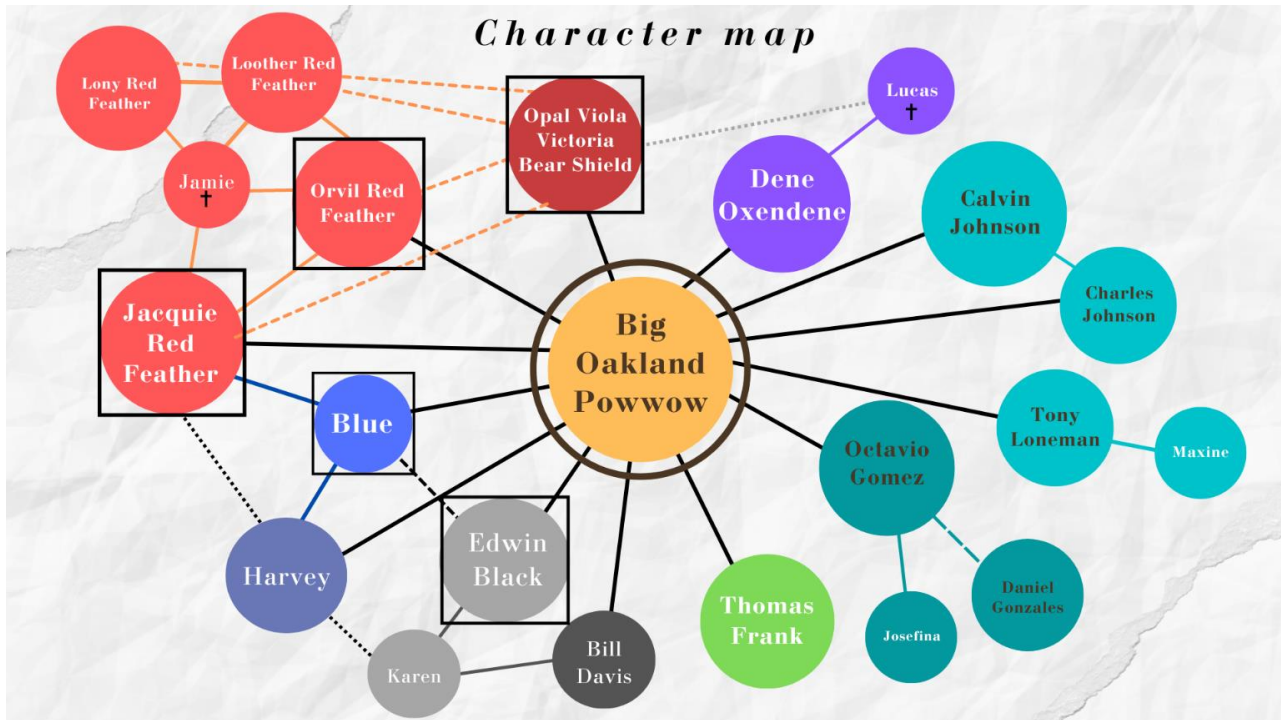
By the beginning of the twenty-first century, approximately two thirds of Native Americans in the United States lived in urban areas, thus, the experience of being indigenous in a metropolitan environment have been common (Perdue and Green 101). In my paper, I analyze several characters of a fictional work to illustrate how the concepts of “family” influence the construction of cultural identity. Although the characters are fictitious, their life stories are not unique in real-life indigenous communities, thus, Tommy Orange’s *There There* can be read as a sociography of Oakland’s urban American Indian demographic.

Family is the fundamental concept of the novel, both literal and figurative meanings are attached to it. The narrative focuses on personal and communal relationships parallel with individual identity constructions. In Chapter two I introduce the historical, social, and cultural background of urban Indian existence. I discuss how the understanding of family is influenced by the introduction of the 1978 Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA), and how the characters construct or reconstruct their personal and cultural identity. In the last Chapter, I analyze the importance of family, identity struggles, and the parallel presence of traditional and contemporary notions in five storylines.

There There is the debut novel by Orange, published in 2018, and the story is also set in the late 2010s. I study how the concepts of family appear in the novel through the characters’ storylines, and how the novel reflects the life of contemporary indigenous communities in the US. ICWA’s central role in the narrative makes the book all the more relevant, as the act’s constitutionality is currently challenged in the adoption case of an indigenous child at the U.S. Supreme Court (Asgarian).

Narrators appear in one another’s chapters more and more frequently as the story progresses, this way the bonds among them are gradually outlined. By the time of the powwow—which serves as the climax of the plot—every character is related to one another—and to the powwow—with multiple ties, thus creating a complex network of relation(ship)s, which serves as the subtext of the novel revealed for the reader, but the characters are

unaware of it. The spiderweb-like representation of these bonds expresses that the two main family concepts of the novel are inseparable, since the narrators are all part of Oakland's urban Indian family, while they are surrounded by their blood relatives. In my color-coded character map, I use different types of lines to indicate how the people are connected to one another and the central event, the Big Oakland Powwow.



Legend:

Names in black brackets: characters analyzed in-depth (see Chapter 3)

Colors: characters with the same color, or similar shades belong to one family or one friend group

Black lines: attendees of the Big Oakland Powwow

Character name in black: the perpetrators of the shooting at the Powwow

Black cross under the name: these characters are deceased in the present of the novel, but they appear in flashbacks

Straight lines: direct family members

Dotted lines: romantic relationships

Short dash lines: siblings or half-siblings

Long dash lines: cousins

My hypothesis is that in *There There*, Orange demonstrates the main problems contemporary urban Indians struggle with both at communal and personal levels, with regard to the various concepts of family and its relation to identity construction. Indigenous identity is inseparable from being a member of a group, which is most often a tribe or a reservation community (Weaver 245). Native Americans in metropolitan areas are referred to as urban Indians, who may construct their identity without reservation or tribal affiliations. Urban American Indians are often conflicted about their ethnic identity, since they developed their generalized indigenous self-perception independent of a specific tribe or a reservation community (Lucero 327). For them, the meaning of family is shaped by the simultaneous presence of tribal traditionalism and the modernity of the urban lifestyle in the same metropolitan space, which is reflected in ICWA's placement preference. The involvement of the extended family and the community's participation in raising children is a conventional part of many Native American cultures (Halverson et al. 322). This notion is incorporated in the 1978 ICWA, which prioritizes placing children in the care of indigenous adoptive parents. In order to support my arguments, I have selected five of the twelve narrators to demonstrate how the cultural, social, and historical factors, such as adoption, and the 1969 Alcatraz occupation shape their notion of family and their affiliation with their Native American roots. These narrators demonstrate the consequences of the presence of the long-term effects of relocation policies and urbanization, such as alcoholism, cultural rootlessness, and the hardships of (re)connecting with their Native American identity on a personal level. The complex, interconnected structure that the characters form together represents how the urban community functions as a family for those who want to embrace their indigenous culture but are unable to do so with their blood relatives.

The plot is rather complicated to summarize as the twelve narrators all have their separate storylines in a Faulknerian manner. Apparently, every character introduces their own narratives which, at first glance, seem unrelated. The reader gradually discovers the network of relations among the characters as the narrators prepare for the Big Oakland Powwow where the climatic shooting takes place. This violent scene is presented from all the characters' points of view.

Opal Viola Victoria Bear Shield, who is in her fifties, often ponders about her past, especially about the 1969 Alcatraz occupation she witnessed when she was a child. There she sees her half-sister, Jacquie getting drunk for the first time in her life, starting her battle with addiction. Opal lived through that Alcatraz Island, which was to be a promise land based on what their mother told them (see Chapter 2.1), was turning into one of the worst experiences

of her life. When the occupation had ended, the girls' mother died, and they got into the foster care system together. A year later, they lost contact since Jacquie turned eighteen, she had to leave and start her adult life independently. Forty years later, Opal is raising Jacquie's three grandsons since she is the closest relative who can adopt them in accordance with ICWA placement preferences. Opal tries to keep Orvil, Loothe, and Lony Red Feather away from Cheyenne culture in order to protect them from the possible disappointments stemming from participating in events organized by the tribal community. In spite of her efforts, the oldest boy, Orvil, finds a regalia Opal keeps hidden in her house. Opal knows that Orvil will take part in the upcoming powwow as a dancer, so she goes to the venue in secret to see him dance. Several months before the big event, Opal starts to talk to Jacquie, who asks Opal if they could meet in Oakland, because the older sister decides to try finding her daughter there. On the day of the powwow, Opal finds her grandchildren and, accidentally, meets Jacquie. Together they take Orvil to hospital where they wait for a doctor to inform them about the injuries he suffered at the shoutout.

Jacquie Red Feather is newly sober when she attends an AA meeting where, by chance, she meets the man who raped her decades ago during the Alcatraz occupation. She tells the man, Harvey, that she gave birth to a girl whom she gave up for adoption. Since ICWA had not yet been introduced when she had her baby, the child was removed from the family to be raised by strangers. Jacquie and Harvey decide to try finding their daughter when they both return to Oakland to attend the Big Oakland Powwow. In the months leading up to the event, Jacquie reconnects with her half-sister, Opal. Jacquie never met her three grandsons Opal is raising but, at least, she is finally able to look at pictures of them her sister sent her since she had adopted the boys. Jacquie is ready to visit her grandchildren and see her sister again, making the trip to Oakland a milestone in her progress towards sobriety. At the Big Oakland Powwow, Jacquie meets her daughter—a fact she does not realize at the moment, but the reader is aware of. Following the shooting, she and Harvey help Opal get Orvil to hospital.

Blue is the main organizer of the powwow which she does as a way of reconnecting with her indigenous cultural roots. She was adopted by white people when she was an infant, before the introduction of ICWA, thus she did not have any relationship with the Cheyenne community she wants to belong to in her adulthood. At the age of eighteen, Blue found out that her birth mother is a Cheyenne woman called Jacquie Red Feather, who used to live in the Oakland area. Blue marries a man of the same tribe, and the couple moves to the tribe's reservation in Oklahoma. As time passes, her husband, Paul, becomes more and more

aggressive to her. Blue decides to leave this abusive relationship and move back to Oakland where she grew up. By returning, she has the chance to get in touch with her birth mother, but she cannot find any information on the Red Feather family. As she starts to organize the Big Oakland Powwow, she develops a friendship with Edwin, who works as an intern at the Indian Center. On the day of the powwow, she accompanies Edwin as he meets his father, Harvey, for the first time in his life. There is a woman with Harvey, whom Blue recognizes as her biological mother when she introduces herself to Blue as Jacquie Red Feather. Not long after, Blue figures that Harvey might be her biological father.

Edwin Black is an unemployed young man desperate to find out which tribe he belongs to. He struggles with the idea of being Native American, but not knowing anything about his tribal background frustrates him. He does not fall under ICWA's protection, thus he seeks a chance to be an active member of Oakland's indigenous community—see Chapter 2.3. Working on the powwow organizing committee as an intern is a particularly important opportunity for him, since he finally manages to reach out to his biological father, Harvey, whom he meets for the first time at the Big Oakland Powwow. At the venue, he at last introduces himself to his father, but his happiness is cut short by the shooting. Edwin is shot in the stomach, and it remains open whether he survives his injury.

Orvil Red Feather is a fourteen-year-old boy, who is on a journey to discover his Cheyenne roots he has been kept away from by his guardian, Opal—as explained above. He enters the indigenous community by participating in a dance contest at the Big Oakland Powwow. Along with the fellow dancers, Orvil takes part in the opening ceremony of the powwow, where he gets shot and is taken to hospital and, similarly to Edwin, it remains unresolved whether he survives his injuries.

The relations of the characters form the privilege subtext of *There There*; readers are aware of the connections, but the narrators are not. As the network of links is revealed, the overarching theme of identity construction also unfolds. The book is divided into four sections—“Remain,” “Reclaim,” “Return,” and “Powwow”—whereby the titles indicate the characters' approach towards their urban Indian cultural identity. As the story progresses, most characters find their way back to their Native heritage while they prepare for the powwow. In “Remain,” the plot does not move forward in time, because every narrator in this section tells their story through flashbacks. Chapters in the second section follow one another in chronological order, while the story leads to the main event, the Big Oakland Powwow, that links all twelve narrators together. In “Return,” narrators recall important episodes in their lives that had a significant impact on how they relate to their Native American cultural

identity. “Powwow” chapters are set at the Big Oakland Powwow, where a robbery and shooting take place, making the event a turning point in the life of the indigenous community and individual characters as well.

Most chapters include third person omniscient narration, but several are told from the first-person point of view. A few characters have both first- and third-person narratives, for example, Opal. The first-person point of view is only employed for flashbacks if the given narrator has processed the past event. Opal’s and Jacquie’s Alcatraz experience serve as an illustration: Opal can describe her time on Alcatraz Island in her own voice, because she dealt with her trauma. Jacquie’s chapters, on the other hand, may not include her point of view, since she is still processing her pain in the present.

The climax of the novel is the day of the powwow, because in addition to the shootout, which affects everyone present at the venue, some of the narrators’ face changes in their personal lives, thus (re)defining their relationship to their Native American identity. Edwin meets his father for the first time, and Orvil is dancing at the powwow. These changes are crucial in the personal lives of the characters and several of them take place simultaneously. The shooting makes the occasion cathartic at a communal level too, since it becomes a collective traumatic experience for the indigenous community of Oakland.

The falling action and the resolution are entirely missing, the open ending leaves the reader with many questions concerning the future of the characters. Although *There There* does not provide an answer for what happens after the powwow, the sequel hopefully will. Orange has confirmed in an interview that *Wandering Stars*, to be published in 2023, will uncover the resolution to the powwow shooting (Ramirez).

2. The historical background and the socio-cultural environment of contemporary urban Indian communities

2.1. Urban Indianism: Historical Background

The federal government introduced training programs in the 1950s, for example the Employment Assistance Program of 1952, and the Adult Vocational Program of 1957, in order to encourage young Native Americans to move from reservations to cities, where people were less likely to maintain their cultural identity (Cosgrove 9). In 1954, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) opened several Relocation Branches, which coordinated the transportation, employment, and housing for indigenous people, who sought better job opportunities in the industrialized areas of the US (Perdue and Green 72). Relocation centers, including Los Angeles, Chicago, and Oakland, became the new home for many Native Americans. This meant assimilating the indigenous demographic into the dominant society, while simultaneously eliminating protective measures from tribes, which supported them beforehand (Fixico 108). Relocates were placed far from their reservations to prevent them from returning or keeping in touch with their families (Fixico 111), an assimilationist attempt to fracture Native American cultural identities. In the two decades between the 1940s and the 1960s, approximately 120 000 people moved from reservations to a metropolis (Perdue and Green 72). The unfamiliar environment induced a culture shock for many relocatees, who were socialized in rural areas, thus, enhancing their alienation in order to lead them towards losing their indigenous identity, as the federal government intended (Fixico 113). As a coping mechanism, many of them started to develop self-destructive behaviors, which included the escalation of alcoholism and the increase in suicide rate within the Native American population in metropolitan areas. Low self-esteem was also a common fallout of urbanization (Fixico 115).

Self-identification and the individual's relation with their community are interconnected, thus, distance from the reservation and family made relocatees question the validity of their Native American identity. Failure to integrate into the metropolitan surroundings drove many people back to their reservations, further from the whims of the federal government, and closer to their cultural environment (Fixico 117). Relocation to urban areas continued after the federal programs ended, thus, at the beginning of the twentieth century, roughly two-thirds of the indigenous population resided in metropolitan regions (Perdue and Green 73). Consequently, more indigenous people embrace urban Indian identity than land-based, that is, reservation affiliation. This makes *There There* relevant not only for contemporary audiences, but also for future generations as well.

Relocation explicitly appears in Jacquie's storyline; although she goes from one metropolis to another, she is a (stereo)-typical relocatee, because she starts a new life in a place where she has no family or friends. Also, she struggles with alcohol addiction, which is a common among Native people trying to cope with adjusting to the new environment. Blue goes through a reverse relocation journey, moving from Oakland to a reservation, then back to the city, as I explain in Chapter 3.3.

Dissatisfaction with and disappointment in the urban Indian experience culminated in the 1969 Alcatraz occupation. Relocation policies and their long-term effects led to the first few-day-long takeover in 1964, claiming that the island is Native land (Strange and Loo 56). In 1969, when the San Francisco Indian Center burned down, it served as a catalyst for indigenous people in the San Francisco Bay area to seize the island for a second time (Kelly 171). Another reason for the second, long-term occupation was the growing social tension between the indigenous population and the federal government in the 1960s. The Civil Rights movement, the rise of feminism, and the failure of the Vietnam war were all the breeding ground for the protest of different classes and ethnic groups, the indigenous population being no exception (T. Johnson 65). Due to the above-listed reasons, university students from San Francisco State University arrived on Alcatraz Island on 9 November 1969, and reclaimed the island, but they were removed by police the next day (Kelly 171). Following the brief and unsuccessful occupation, Richard Oakes, a twenty-seven-year-old Mohawk university student, gathered supporters and started to organize a larger association to take over the island. As a result, "Indians of All Tribes" came into being (T. Johnson 68). On 20 November, about a hundred Indigenous protestors arrived on the island, this time refusing to leave when federal officials accused them of trespassing federal property (Strange and Loo 56). The general public supported the takeover in its early days by donating money and food, along with providing boats for transportation, however, interest decreased as the new settlement on the island lengthened and stagnated (DeLuca 16). Non-Native occupants affiliated with the hippie movement introduced drugs and alcohol on the Rock, which were originally banned by the first occupiers (T. Johnson 70). Oakes left when his daughter had suffered major head injuries while playing in one of the abandoned buildings in early January 1970, and died days a few days afterwards (DeLuca 16). Following long months of unsuccessful negotiations between the occupants and the General Service Administration responsible for federal properties, on 11 June 1971, U.S. marshals arrived on the island, evicting the last fifteen people residing on Alcatraz (Bauer 98).

The occupation can be seen both as a failure and a success. The original goal to permanently occupy the island and create a residential area for Native Americans with facilities, such as a school and a hospital, was not achieved, since the unity of the occupants in terms of objectives disintegrated shortly after their arrival on Alcatraz. On the other hand, this event is symbolic when public opinion and political attitude towards indigenous people is in the focus. The federal government gave back land to several tribes in the following years of the occupation, which was a catalyst for moderate changes in the Nixon administration's policies concerning Native Americans (Kotlowski 208).

The Alcatraz occupation and the concomitant changes in Native American policies did not only affect indigenous communities, but also impacted their members personally. The takeover was to draw attention to the problems of both reservation and urban Indians, and to initiate changes in the federal government's policies concerning Native Americans (Kahle 111). With the first occupation attempt, and the fire at the Indian Center, urban Indians realized that occupying is an opportunity to achieve their goals of having a new place for community center, and to make mainstream society notice the injustices inflicted on Native Americans. The occupiers of the island saw the possibility of unifying indigenous people in order to reignite indigenous activism (Kahle 113). With the social changes brought about by relocation, the need for an alliance between reservation and urban Indians arose. The majority of Native Americans perceived the Alcatraz occupation as a symbolic first step in (re)claiming indigenous cultural identity, and setting an example for future generations (Kahle 114). In comparison with the glorification of the occupation, Opal and Jacquie's stories provide a counter-narrative of their personal traumatic experiences on the Rock. They both reminisce with bitterness, portray the occupation negatively, and consider it their main reason for turning away from their Native American cultural heritage.

2.2. Concepts of identity

The cultural identity of an individual evolves throughout the course of a person's life, as it adjusts to the social, political, economic situation of the communities (Weaver 244). For example, the relocation policies of the 1950s initiated realignment in Native American societies. Indigenous people moved to already multicultural and ethnically heterogeneous cities, which were the opposite of reservations that mostly had tribe-based populations (Fixico 113). Distanced from reservation and family made the city environment alienating. "For Native people, land is about community, culture, history, and ancestral connection. In that sense, being part of a land-based Native community is at the heart of what being Indigenous signifies" (Lawrence 191). Physical distance created emotional detachment, which often made

individuals question their identity. Thus, relocatees had to find a way to maintain their connection to their cultural roots; without the land base they were to construct a new society in the city. “Their new neighbourhoods represented a new kind of home space without land. This was a new kind of tribalism or re-tribalism that formed new groups [. . .]. This newly formed identity was one that transformed tribalism on reservations into Indianness in cities” (Fixico 120). Adjustment to the metropolitan environment resulted in changes in the relocatees’ self-perception: they started to identify themselves with the city they lived in rather than the reservation where they came from, thus urban Indian identity came to be (Fixico 122). In *There, There*, while several characters share Cheyenne affiliations, they all relate to the Oakland Indian community with stronger ties.

Since people from many different tribes relocated in the same metropolitan areas, it resulted in a tribally diverse environment, which strengthened the notion of pan-Indianism by the formation of relationships in the indigenous community regardless of tribal affiliation. “The Red Power Movement for American Indian rights during the 1960s and 1970s drew its membership from mainly urban Indians and generated a unified pan-Indian cultural front by borrowing cultural forms from many native communities” (Nagel 167). This constructed identity was created with the intention to join Native Americans on reservations, urban Indians, and any indigenous individual willing to identify with their “Indianness.” It brought about a “suprapersonal” identity, the extension of the self-image (Aydin 127), implying that personal and cultural identities are inseparable.

The urban Indian community can also function as an alternative family for those who have no relatives and friends in the city (LaGrand 163). This way, the metropolitan space becomes the home environment for relocatees and their descendants. The sense of stability provided by the family, whether it is the biological family, or the urban Indian society, plays a key role in identity construction.

Just as a Native American community shapes the self-perception of its members, so do the non-Native surroundings affect how they define themselves. The most prominent example is the federal government, since it can judicially validate the definition of Native American identity (Weaver 246). The heavily debated blood quantum is used to express “Indianness” in a manner that it may be employed in tribal enrollment requirements (Schmidt 1). The theory of blood quantum was created by federal administrators in order to determine Native American origin based on lineage that can be proved by documentation. It is a bureaucratic method to categorize indigenous people according to the tribal affiliation of their ancestors, thus it is not connected to “blood” in the literal sense, and it does not require DNA

analysis. For example, if someone has a “full blood” Native American mother and a white father, they are defined as “half-blood.” When someone has relatives from multiple tribes, the proportions of “Indian blood” cannot be added up for enrollment. This means, that even an individual with two full- blood parents, one Cheyenne and the other Lakota, is half Cheyenne and half Lakota, instead of being full-blood. The concept was officially introduced in 1934 in the Tribal Enrollment and Reorganization Act, and has been used ever since in determining which tribes are recognized by the federal government and how tribes decide who is eligible for enrollment (Schmidt 5).

Criticism concerning tribal enrollment requirements is strongly related to racial identity. Even though inaccurate, DNA profiles are commonly used to support the blood quantum documentation (TallBear, *Native American DNA* 44). “Such biological measures reaffirm racial definitions of the tribal nation and who rightly claims tribal citizenship” (TallBear, “DNA, Blood and Racializing the Tribe” 83). Such an approach supposes that an individual’s genetic profile is the same as their cultural identity, which is not true because these two terms cannot be used interchangeably, since DNA profiles do not reveal biological descent entirely (TallBear, “DNA, Blood and Racializing the Tribe” 84). Tribal enrollment in itself has many problematic aspects and is directly linked to ICWA. Children removed from their family can be categorized as Native American only if they are enrolled members of a tribe, or they are eligible for enrollment based on documented indigenous lineage. Blood quantum requirements exclude many people from being registered members of any tribe, thus children with mixed or unknown Native American roots are not entitled to ICWA protection even if they grew up in an indigenous cultural environment. Orange reflects on his personal experience: he is an enrolled member of the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes of Oklahoma, but his son, who does not have the required blood quantum is not eligible for enrollment (“Tommy Orange” 00:19:03-00:21:02).

2.3 The social background of family concepts and child welfare policies

All characters in *There There* are involved in complex family dynamics through adoption and/or the absence of a parent/parents. Adoption itself may create tension and complication in any family’s life, but in the case of Native American communities, as explained above, the process is even more problematic. Challenges are rooted in indigenous child welfare policies, dating back to the second half of the nineteenth century. From 1871 to 1940, Native American children were taken to be raised in non-Native families or institutions, such as boarding schools (Lidot et al. 67), where children experienced unimageable suffering.

The ultimate goal was to “kill the Indian, save the man,” in other words, to forcefully assimilate them into American society (Lidot et al. 68). The seven decades of assimilationist policies have long-term, transgenerational psychological effects on indigenous societies. “Historical trauma [. . .] is conceptualized as a collective complex trauma inflicted on a group of people who have a specific group identity or affiliation” (Lajimodiere 5). The boarding school experience and, later, the relocation program are but two instances of injustices committed against the Native American population that inflicted a psychological wound for not only those directly affected, but also for their descendants.

One of the social consequences of the boarding school system has significantly changed the concept of family. “It normalized child removal and undermined the customary socialization of Indian children; generations grew up without learning how to raise children within their own cultural contexts” (Jacobs 139). Since many indigenous people did not know how to create well-functioning households where they can have balanced family life, the number of indigenous children in foster care increased in the 1960s and 1970s (Jacobs 139). This tendency called for reforms in the child welfare system, and, in 1978, the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) was introduced. The main objective was to ensure that Native American children, once removed from their home, are adopted by a distant family member or Indigenous guardians (Gallegos and Fort 3). Children were removed from their families due to poverty, because the “paternalistic state system failed to recognize traditional Indian culture and expected Indian families to conform to non-Indian ways” (Jones 18).

ICWA introduced placement preferences, which means that the child or children should primarily be raised by an immediate family member. If it is not possible, the second option is to find someone in the extended family to take care of the child. If no one is available, child welfare services look for a person from the child’s tribe, or a potential guardian with Native American background to foster the child/children (Zug 57). ICWA was progressive when it was introduced but, with time, doubt arose about its effectiveness. The original legislative goals were to decrease the number of American Indian children with mental health issues and substance abuse—consequences of the historical trauma—and to increase the adoption rate of indigenous children in Native American families, which was significantly lower than the national average. In the first decade after the codification of ICWA most of these tendencies changed as expected, but the most important aspect, the balance of adoption rate between Native and non-Native children did not alter substantially (MacEachron et al. 457). The reason might be ICWA’s categorization of indigeneity, as discussed in Chapter 2.2, which is one of the most highly criticized aspects of the act.

Only those children are considered Native American who are either already enrolled members of a federally recognized tribe or eligible for enrollment. Hence, the law excludes children who have ancestors from numerous tribes, or do not have the necessary blood quantum to be enrolled members of any tribe that they are connected to through ancestry (Jones 21). In practice, this means that even if both parents of a child are of Native American background, the child might not be registered as indigenous in the child welfare system.

ICWA's main objective, the protection of Native American children, has been challenged. The primary counterargument about the safety of indigenous children is that although they have to be placed with the extended family or indigenous caretakers, the same level of protection non-Native children receive is not ensured (Zug 3). Despite the shifts in the perception of child welfare, laws introduced after ICWA mostly follow its basic notions, proving that the claims about the harms that ICWA might cause were found unjustifiable since its introduction (Zug 3). In recent years, adjustments have been made to make communication between tribes and child welfare services more effective. Also, the process of recruiting indigenous foster families has developed in order to meet the designated placement preferences (Goldenberg 15). Overall, the Indian Child Welfare Act is a cornerstone in American child welfare policies and has an undisputed effect on the lives of indigenous families. In *There There*, five narrators are affected by ICWA directly or indirectly. Jacquie, Opal, and Blue were adopted before the introduction of these child welfare policies. The sisters end up in the dysfunctional foster care system, while Blue is entirely cut off from her cultural environment. Orvil and his brothers are post-ICWA adoptees, thus they are placed in the care of an extended family member, Opal, Edwin is indirectly impacted by the act; he does not know that Blue is his half-sister, since she was raised away from the family. Edwin serves as an example of Native Americans who grow up in single-parent families, yet another crucial social issue in indigenous communities. These characters each have their own specific circumstances, but they reflect on possible real-life ICWA scenarios, they are fictionalized versions of real people with similar experiences.

Historical trauma affected urban Indians' mental health, since many people tried to cope with psychological wounds with developing self-destructive tendencies, such as substance abuse (Fixico 115). The reason for high rates of alcoholism can be traced back to the federal policies of relocation and termination that forced Native Americans to abandon their cultural environment, their family, or the operation of boarding schools with the same purpose (French and Hornbuckle 278). The alienating metropolitan environment, and the struggles of the new, urban Indian life resulted in isolation, which prevented individual access

to emotional consolation from family, or members of reservation communities. French and Hornbuckle argue that within the Native American population, the leading causes of death are related to alcohol, and drinking problems are a major factor in two thirds of suicides; these both significantly differ from the general American population data (275).

Personal problems may also contribute to the high rates of drinking problems, as it is represented in *There There* as well. Three narrators, Tony Loneman, Dene Oxendene, and Jacquie Red Feather's storylines feature the depiction of alcohol abuse and its consequences in their lives. Furthermore, as the character map indicates, alcohol abuse affects all others related to them. In Chapter 3.2, I focus on Jacquie's addiction and attempts at sobriety.

2.4 Urban Indian existence and Native American family concepts

Relocation policies not only affected the social structure of indigenous communities and impacted child welfare legislation, but also initiated cultural changes in urban Indian existence. In metropolitan societies, traditional values of various tribes merged with modern notions of life in the city, thus, pan-Indianism came to be an intertribal, suprapersonal notion, which connects Native Americans regardless of their tribal roots. From the 1880s to the 1930s, indigenous cultural and religious practices, such as the Sun Dance and the potlatch, were banned as part of the federal attempt to assimilate the Native American population into the dominant society (Treglia 778). With the appearance of pan-Indianism, the powwow emerged to unite indigenous people in urban environments by using the patterns of traditional gatherings and celebrations. A powwow is a secular event that aims to provide a safe informal environment for Native American people to gather and celebrate their cultures with traditional dancing, music, and art. Powwows are a relatively new form of traditionalism, popular all over the North American continent, open for anyone, regardless of age, gender, and, in most cases, race (Herle 57). The event originates in the Plains warrior dance tradition, but new dances also evolved since the first powwows were organized (J. Johnson 221).

I contend that in multicultural, urban Indian settings in addition to powwows, the presence of grandmothers—or clan mothers, who are matriarchs both in their family and indigenous communities—also secures community integrity. The concepts of family in Native American cultures and Western society are significantly different and closely related to the sense of identity. Killaback explains that in Cheyenne culture, for example, “kinship relationships, roles, and responsibilities extended beyond the nuclear family; they were the foundation for their Indigenous identity. Collectively, the kinship relationships, roles, and responsibilities were the foundation for community and nation-building” (43). In Cheyenne

culture, grandmothers especially important family members: “Grandmothers embody the Cheyenne principle of Éškemane (Grandmother Earth), the ultimate giver of life [...] Throughout a child’s life, the grandmother–child relationship is strong. Grandmothers learned and experienced the same teachings and lessons in childrearing from their mothers, as part of the continuum of the Cheyenne culture and tradition” (Killsback 37). Family does not merely mean immediate relatives, extended family members and people who are not blood-related but have a strong relationship with the family are also considered kin. By extension, such kinship definitions make it possible for the urban society to function as family.

Both in urban communities and families, the leader is most often the grandmother. “Older women in Native American culture have a special status, based on their age and role as caregivers. Tribal societies emphasized tradition and respected older members as holders of knowledge that is essential to cultural continuance” (Byers 305). In metropolitan areas, where urbanization and relocation fractured indigenous identities, grandmothers assist close and distant relatives and members of the community to maintain a connection to their Native American cultural identities.

The presence of female leaders provide stability for members of the urban Indian community, therefore, they are not only grandmothers, but also fulfil the role of urban clan mothers. “The stable households they have created and maintain serve as fixed and welcoming anchors in the otherwise highly fluid and complex urban Indian community” (Lobo 514). Thus, clan mothers embody permanence in the city, where Native Americans might feel lost due to the challenges to construct an indigenous cultural identity in the multicultural surroundings, where many minorities share the same space with one another. In the metropolitan environment identity construction relies on emotional support, since urbanization fragmented land-based cultural identity, as was discussed in Chapters 2.1 and 2.2. The support these female leaders provide plays a key role in the sense of identity for individuals who seek acceptance in Native American communities in metropolitan areas. In *There There*, Opal, Jacquie, and Blue are all potential clan mother figures. While by age, it would be the sisters’ task, it is Blue who is involved in community building in Oakland as the main organizer of the powwow. She figuratively fulfills the clan mother role, since she is not a grandmother, but by being the head of the planning committee she provides the opportunity for indigenous people to get together. I analyze her figure as a leader/ clan mother in Chapter 3.3.

The central role of grandmothers was first challenged by the arrival of European colonizers, as they took control over tribes and changed their social structure which

undermined the significance of grandparenthood (Byers 307). Termination and relocation policies did not manage to completely assimilate the indigenous population into the dominant society, in fact, some traditional tribal notions of family structure gained more significance. Grandparents contribute more to raising children in indigenous households, and this tendency remained in spite of historical and social changes. The 2000 US census shows that Native Americans participate the most in taking care of their grandchildren compared to other ethnicities in the country (Byers 310). Based on the 2015 US census 5-year estimate data, I calculated that in indigenous families, the proportion of grandparents responsible for their grandchildren is 54%, while the same proportion in the total population is 41% (“Grandparents Living with Own Grandchildren”). The difference in the estimates proves that in Native American families, grandparents are much more actively involved in raising children than in the total population.

In *There There*, Opal represents the image of Cheyenne grandmothers. As leaders of families, they provide guidance for their grandchildren, who struggle with embracing their urban Indian cultural identity. Opal is a clan mother for the Red Feathers, she is the head of the family, the source of stability. The relationship between Opal and her adopted grandchildren is described as: “She is not technically their grandma. *Indian way she is*. That’s what she told them when she explained why she was a Bear Shield and they were Red Feathers. She is actually their great-aunt.” (Orange 119; emphasis added). The quote reinforces that in indigenous communities the extended family has a more central role than in western societies. Although Opal is not the closest relative of the Red Feather boys, based on ICWA, they remain within the family instead of being placed in the foster care system, achieving the main goal of the law. They call Opal their grandmother not only because she raised them for most of their lives, but also because she is the matriarch, an embodiment of stability and familial integrity.

Other than adoption, Opal and Orvil are also connected to each other in a spiritual way as well, which is closely related to their Cheyenne tribal background. Orvil discovers that he has a bump, which has three spider legs in it. Several decades before him Opal experienced the same. In Cheyenne cosmology, Spider is a recurring figure; its name variations, such as Wihio, Veeho, Iktomi, and Veho are all used for the same entity. Spider is often described wise and considered sacred in spite of its tricks against people (Bastian and Mitchell 225). Veho is a trickster figure, who demonstrates what people should not do, since whenever he goes on an adventure, he always fails at the end (Rice 122). Tricksters are often depicted as characters who deceive others for their own benefit (Bastian and Mitchell 224), therefore,

Veho is also used for white men, because colonizers betrayed Native Americans for their own gain (Rice 122).

In the novel Veho is mentioned three times, always when characters face turning points in their lives. First, it is described from Jacquie's point of view, when she has a flashback about identifying her daughter's corpse in the morgue. Secondly, Opal had discovered spider legs poking out of a bump on her leg right before she and Jacquie got into the foster care system. Lastly, Orvil experiences the same deformity shortly before the powwow, which foreshadows that the upcoming event will have a lasting effect on his life.

The appearance of the spider and Cheyenne folklore indicate how traditionalism resurfaces, even though Opal tries to keep Orvil away from his culture. "Opal and Jacquie's mom never let them kill a spider if they found one in the house, or anywhere for that matter. Her mom said spiders carry miles of web in their body, miles of story, miles of potential home and trap. She said that's what we are. *Home and trap*" (Orange 163; emphasis added). Spiders and their web are employed as metaphors for Native American people and their cultural identity. Indigenous people have their cultural roots and tribal stories imbedded in their persona, which provides the potential to embrace their Native American sense of self, even in the urban environment. Also, accepting their indigenous cultural identity is connected to historical trauma and discrimination, which can be regarded as a trap of being Native American. I contend that home and trap have two possible meanings in the novel, they are the foundation for the concepts of family. Firstly, the biological family provides the home environment for individuals, but what family someone is born into cannot be changed. For Orvil and Blue, their families function both as homes and traps. Orvil is adopted by Opal, who takes care of him and his brothers, but they are prohibited from learning about their Native American cultural heritage. Blue is also adopted, but she grows up in a white family, which cannot offer the indigenous environment she belongs to by descent. On the other hand, Oakland's urban Indian community as a family is also both home and trap. Due to relocation policies, the city becomes a new home for many Native Americans who find themselves far from their family and reservation, which makes them isolated and trapped as they struggle to maintain their connection with their cultural background.

3. Family, urban Indian identity, and ICWA in five storylines

3.1 Opal Viola Victoria Bear Shield

The first essential element in Opal's narration that has a long-lasting effect on her life is the Alcatraz occupation. In the beginning, Opal enjoys spending her days on the abandoned prison territory, but she witnesses how her sister, Jacquie, gets drunk and is abused by Harvey, which makes Opal disillusioned about the island as the "promise land" (see Chapter 2.1). The shift is apparent in Opal's mood, she feels less safe, and a sense of uneasiness takes over her. Seeing how the failure of the occupation shatters her mother's dream, forms Opal's negative attitude towards indigenous culture and creates the urge to isolate herself from the cultural community as much as possible. The flashback in which Opal recounts this memory also contains a symbolic element. She is eleven-year-old at the time of the occupation, she has her teddy bear with her, even though she knows people might think she is too old for a toy like that. Shortly before Opal and her family leave the island, she puts her teddy bear on the rocks on the shore of the island. Leaving it behind symbolizes that not only the occupation, but also her childhood and innocence end on Alcatraz Island, as does her affiliation with Native American/ Cheyenne culture.

Opal's disassociation from Native American culture influences her parenting when she adopts the Red Feather boys. Since ICWA had been introduced by the time they have been removed from their mother's care, they were placed with Opal, their distant relative. The tragic irony in the adoption is that the aim of the act is to keep children close to their cultural heritage. In this case, however, Opal is the one who keeps the Red Feather boys away from anything connected to Native American culture and tradition. It is especially important for Opal to take good care of the boys, since she has first-hand experience of the foster care system where she was placed after her mother had died. With the adoption of Orvil and his brothers, Opal undertakes the role of the "clan mother," and she becomes the matriarch of the family. The role Opal assumes is reflected in her name. Her last name, Bear Shield expresses that Opal bears the responsibility of raising Orvil, Lony, and Looother, while she shields them from the hardships of being Native American. Her first name suggests that she is a strong person, and she proves that by assuming the clan mother role.

When Orvil asks Opal to teach them about their indigenous background, she refuses. Opal keeps a regalia she received as a gift from her friend, Lucas, only weeks before he passed away, hidden in her closet for years. She regularly monitors the phones of the boys to see if there is anything alarming, "[...] looks at what pictures and videos they take, their text messages, and their browser history. None of them have shown signs of especially worrisome

depravity yet. But it's only a matter of time" (Orange 163). She is pessimistic about the future of the boys and convinced that they will, eventually, engage in some criminal activity. This assumption derives from her experiences on Alcatraz Island, where she witnessed depravities in the behavior of the occupiers, who were barely older than her adopted grandchildren. During one of Opal's regular inspections, she notices a video of Orvil wearing the regalia as he is dancing in the house. When she finds out that Orvil is going to participate at the upcoming powwow, she decides to go there in secret in order to see him dance, as she is proud of him for embracing his cultural identity. The fact that she kept the regalia and that she did not ask Orvil about the traditional dancing suggests that in spite of her overall negative attitude towards Native American culture, she still has emotional connection to her Cheyenne heritage, thus there is possibility that she might reclaim it as part of her identity. It is not disclosed whether the regalia is Cheyenne or not, but, as I have explained in Chapter 2.4 powwows are intertribal, the regalia worn is not tribe specific, and in Oakland's diverse urban Indian community, it is very likely that Lucas was from another tribe.

Opal being deeply superstitious ties her with the old traditions, although she keeps it a secret. She is very careful to use her lucky spoons, avoid stepping on certain cracks in the pavement, observes numbers everywhere, since she thinks numbers are the only consistent parts of life she can always rely on. Also, she pays special attention to spiders the embodiment of the Cheyenne trickster, Veho. To counteract the traumatic experiences Opal has been through, holding onto these ritualistic habits allows her to have a sense of control over her life, and they substitute for the losses she suffers.

The Alcatraz occupation and her negative experiences throughout her life deeply affect her mental health; the hardships she faced became bottled up undissolved historical and personal traumas. Even her name indicates that "Opal is *stone solid*, but there is troubled water that lives in her, sometimes threatens to flood, to drown her—rise up to her eyes" (Orange 162; emphasis added). She seems strong, unwavering but, occasionally, her frustration and sadness resurface, causing her a great deal of pain. The quote also reflects on the symbolism of her first name: her strength is similar to the durability of the gemstone. In order to keep negative thoughts at bay, she always tries to distract herself by doing multiple things at the same time, keeping herself busy to keep her composure and avoid a mental breakdown even when anxiety paralyzes her.

Not long before Opal and Jacquie are placed in the foster care system, Opal notices a bump on her leg with three spider legs poking out. She plucks the legs, but the bulge remains. Forty years later, she learns that Orvil experiences the same. The number of legs is

significant, since three is one of Opal's unlucky numbers, which foreshadows that something bad will happen to Orvil, just as in her case decades before. The presence of the spider reminds Opal of the stories she heard about Veho from her mother as a child. In my reading, this episode expresses that it is impossible to "shield" Orvil away from his cultural background, if he wants to embrace it, Opal cannot do anything to prevent him from doing so. It also indicates why Orvil is so intent on his "unknown" heritage—to be discussed further in the section on Orvil. Similarly, Opal herself is unable to denounce her Native American identity, as keeping the regalia and her superstitious rituals demonstrate. I argue that this testifies to how her Native American identity is both home and a trap for her; tribal culture is an integral part of her personality, hence she fails to eliminate her characteristics inherent in her Cheyenne roots.

After Orvil is shot at the powwow, his family takes him to hospital. In the waiting room, Opal observes the faces of her stepsister and the two younger Red Feather boys. All of them look devastated, while Opal, on the other hand, is certain of a positive outcome, although she long gave up the belief that she can get help from anyone but herself. When a doctor finally appears, Opal cannot listen to, or even look at him. When she notices that the door swings eight times, which is one of her lucky numbers, she lets out a sigh of relief, and only then is she able to pay attention to the surgeon. She takes this sign as a confirmation about Orvil's survival, the reader is left with her conviction, not being informed of what happens to the boy. Opal embodies the clan mother role as she maintains a positive mindset, and being the mentally most stable person in the family crisis. It also shows that Opal is unable to turn away from her indigenous cultural heritage in spite of her negative experiences.

3.2. Jacquie Red Feather

Likewise for Opal, the Alcatraz occupation was a life-changing event in Jacquie's life, as she gets pregnant by Harvey. Four decades later, they meet by accident at a conference. Jacquie tells Harvey that she gave birth to their child, to which Harvey reacts with suggesting that they should try to find their daughter in Oakland. She is persuaded to take his offer because Harvey implies that Jacquie later might regret if she declines the possibility of finding her first-born child. This argument is especially convincing for her, since earlier that day she heard a speech at the conference about suicide, which made her relive the tragedy of losing her younger daughter, Jamie, due to a self-inflicted gunshot. Even the slightest chance of finding the child she gave up for adoption more than four decades ago prompts Jacquie to go to Oakland, where she can also meet Jamie's sons. Seeing Orvil and his brothers is only possible because ICWA's placement preference designates Opal as the primary caregiver,

thus they stay in the extended family. On the contrary, Jacquie has no connection with her daughter, Blue, who was adopted before ICWA. I argue that Jacquie refuses to meet her grandchildren before she returns for the powwow, because her unresolved personal trauma prevents her from actively participating in their lives. Her pain makes her fail as a grandmother, even though she should be the primary guardian.

The Alcatraz occupation had another long-running effect on Jacquie's life: she drank alcohol for the first time on the island, and from then on, she has been suffering from alcoholism. She tries several times to stay sober, but these attempts fail. The final longer sober period lasts six months, but ends when Jamie commits suicide. After this tragedy, Jacquie moves to Albuquerque and starts to work at an Indian Health Clinic. Losing her daughter leaves her in a vulnerable state, and without a family to support her, she makes her way back to the indigenous community. In my view, she chooses to return to a Native American facility, where she feels the sense of belonging. Even though this is not the region where she is originally from, her cultural identity creates the connection between Jacquie and the "family" of urban Indians who understand and support her. Because of the notion of pan-Indianism, she integrates into any indigenous society regardless of tribal affiliation (see Chapter 2.2). The move to a completely new place, leaving her life in Oakland behind, can be seen as a form of voluntary relocation. Although in this case the movement is between two urban areas, the environment Jacquie ends up in is unknown to her, and she has only the local Native American community to rely on.

In spite of her alcohol problems, she becomes a substance abuse counselor, which might seem contradictory at first glance. When Jacquie decides to go to an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting, this choice of carrier is explained: "There were always meetings at conferences, it being a mental-health/ substance-abuse-prevention-based conference, full of people like her, *who got into the field because they'd been through it and hoped to find meaning* in their careers helping other people not to make the same mistakes they had" (Orange 107; emphasis added). Jacquie craves to have a purpose in life after Jamie's death, and by becoming a substance abuse counselor she can help others while she herself is healing and working through her trauma. Although she fails as a grandmother, she fills a clan mother role in her new family, the indigenous community in Albuquerque. By assisting others, she is able to overcome her frustrations of being a "bad" mother and grandmother, and the idea of finding her daughter, Blue, gives her a new chance to make her past mistakes right.

She has been unsuccessful in staying sober, yet when she finds new goal, she gains a source of motivation to continue her journey without alcohol. She struggles to overcome the

temptation to drink multiple times while she is staying at the hotel, she even pushes the minifridge full of alcohol out of her room to the hallway in order to physically distance herself from the substance. Temptation reminds her of what their mother said about a spiderweb being a home and a trap: “In this case Jacquie was the spider, and the minifridge was the web. Home was to drink. To drink was the trap” (Orange 101). She has been drinking for so long that it became a part of her life, but she realizes that she has to find her way out of the trap. Even though she relocates from Oakland and goes to Albuquerque, she cannot leave alcoholism behind, which becomes the only permanent factor in her life, thus drinking feels like “home,” but it traps her in a vicious circle of sober periods and relapses.

3.3 Blue

Blue’s life is fundamentally affected by ICWA. She was adopted as an infant, but she knows that her biological mother is Jacquie, who is Cheyenne. “*I knew I wasn’t white. But not all the way. Because while my hair is dark and my skin is brown, when I look in the mirror I see myself from the inside out. And inside I feel as white as the long white pill-shaped throw pillow my mom made me keep on my bed even though I never used it*” (Orange 197; emphasis added). She has a solid identity based on her upbringing, she feels white, but her appearance reflects her Native American background. Her view of her biological identity aligns with the concept of blood quantum, because she relies on the documents that prove she is indigenous. She starts to find her way to her Cheyenne heritage only as an adult, and she is officially tied to the community by marriage. This is when she receives her new name, Blue Vapor of Life. In my view, she chooses to marry a Native American man to establish her place in indigenous society: “I was adopted by white people. *I needed an Indian name*” (Orange 197; emphasis added). She wants to have a Native American name, regardless of tribe, which shows that Blue supports pan-Indianism over tribe-affiliated identity.

With the new name she also gets the desired indigenous identity, which is a major turning point in her life. The symbolism of this change is expressed by the names themselves. Her original name, Crystal, suggest the certainty of Blue’s self-identification as white before she connected with the Cheyenne tribe, as crystal is a transparent, solid gemstone. On the other hand, blue vapor is dim and intangible, indicating that by discovering her Native American cultural background, Blue’s perception of herself becomes more complex and less one-dimensional.

Blue represents the pre-ICWA generation. She is adopted into a white family, thus, cut off from her cultural heritage, but she decides to seek opportunities to bond with her Native American identity. Even though she ends her marriage, which directly linked her to

Cheyenne society, Blue does not distance herself from the cultural environment in spite of being a victim of domestic abuse by her husband. Likewise, her mother in Albuquerque, she works at the Indian Center in Oakland, thus maintaining her bond with the indigenous community. She chooses to embrace the supra-tribal urban Indian identity the pan-Indian sentiment, instead of the more confining Cheyenne tribal identity. Her work as the main organizer of the powwow makes her feel belongs.

Blue goes through a reverse relocation journey when she gets involved in the life of the Cheyenne tribe a year before the Big Oakland Powwow. She is raised in an urban area, but she moves to the Oklahoma reservation of the tribe when she applies for a job as a youth coordinator. She meets her husband there, but she runs away from the abusive marriage, returning to the city. Even though this is the opposite direction of relocation, the effects are similar. Before moving to the reservation, Blue felt like she was white, then in Oklahoma she lived in an indigenous environment, totally unfamiliar to her. When she leaves her husband, she returns to her hometown, now integrating the white and Native American identities in her life, making her a different person. As she is looking at her reflection in her car's rearview mirror, the dual presence of her identities is described: "She sees a version of herself she thought was long gone, someone she'd left behind, ditched for *her real Indian life* on the rez. Crystal. From Oakland. She's not gone. She's somewhere behind Blue's eyes in the rearview" (Orange 236; emphasis added). First, Blue believes that to fully embrace her Native American identity, she has to live on a reservation, in a more traditional environment, not in a city as an urban Indian. She leaves her name, Crystal, and her one-dimensional white identity behind in Oakland when she moves to the reservation. She returns to Oakland as Blue, and her cultural and personal identity changes due to her bond with the indigenous community. Although she finds out about her indigenous background as a young adult, she also struggles with fitting into the stereotypical mold of being a "real Indian," as expected by mainstream society, just like many other characters in the novel, such as Orvil and Edwin. She chooses to connect to her Native American culture through being an active member of the community, justifying her indigenous identity to herself in the first place, but also for people around her. She is content with her life in Oakland, enjoys her job, the "only" thing she lacks is the knowledge about her biological family. In my view, her success of identity construction depends on whether she finds her mother/ parents or not. Without knowing them, she is unsure about her dual identity, and she compensates for it by taking a clan mother role as the main organizer of the powwow, which functions as a family reunion for the Native American community. She becomes an integral member of the urban Indian society, which functions as her extended

family. Jacquie and Blue both try to find their place in the indigenous world by working for the community, which creates a parallel image in their storylines. It indicates that it is crucial for both of them to find each other for personal identity (re)construction and the mirrored image establishes a mother-daughter connection before they actually meet at the powwow.

Blue starts to form a friendship with an intern, Edwin Black, while they work on the powwow organization committee together. She bonds with him, although she cannot explain whether it is from pity or sympathy, which she describes as: “There’s something about him that *feels like family*” (Orange 237; emphasis added). She feels they have a similar background, which creates the sense of bonding, because, likewise Blue, Edwin also struggles with constructing his Native American cultural identity. Even though the two are unaware, the reader knows that Blue and Edwin are indeed related to each other, since Harvey is the father of both of them. On the day of the powwow, Blue goes with Edwin to emotionally support him when he meets his father for the first time. When the woman with Harvey introduces herself as Jacquie Red Feather, Blue realizes that she is standing in front of her birth mother. Since Blue is adopted before the introduction of ICWA, she has no information about her biological family, except for her mother’s name. As I explained in Chapter 2.3, ICWA does not ensure that adopted children stay in their family, but the main aim is to place a child with an indigenous caregiver to maintain the Native American cultural environment. Although Blue accidentally meets Jacquie, and she suspects that Harvey might be her father, this is merely the result of a series of coincidences. It remains undisclosed whether they will get and keep in touch, or how their relationship develops if Jacquie, Harvey, and Blue figure out how they are related to one another. Their coincidental meeting turns the powwow a family reunion both figuratively and literally.

3.4 Edwin Black

Throughout the plot, Edwin struggles with coming to terms with his Native American identity. He knows that his father is of indigenous descent, but he has never met him. Edwin is determined to find out which tribe he belongs to, since he feels like a fraud for earning a master’s degree in Native American literature without the knowledge about his own tribal background. “I wrote my thesis on the inevitable influence of blood quantum policies on modern Native identity, and the literature written by mixed-blood Native authors that influenced identity in Native cultures. *All without knowing my tribe*. Always defending myself. Like I’m *not Native enough*” (Orange 71; emphasis added).

Similarly to Blue, Edwin also considers biological factors as the basis of Native American identity. The lack of connection to any tribe frustrates him and makes him question the validity of his indigenous cultural identity. To acquire the missing information about his Native background, he uses the internet to look for ways of determining one's tribe based on physical features, but to no avail. He listens to music that is the mixture of powwow drums and electronic beats, which is modern and traditional at the same time, thus, Edwin can easily relate to the duality of traditional indigenous and contemporary urban art, analogous to his struggle to find his cultural background in a modern environment. He also uses the internet to get in touch with Native American people. He befriends several of them on Facebook, but he has never met or talked to any of them, which is not as fulfilling as he hoped for in terms of being connected to the indigenous community. When he finally finds his father, Harvey, Edwin's first question is about their tribal affiliation. Harvey tells him that they are Southern Cheyenne, adding that Edwin will be an enrolled member. It is a turning point in his cultural and personal identity construction, likewise for Blue, who achieves the same by her marriage and name change. Not only does Edwin get in touch with his father, but he also will be a part of an indigenous family.

Although Edwin was not adopted, he was raised by his white mother, Karen, and he feels disconnected from his indigenous cultural heritage because of the missing father figure. His character is not directly impacted by the child welfare policies targeting Native American children, but his difficulties to embrace his cultural identity are similar. Edwin is representative of people who were not adopted out, but still experience doubt when they want to affiliate themselves with a Native American cultural background. In the novel this interim position is established symbolically: Edwin is older than Orvil, but younger than Blue, thus he is in between the pre- and post-ICWA generations. Edwin is affected indirectly, because the act institutionalizes blood quantum as the indicator of "Indianness," in addition to enrollment requirements of several tribes, a notion that makes him doubt the validity of his indigenous identity.

Edwin has low self-esteem and feels hopeless: he has no motivation to leave his room. "My problem hasn't just been with gaming. Or gambling. Or incessantly scrolling down and refreshing my social media pages. Or the endless search to find good new music. *It's all of it*" (Orange 62; emphasis added). He does everything to stay in the virtual spaceto escape the problems in his life, such as addiction—especially gambling, which is stereotypically associated with Native Americans—cultural rootlessness, and insecurity about his body. In his simulated life, he customizes his character to be the exact opposite of his real

circumstances: he is gradually getting more fit, he lives on a reservation with his father, since in that virtual reality his avatar lost his mother at birth. There he also has a girlfriend, a job, hence achieving and possessing everything the real Edwin only dreams of. He chooses to be indigenous in his virtual life, because he is unsatisfied with his reality being white, since he is unable to embrace that side of his dual identity.

The frustration Edwin feels over the missing information about his Native American background manifests in addictive habits, which affects his physical appearance. In the four years since his graduation, he has put on a significant amount of weight, he has isolated himself in his own body, similarly to how he avoids social activities and spends all his time in his room. Emotionally and physically he is unable to find a job. He has been bullied on a bus because of his obesity, and he completely avoids public transport. Whenever he looks at himself in the mirror, he is horrified of his own reflection. In his first-person point of view account, he positions himself in a humiliating situation: he is sitting on the toilet unable to defecate, and he keeps returning to this topic, making his narrative as grotesque as he sees himself. The reader might be in a similar position as Blue, who cannot decide whether her affection for Edwin derives from sympathy or pity. In my view, the way Edwin describes himself attests to the hatred of and desperation over his future, but finding Harvey gives him hope. As part of his identity construction, he works on the powwow organizing committee, which he regards more than a temporary job. Being an organizer, he becomes an active member of the family—Oakland’s pan-Indian community, where he is accepted regardless of tribal affiliation—making the event a family reunion. He agrees Harvey to meet at the powwow, thus, he establishes a connection with his biological family as well. Edwin is not aware, but his boss, Blue, is his half-sister, which makes both the organization process and the event itself a family affair.

3.5 Orvil Red Feather

As discussed in Chapters 3.1 and 3.2, Orvil is raised by Opal since he had been removed from his mother’s care along with his brothers not long before she committed suicide. Orvil’s adoption takes place after ICWA’s introduction making him the representative of the ICWA-generation. He learns that he is Native American when he and his brothers, Lony and Looter, are removed from their home by a social worker. Because of ICWA’s placement preference, Opal is designated as the caregiver, who adopts the boys. The main purpose of the law to keep Native American children in their cultural environment, enable them to learn about their heritage, and practice their traditions absolutely manifests in Orvil’s case.

He is curious about his indigenous background and asks Opal to teach him about Cheyenne culture. She refuses, and she does not allow him to do anything related to Native American culture. “Ever since they were in her care, Opal had been openly against any of them *doing anything Indian*. She treated it all like it was something they could decide themselves when they were old enough. *Like drinking or driving or smoking or voting. Indianing*” (Orange 118; emphasis added). Opal is convinced by her negative experiences that embracing this cultural identity is a burden, causing hardships, instead of being something to be proud of. She wants to protect the boys from the possible disadvantages that come with being involved in the life of the Native American community. Still, Orvil decides to learn about indigenous culture on his own: he listens to traditional music—as does Edwin—and he watches tutorials about how to dance in full regalia. For the urban Indian community, the Big Oakland Powwow is a family reunion, and Orvil becomes a member of the family by registering for the event as a competition dancer. He hopes to win the prize money to help Opal financially, who works hard to provide for him and his brothers. After Orvil is shot at the powwow, his biological grandmother, Jacquie recognizes him from pictures and carries him out of the building to take him to hospital, thus, a real family reunion materializes.

Orvil’s bump with the spider legs evokes the figure of Veho thus, Cheyenne culture manifests in him physically. This also refers to “biological” identity, although Opal tries to keep him away from indigenous culture, she cannot prevent the presence of the lump on his leg—the trickster spirit, by extension, his Cheyenne heritage. In my view, adoption and the spider legs create a dual bond between Orvil and Opal characters. While ICWA’s placement preference secures a living arrangement for the boy, the deformity that elicits Veho’s figure attests to the blood relation of Opal and Orvil in spite of being “only” extended family members.

From the moment of finding out about his indigeneity, Orvil is self-conscious about being Native American enough. This insecurity bothers him and he wants to explicitly express the validity of his cultural identity: “It’s important that he dress like an Indian, dance like an Indian, even if he feels like a fraud the whole time, because the only way to be Indian in this world *is to look and act like an Indian*” (Orange 122; emphasis added). His struggle with his cultural identity mirrors that of Blue’s and Edwin’s. All three believe that their appearance should match their Native American identity, but their self-perception makes them doubt its validity. According to Opal, external validation is not necessary for Orvil to be Native American: “anything you hear from me about your heritage does not make you more or less Indian. More or less a *real Indian*. Don’t ever let anyone tell you what being Indian means”

(Orange 119; emphasis added). Opal thinks she should not teach Orvil about Cheyenne culture, but also, she explains that cultural identity has to arise from his internal certainty, personal belief rather than from validation by others. At the powwow, while taking part in the opening dance of the event, Orvil realizes that the only affirmation he needs is the overflowing emotion he experiences while dancing; the outside world seems to disappear as all the dancers move to the beat of the drums. This realization makes him understand that he does not have to dress or behave in a certain way in order to be a part of the Native American family.

4. Conclusion

In my paper I have demonstrated how the concepts of family, ICWA's affects, and identity construction appear in Orange's *There There*. I examined how the social, cultural, and historical settings of contemporary urban Indian communities are presented in five storylines of the novel. I regard *There There* a sociography of Oakland's Native American society, thus the fictionalized characters display the problems and struggles indigenous people living in metropolitan areas face in their everyday lives. The long-term effects of relocation policies and the introduction of ICWA in 1978 radically changed the concept of family. People who were adopted and lost touch with their relatives see the urban Indian community as a welcoming family they can belong in, which might substitute for their biological family. They can integrate into the metropolitan indigenous society, because pan-Indianism is supratribal, Native American cultural identity is the cohesive force instead of tribal affiliation.

The five narrators I analyze are all connected to one another as they are part of the same extended family. Opal, Jacquie, Blue, Edwin, and Orvil all (re)construct their urban Indian cultural identity, while they prepare for the Big Oakland Powwow. Opal and Jacquie process the historical trauma of the Alcatraz occupation, while Blue, Edwin, and Orvil construct their indigenous cultural identity by overcoming their frustration over not being Native enough. All five characters (re)unite with their families both literally, as they find biological relatives, and figuratively at the powwow, where the indigenous community gathers for celebrating Native American cultures. Family, in both senses, has a key role in Blue, Edwin, and Orvil's identity construction; as they participate in the cultural life of Oakland's urban Indian community, they progressively gain confidence to fully embrace their Native American roots. Other than being part of the same extended family, they are also connected by the shared experience of Cheyenne culture physically appearing in their body. Their stories prove that despite assimilationist federal policies, the urban Indian presence endures because "[t]here's something about [it] that feels like family" (Orange 237).

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