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Coping with Transgenerational Trauma in Tommy Orange's *There There*

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Letter of Approval

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Coping with Transgenerational Trauma in Tommy Orange's *There There*

Abstract

This thesis explores the enduring impact of transgenerational trauma on Native Americans as portrayed in Tommy Orange's novel There There*, with a focus on the coping strategies characters employ to confront and heal from inherited grief. The study problematizes the long-term psychological and cultural consequences of colonial violence and displacement, particularly how trauma is transmitted across generations and manifests in urban Indigenous life. The central argument of this research is that storytelling, cultural gatherings such as the Big Oakland Powwow, and acts of personal resilience serve not only as coping mechanisms but also as tools for reclaiming identity and resisting cultural erasure. This paper employs a qualitative approach based primarily on textual analysis of Orange's* There There*. For this work, different scholars' insights and views are discussed. The informations are collected from secondary sources like books, journals, articles and electronic resources. The theoretical parameters used in this analysis are grounded in Dominik Lacapra's concept of* 'Acting Out' *and* 'Working Through' *and Jeffrey C Alaxender's concept of* 'Cultural Trauma'. *This paper demonstrates that while trauma persists across generations, healing is possible through acts of resilience, resistance, and the reclamation of identity. This study contributes to broader discussions on the intersections of trauma, identity, and resistance, offering valuable insights into the role of cultural practices in coping mechanisms with historical and inherited grief.*

Keywords: transgenerational trauma, coping mechanism, cultural trauma, cultural dislocation, resilience, post-traumatic stress disorder

This thesis explores coping mechanisms with transgenerational trauma in Tommy Orange's *There There*, examining how Native characters navigate inherited

pain, suffering, and historical displacement. The novel portrays trauma as both an individual burden and a collective identity that shapes relationships and resilience within urban indigenous life. Drawing on Dominick LaCapra's concepts of "acting out" and "working through," this research analyzes how storytelling, cultural traditions, and communal gatherings, particularly the Powwow, serve as sites of healing and resistance. Jeffrey C. Alexander's theory of cultural trauma provides a lens to examine how historical violence rooted in colonization, forced displacement, and cultural erasure continues to shape contemporary Native life. Using close textual analysis and qualitative methods such as thematic coding, the study identifies patterns of coping and resilience in the novel. Ultimately, this research argues that Orange's *There There* reclaims Native identity by challenging mainstream representations and illuminating the resilience of urban Indigenous communities in the face of transgenerational trauma.

Orange's novel delicately intertwines the stories of several Native American characters of Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes living in Oakland. Orange's *There There* demonstrates the pervasive impact of trauma on the lives of the characters. The novel follows twelve characters of Native American descent as they come together on Big Oakland Powwow each struggling with their own stories. Orange carefully examines the historical and transgenerational trauma experienced by Native Americans by highlighting how these trauma shape their identity and community.

The novel begins with prologue that describes the historical trauma inflicted on Native American communities. An unnamed narrator describes the ways in which Native people have been brutalized and systematically attacked throughout American history. The narrator recounts the Thanksgiving meal ritual, during which "two hundred Indians dropped dead that night from an unknown poison" (4). They also

describe the Indian War, or King Philip's War, emphasizing the atrocities such as the beheading and dismemberment of Meta comet's body. These historical traumas compelled Native Americans to move to cities in search of refuge and new opportunities, away from the violence and oppression they experienced: "plenty of us came by choice, to start over, to make money, or for a new experience" (9). Even in urban settings, they persist in resisting and preserving their cultural identity, by maintaining a connection to their heritage despite ongoing challenges. The prologue outlines the violent history of Native Americans, creating a backdrop of displacement and cultural erasure that still affects the characters' lives.

The complexity of Indigenous identity in a space shaped by displacement and historical erasure has been one of the prominent issues in the novel. The characters grapple with their cultural identity amidst the backdrop of modern day Oakland. As Orange writes, "getting us to cities was supposed to be the final, necessary step in our assimilation, absorption, erasure, the completion of a five- hundred-year-old genocidal campaign" (8). This quote underscores the historical and ongoing attempts to assimilate Native Americans into mainstream American society, often at the cost of their cultural identity.

The novel explores the theme of intergenerational trauma, highlighting how the past continues to affect the present. For instance, Orvil Red Feather "learned about being Indian he'd learned virtually. From watching hours and hours of Powwow footage, documentaries on YouTube, by reading all that there was to read on sites like Wikipedia, Powwow.com and *Indian Country today*" (121).
Orvil's experience reflects the struggle many Native Americans encounter in reconstructing their identities in the wake of historical trauma.

Similarly, generational trauma can be seen through the character of Jacquie Red Feather, who struggles with the weight of her past and the impact it has on her present life. Psychological and emotional distress that is passed down from one generation to the next in the form of generational trauma. Jacquie's battle with alcoholism and her estrangement from her family are deeply connected to the trauma she inherited from her mother who was a victim of systemic oppression. She says, "The problem that became a drinking problem started for me way before the drinking was even related to it, though it was when I first started drinking" (110). It shows how Jacquie's addiction is not just a personal struggle but a manifestation of the unhealed wounds passed down through generations.

Moreover, the novel highlights the collective nature of this trauma emphasizing that it is not just an individual burden but a shared experience among native communities. This is evident during the Big Oakland Powwow, where the characters come together in a symbolic act of reclaiming their identity and resisting the forces that have sought to erase it. The Powwow represents both the pain of the past and the possibility of healing: "we keep Powwowing because there aren't very many places where we get to all be together, where we get to see and hear each other" (135). This collective journey toward healing, in spite of the burden of generational trauma, is a powerful reflection of the resilience within Native communities.

In conclusion, Orange's *There There* offers an exploration of the impact of historical and intergenerational trauma on Native American communities. By weaving together the stories of twelve characters from the Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes living in Oakland, the novel illustrates how the past's violence and cultural erasure continue to shape their present lives.

Orange's *There There* addresses the complexities of Native American identity by challenging the monolithic version of what a Native is supposed to be. As Orange stated in an interview, his goal was to create a "polyphonic, multigenerational novel that would construct a complex human identity for Indigenous peoples, challenging the stereotypical images often found in popular culture" (Orange). Orange brilliantly deconstructs the concept of a singular Native American identity by portraying a wide range of characters each with their own unique stories and perspectives. The novel's polyphonic nature allows readers to engage with multiple voices and experiences, highlighting the richness and diversity of Native Americans.

This novel has gained significant scholarly attention, captivating literary critics and academics alike with its complex narrative and rich thematic depth. Numerous scholars, critics, and writers have engaged in descriptive and comparative analyses of the novel, exploring it through a variety of lenses, including identity, trauma, cultural resilience, and the challenges faced by urban Indigenous communities. Christina Garcia Lopez in her article discusses the complexities of urban native identity and its representation in contemporary literature. She argues that Tommy Orange's novel *There There*, "deftly takes on questions about cultural history as it pulses in the cultural present" (3). This observation emphasizes the novel's exploration of how historical and cultural legacies shape the lives of Native Americans in modern urban settings particularly in Oakland. By highlighting the intersection of past and present, Lopez emphasizes the novel's role in bringing to light the complexities of identity and belonging within Native communities.

Likewise, Laurie Camp Hatch has examined the novel *There There* through the lens of crime fiction. She proposed that, "Reading the novel as a mirrored or reversed crime plot allows for a unique exploration of Indigenous identity in urban

spaces" (2). The author argues that Orange's portrayal of the city of Oakland defies traditional crime fiction tropes and challenges the notion that urban landscapes can reliably represent and reconstruct history.

Furthermore, Brygida Gasztold has studied *There There* from the perspective of History, Heritage and the Urban Native Experience. He reveals how analysis of the particularity of Native experience may identify the narrative pillars of the postmodern thought and incorporate them into a framework of interpretation that promotes Native perspectives.

Orange's novel *There There* provides a multifaceted exploration of Contemporary Native American life, focusing on the challenges and resilience of urban Native communities. As Saera R. Khan and Christine J. yeh highlight in their article, "Tommy orange's characters embody the struggles, hopes and identities of a community often not seen or understood in a modern urban context. These stories allow us to engage deeply with urban Indians as they are today without the primary and limited lens of their past" (2). Khan's observation brings out the novel's ability to portray Native American experiences in the urban setting of Oakland. By focusing on the present lives and struggles of his characters, Orange challenges readers to reconsider preconceived notions and engage with the complexities of modern Native identity.

Furthermore, the novel *There There* has been analysed through the perspective of postmodernism as well by using the lens of post - modern literary techniques. Greg Riggio claims in his article, "Orange uses postmodern literary techniques to indigenize sources of power in the contemporary world in order to create strategies for Indigenous peoples living today to be modern, relevant, and alive" (6). These postmodern techniques reflect the complexities of Native identity today, showing that

Indigeneity is not stuck in the past but is modern, urban, and alive. Through this, Orange creates space for Indigenous presence and power in contemporary life.

Likewise, the novel *There There* by Tommy Orange is a significant work that addresses the marginalization of Native Americans in contemporary society. As Lindenman observes:

> The novel portrays the struggles of Urban Native Americans in a so-called post-race United States, highlighting their cultural and social marginalization. Orange employs intertextual references, particularly to Hip-Hop musicians, to contextualize the position of Urban Native Americans within contemporary society and popular culture. (2)

This technique not only emphasizes the unique challenges faced by Native Americans but also illustrates their connections to broader cultural movements. By drawing parallels between their struggles and those of other marginalized groups, Orange challenges the notion of a post-racial society, suggesting that racial and cultural identities remain deeply influential in shaping personal and collective experiences.

Likewise, the novel *There There* also have been looked through the lens of urban Indigeneity, emphasizing themes of displacement, memory, and cultural survival. As Meghanlata and Nolan claim that, "The novel *There There* positions the city as a product of settler-colonialism and it also illustrates the ways in which urban Indigenous peoples subvert colonial mechanisms by celebrating tribal histories, claiming space, and revitalizing cultural practices within the structure of the city" (1). This view highlights the resilience of Indigenous communities in urban settings. Building on this, the novel also explores how individual characters navigate fragmented identities, showing that resistance can be both collective and deeply personal.

Correspondingly, scholar Adisa Ahmetspahic highlights a critical aspects of Orange's novel by pointing out that despite being Native American, most of the characters "feel estranged from the community since they do not live on reservations, whereby the general implication is that reservation have become ossified as identity markers for many Native Americans" (363). Adisa's observation highlights the tension between traditional and contemporary identities and how geographical and cultural dislocation can impact a sense of belonging. By focusing on Urban Native Americans, Orange challenges the stereotype that Native American identity is solely tied to life on reservations, instead portraying a diverse range of experiences and identities.

Similarly, Amani and Murtaza write, "*There There* by Tommy Orange underscores the violent legacy of Euro-American colonization and the subsequent endeavours by Native Americans to defy absence and erasure and ensure their visibility and presence" (727). Through this, *There There* uses interconnected stories to portray the ongoing struggles and resilience of Urban Native Americans. Orange challenges stereotypes by showing diverse, complex identities shaped by historical trauma and cultural disconnection. The novel's focus on storytelling and community reclaims space for Indigenous presence, making it a powerful response to erasure and colonization.

Juniper Ellis shows that *There There* is more than just a story about trauma. It's a complex novel that uses irony, Native ways of thinking, and urban Indigenous experiences to explore how people survive, resist, and rebuild identity in a world that has tried to erase them. He writes: "The novel rubs together past and present, the urban and the land, exemplifying one of the ways to create irony. Indian removal failed, despite prolonged and aggressive attempts to separate Indians from the land

and reduce them to a feathered image" (7). Through these lines, Juniper highlights the theme of irony in *There There* by showing the contrast between historical efforts to erase Native peoples and the reality of their enduring presence. In the past, policies like Indian removal tried to separate Native Americans from their ancestral lands and erase their culture, reducing them to stereotypes or symbols of the past. However, these efforts failed, as Native identity and culture remain strong, even in modern urban settings. The novel blends the past and present, showing that urban Native Americans are still deeply connected to their heritage and the land. This creates irony because the very efforts meant to erase Native peoples have instead shown their resilience and ability to adapt. The novel challenges the idea that Native people belong only to the past and instead presents them as vital and active in shaping the present and future. "For nonnative readers who share in some of the struggles with settler colonialism, Orange's novel is one of the healing, pulling together the intimacies of family, community, history and history" (Alex). The novel challenges the prescriptive definition of indigeneity by depicting characters who don't fit conventional stereotypes. This novel offers a nuanced perspective of native identity.

In this way, *There There* has been extensively analysed by scholars across a wide range of themes and perspectives. These include its portrayal of urban Indigenous identity, its exploration of generational trauma, the symbolism embedded in its narrative, and its critique of historical and cultural marginalization. Furthermore, the novel has been examined through lenses that emphasize the resilience of Indigenous communities, investigate the intersection of tradition and modernity, question the impacts of displacement, and highlight the role of oral storytelling as a cultural anchor. Most of the researches have been conducted on Native American resistance effort in urban spaces across the United States and some of the studies do

focuses on Native American identities. In this relevance, resistance to Native American in order to cope with trauma is yet to be discussed. Therefore, this research aims to address this gap by specifically examining how Native American communities are resisting as a way to cope with trauma.

In Tommy Orange's *There There*, storytelling, cultural gatherings, and personal resilience emerge as crucial strategies for addressing transgenerational trauma. The novel portrays how inherited grief, rooted in centuries of colonization and cultural dislocation, shapes the lives of its characters. Storytelling plays a central role in this process, allowing individuals to narrate their experiences and transform pain into empowerment. Similarly, the powwow serves as a powerful metaphor for cultural reclamation, offering a space where fragmented identities are pieced together through shared rituals and collective solidarity. Alongside these communal acts, personal resilience is evident in characters like Orvil Red Feather, who confronts his estranged heritage and finds strength in rediscovering his roots. These coping mechanisms are not isolated, they interconnect to show that healing requires both individual courage and communal support. By focusing on these strategies, the novel emphasizes the possibility of recovery and resistance even in the face of persistent trauma. Ultimately, this exploration underscores how *There There* advocates for resilience, cultural memory, and collective healing as essential pathways to confronting transgenerational grief.

The following research questions have been developed to address the central focus of this study: How does *There There* portray the various ways trauma victims cope with transgenerational trauma within the context of urban Indigenous life? In what ways does the novel highlight storytelling, communal gatherings, and cultural traditions as mechanisms for healing and resilience? How do Dominick LaCapra's

concepts of ‘acting out’ and ‘working through’ trauma, alongside Jeffrey C. Alexander’s theory of cultural trauma, provide a framework to analyze the coping strategies depicted in the novel? These research questions aim to explore how characters in *There There* navigate the complexities of inherited trauma, examining the role of collective memory, cultural reconnection, and self-expression in their healing journeys. By investigating these coping mechanisms, the study seeks to shed light on the broader implications of transgenerational trauma, emphasizing the power of cultural practices and community solidarity in fostering resilience and transformation.

Transgenerational trauma refers to the transmission of unresolved trauma from one generation to the next, often perpetuated through behaviors, silences, and cultural practices. Dominick LaCapra’s theoretical concepts of acting out and working through provide a lens to understand how this trauma manifests and can potentially be addressed. Acting out refers to the unconscious repetition of traumatic experiences, where a person relives pain through compulsive behaviors, emotional outbursts, or destructive patterns without consciously processing the trauma. In contrast, working through involves consciously engaging with and reflecting on the trauma to understand and integrate it into one’s identity. This process often includes storytelling, cultural practices, or therapy, allowing individuals to reclaim agency and move toward healing. While acting out keeps trauma alive in present behavior, working through represents a path toward emotional resolution and transformation. In the context of native communities such as those portrayed in Tommy Orange’s *There There*, trauma stemming from colonization, cultural erasure, and displacement is passed down through familial and communal narratives. Characters who suppress

their cultural identity or struggle with addiction exemplify acting out, perpetuating cycles of pain.

Similarly, storytelling and communal events like the powwow in the novel represent attempts at working through, allowing individuals to reclaim their identity and heal collectively. These moments offer Native characters not just a stage to express pain, but also a space for connection, recognition, and collective healing. In the novel, Dene Oxendene's storytelling project is a key example. He sets up a booth at the powwow to record Native stories, hoping to "collect real stories from real Native people living now" (38). His effort is more than a documentation; it becomes a healing ritual that validates Indigenous experiences, countering erasure and silence. Characters like Orvil Red Feather prepare to dance in regalia for the first time, attempting to connect with a culture from which he has long been distanced. Orvil reflects, "You have to know what dancing means. That it's prayer" (120). His dance is not just performance, it is an embodied act of cultural survival.

Moreover, the powwow space creates a shared arena of mourning and resistance, where personal grief intersects with communal purpose. Characters like Blue and Thomas Frank also see the event as a way to start over and reconnect with their heritage. Blue, who is searching for her long-lost family, views the event as a way to return to her roots after years of displacement, abuse, and forced adoption. Thomas Frank, a half-Native drummer and recovering alcoholic, sees the powwow as a chance for personal redemption and belonging. He feels the beat of the drum as healing: "The sound of the drum is the sound of the Earth. The pulse. The truth" (208). These examples highlight how the powwow becomes a symbolic space for collective memory, a site where individual trauma converges into a shared experience of cultural survival.

Additionally, Jeffrey C. Alexander's theory of cultural trauma complements this analysis by examining how collective experiences of suffering, such as colonization or genocide, become integrated into a group's identity. Cultural trauma arises when a community collectively interprets historical events, such as colonization or genocide, as transformative and integral to its narrative. This theoretical framework illuminates the ways in which trauma can either confine individuals to cycles of suffering or serve as a pathway to resilience and renewal when addressed constructively.

Orange uses characters like Dene Oxendene, Orvil Red Feather, and Opal Viola Victoria Bear Shield to show how the legacy of trauma emerges in both personal and collective experiences. This analysis explores the causes and symptoms of transgenerational trauma and how storytelling, community rituals like the powwow, and other coping mechanisms serve as tools for navigating the complexities of inherited pain. Drawing on Dominick LaCapra's concept of 'working through' trauma and Jeffrey C. Alexander's 'framework of cultural trauma,' this paper examines how Orange's characters embody strategies for survival and healing, highlighting the interplay between memory, identity, and resilience in the face of historical oppression.

Transgenerational trauma often manifests in ways that deeply affect individuals and communities, even if the original source of the trauma occurred generations before. Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart in her article outlines the symptoms associated with historical unresolved grief including, "depression, anxiety, survivor guilt, low self-esteem, anger, and difficulty expressing emotions" (6). These symptoms include depression, which can manifest as persistent sadness, hopelessness, or a lack of motivation; and anxiety, which involves feelings of fear, worry, or unease that may seem disproportionate to the present situation. These symptoms are part of

what Maria terms the “historical trauma response,” a constellation of features resulting from cumulative emotional and psychological wounding over generations due to massive group trauma (5).

Likewise, in Tommy Orange’s *There There*, several characters vividly exhibit these symptoms, showcasing the intergenerational impact of colonization. Calvin’s internal conflict, encapsulated in his statement, “I just don’t feel right trying to say something that doesn’t feel true” (149). It can be interpreted as a manifestation of the historical trauma response described by Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart. Calvin’s discomfort with speaking authentically reflects a deeper struggle with low self-esteem and anxiety rooted in inherited trauma. His hesitation to articulate false narratives imposed by colonial history shows his resistance to internalized oppression and his attempt to reclaim authenticity, which is essential for healing.

Similarly, Orvil Red Feather represents the generational disconnection from native identity caused by colonization. When Orvil discovers the regalia in his grandmother Opal’s closet and asks why she doesn’t teach them about being Indian, she responds: “We let you learn by yourself, then teach you when you’re ready” (119). This moment shows the way transgenerational trauma can affect next generation of victim through their culture. Opal’s choice to hold back teaching the boys about their heritage comes from a fear of causing them more pain. She wants to protect them from the challenges that come with being connected to their culture, such as discrimination and feelings of loss.

Jacquie Red Feather in *There There* embodies many of these symptoms as she grapples with her traumatic past. One powerful moment illustrates her emotional collapse, which aligns with Brave Heart’s description of depression and emotional suppression:

> Jacquie was out of the room before the audience even started its hesitant. When she got to her room, she closed the door with her back and slid down, collapsed, and sobbed against it. She pressed her eyes into her knees and bursts of purple, black, green, and yellow splotches bloomed there behind her eyes, then slowly formed into images, then memories. She saw the big hole first. Then her daughter's emaciated body. (105)

Jacquie's emotional breakdown and the vivid memories that flood her mind demonstrate how transgenerational trauma can resurface unexpectedly and powerfully. When Jacquie collapses and sobs, her physical reaction represents the overwhelming impact of unresolved grief. The "splotches" of color behind her eyes symbolize the intense emotional pain she feels, which is too much to process in a straightforward way. These distorted sensations show how trauma alters one's perception, making it difficult to separate past trauma from present reality. The images and memories that emerge from her subconscious reflect the deep psychological scars caused by intergenerational trauma, which Brave Heart argues are central to historical trauma responses.

Tony Loneman in Tommy Orange's *There There* exemplifies low self-esteem and feelings of alienation, which Brave Heart highlights as symptoms of historical trauma. Tony reflects on his experience of living with fetal alcohol syndrome as he says that, "People look at me then look away when they see I see them see me" (16). Tony's reflection highlights the social alienation and shame that often come with being affected by fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS), which is a direct result of trauma. The act of looking away reflects society's tendency to avoid confronting painful histories and the reality of the consequences of trauma, especially when it manifests in ways that are visible, like FAS. For Tony, this reflects how Indigenous people,

especially those who bear the marks of historical trauma (such as FAS, which may be linked to cycles of alcohol abuse within families), are often stigmatized and treated as different or lesser.

Similarly, Daniel Gonzales's, a young native man before robbing the Powwow writes an email to his brother Manny saying, "so let them rob a powwow, whatever, dad never told us anything about being Indian. What's that got to do with us" (194). This statement highlight his detachment from his cultural identity and the disconnection that many Indigenous individuals experience as a result of generational trauma. His dismissive tone suggests a lack of understanding or recognition of the cultural and spiritual significance of the powwow, reflecting the erosion of cultural knowledge within his family.

Similarity, "dissociation and depersonalization, emotional numbness, feeling of shame and guilt or low self-esteem are some common signs and symptoms of generational trauma" (Raypole). These symptoms arise as individuals cope with inherited pain from past generations, particularly in communities affected by historical trauma. Dissociation and depersonalization create a sense of detachment from oneself, while emotional numbness helps protect against overwhelming emotions. Shame, guilt, and low self-esteem often stem from internalized societal rejection and cultural loss.

Similar to the signs of generational trauma described by Crystal Raypole, Edwin Black in exhibits these characteristics throughout the novel. Edwin's alienation from his native heritage, amplifies by his mother's failure to connect him with his father's culture, results in a fractured sense of self. He expresses frustration with his mixed identity, stating: "I've always hated it when my mom says 'Native American Indian.' It's a weird politically correct catch-all you only hear from white people

who've never known a real Native person" (69). This quote shows the frustration some Indigenous people feel when their identity is misunderstood or simplified by outsiders. The speaker dislikes the term "Native American Indian" because it feels like a label used by people who don't really understand what it means to be native. The speaker points out that this term is often used by white people who have never met a real Native person, making it feel impersonal and generic. It reflects a bigger issue of how Indigenous identities are often oversimplified or misrepresented by those outside their communities. This comment reflects Edwin's dissociation from his heritage and the emotional numbness he feels in his search for authenticity.

Furthermore, his self-loathing and isolation are evident when he grapples with low self-esteem, indicative of the generational trauma he carries from both sides of his ancestry. As he states, "I am aware of the fact that I am huge, I walk around with it, it knocks things over. I can't fit into most of my clothes" (73). Edwin's low self-esteem and feelings of self-hate reflect the emotional burden of trauma he inherits. When he talks about being "huge" and how his body "knocks things over," it shows that he feels out of place, not just physically, but emotionally as well. His difficulty fitting into clothes symbolizes his struggle to find a sense of belonging, both in his body and in the world around him. This highlights how generational trauma affects his self-image and sense of worth, influencing how he sees himself and his place in society. This feeling of being physically out of place mirrors his emotional and cultural disconnect, reinforcing the generational trauma he carries.

Likewise, Edwin's self-doubt and frustration with his identity reflect the emotional numbness and dissociation. As he states, "I am as Native as Obama is Black. It's different though. For Natives. I know. I don't know how to be. Every possible way I think that it might look for me to say I am Native seems wrong" (72).

The struggle to define oneself in relation to cultural heritage shows how deeply disconnected they feel from their roots. The confusion about how to claim their identity without feeling 'wrong' highlights the internal conflict and uncertainty many experience when they are caught between different cultural worlds. This sense of not knowing 'how to be' reveals the emotional numbness that can come from generational trauma, where individuals may feel detached from their own heritage, unsure of how to connect with a culture they feel distant from, despite it being part of their ancestry.

Additionally, Octavio's statement reflects experiences commonly associated with low self-esteem as he states, "Some of us got this feeling stuck inside all the time like we have done something wrong. Like we ourselves are something wrong. Like who we are deep inside—that thing we want to name but can't. We are afraid we'll be punished for it. So we hide" (184). This statement profoundly illustrates the internalized sense of shame and self-doubt experienced by individuals carrying unresolved trauma. This enduring feeling of being inherently flawed or "wrong" closely corresponds with the symptom of low self-esteem identified by Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart in her work on historical unresolved grief. Brave Heart outlines that low self-esteem, alongside depression, anxiety, and survivor guilt, is a common manifestation of intergenerational trauma. Thus, Octavio's vivid description of fear and concealment can be understood as an expression of the low self-worth that arises from the lingering effects of collective and transgenerational trauma.

Similar to Edwin's dissociation and struggle with his identity, Blue's reflection also captures the impact of generational trauma on self-perception and cultural belonging. Crystal Raypole describes how symptoms such as "dissociation and depersonalization, emotional numbness, and feelings of shame and guilt or low self-esteem" often emerge in individuals coping with inherited trauma (4). These

symptoms are evident in Blue's internal conflict when she states, "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 shapes throw pillow my mom always made me keep on my bed even though I used it" (198). Blue's dissociation manifests in her inability to reconcile her external Indigenous features with the internalized whiteness shaped by her upbringing and societal pressures. Her description of feeling 'as white as the long white pill shapes throw pillow' symbolizes an emotional numbness, a protective detachment that distances her from the pain of navigating her mixed identity in a predominantly white society. Moreover, Blue's reflection mirrors the shame and low self-esteem described by Raypole, as her internal conflict reveals the cultural dislocation imposed by systemic oppression. Blue's feelings of detachment highlight the pervasive nature of generational trauma, which leaves individuals questioning their place within their own cultural and social contexts.

Similarly, Thomas Frank also grapples with the complexities of living with a dual heritage marked by historical trauma. As he states, "You are from people who took and took and took. And from a people taken. You were both and neither" (216). This statement highlights the tension between the colonizer and the colonized within his identity, revealing the struggle of belonging fully to neither group. It reflects the emotional and cultural conflict experienced by many Indigenous people of mixed ancestry, caught between histories of oppression and privilege. Thomas's words underscore how transgenerational trauma complicates identity formation, leading to feelings of alienation, confusion, and a fractured sense of self.

Furthermore, anger and aggression often emerge as symptoms of transgenerational trauma, reflecting the unresolved pain and systemic injustices

inherited by descendants of trauma survivors. “Psychological studies have characterized various symptoms exhibited by the children and grandchildren of trauma survivors. These vary from group to group but normally manifest in signs associated with Post traumatic stress disorder as well as behavioral disorder such as aggression and delinquency” (Ali). These symptoms can vary by group but commonly include signs of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), such as flashbacks, anxiety, and hypervigilance, as well as behavioral issues like aggression and delinquency. These behaviors are a direct result of the trauma passed down through generations, reflecting the unresolved emotional wounds that affect the descendants of those who experienced systemic injustices. Anger and aggression, in particular, are often expressions of this inherited trauma, as individuals struggle with feelings of helplessness, frustration, and the lasting impact of their ancestors' pain.

In the text, this is evident in Tony Loneman’s character. When a friend mocks his appearance, Tony reacts violently, later reflecting: “I don’t remember what I did. I still don’t know. I remember smears of blood on the metal and the taste of metal in my mouth” (15). This moment illustrates how deeply Tony’s inherited trauma manifests as aggression, underscoring the novel’s broader commentary on the cyclical nature of historical trauma and its psychological toll on individuals. This pattern of aggression as a response to feelings of abandonment is further illustrated when Tony confronts the harsh realities of his identity. He remarks as: “The way I see it, I got this big body to help me since my face got it so bad. That’s how looking like a monster works out for me. And when I stand up, when I stand up real fucking tall like I can, nobody will fuck with me” (19). This statement underscores Tony's internal struggle and the way he uses his physical presence to mask his vulnerability and assert control. The aggression implied in his words stems from his need to protect himself in a world that

has consistently rejected and misunderstood him. It reflects the intersection of systemic marginalization and personal trauma, illustrating how deeply rooted pain manifests as outward hostility.

Cultural Trauma as defined by Andrew and Bruce, “involves an assault by a dominant group on an individual’s culture through force, threats of force or oppressive policies for the purpose of damaging, devaluing or destroying that culture to advance the dominant group’s interest in gaining key resources(eg, natural, labor) or status/ reputation (eg colonial empires)” (3). The novel presents various examples of how systemic violence has been used to damage and erase Indigenous cultures, leaving deep scars that affect successive generations. In the prologue of a novel, there is mention of the forced relocation and assimilation policies that pushed Native Americans into cities, reflected in the statement: “Getting us to cities was supposed to be the final, necessary step in our assimilation, absorption, erasure, the completion of a five-hundred-year-old genocidal campaign” (8). The statement emphasizes the deliberate and systemic efforts to remove Indigenous people from their ancestral lands and assimilate them into the dominant culture, effectively completing a long history of cultural violence. It also highlights how the relocation of Native peoples was not just about removing them from their land but about systematically erasing their culture and identity to serve the interests of the dominant colonial powers.

Furthermore, they opine as: “Cultural trauma has been clearly observed in multiple populations including Holocaust survivors, refugees, combat veterans and indigenous populations” (9). This observation aligns with the experiences portrayed in the novel, where Native characters grapple with the intergenerational effects of colonization, forced assimilation, and systemic marginalization. The prologue vividly recounts historical atrocities, such as “the massacre of the Pequot” (5) and “the forced

relocation of Native Americans to cities" (8). These events exemplify the cultural trauma endured by Indigenous communities, creating a shared legacy of grief and identity loss.

Teresa Campbell writes in her article that, "cultural trauma occurs through physical dislocation from native land via force, genocide or disease" (320). It shows that Cultural trauma occurs when a group experiences profound and collective psychological injury due to catastrophic events that disrupt their cultural identity and continuity. Physical dislocation from native land, whether through force, genocide, or disease, is a significant source of such trauma. Forced displacement, as seen in colonization or government relocation policies, severs people from their ancestral lands, which hold deep spiritual, cultural, and historical significance, leading to the erosion of cultural practices and identities.

Similar kind of cultural trauma dislocating through disease is seen in the novel. Tony addresses the statement of the Maxine as, "The sad part is, all those Indians probably knew but couldn't do anything about it. They didn't have guns. Plus the diseases. Killed us with their white man's dirt and diseases, moved us off our land, moved us onto some shit land you can't grow fucking shit on" (18). This particular statement is taken place when white colonizers wanted them to move out from Oakland. Tony reflects on Maxine's statement, acknowledging the harsh reality faced by Native Americans during colonization. He remarks that many likely understood what was happening but were powerless to stop it, lacking weapons to defend them. He highlights how diseases brought by white settlers devastated their communities, describing them as "white man's dirt and diseases." He further emphasizes how they were forcibly removed from their lands and relocated to barren, infertile land where survival was nearly impossible. He further addresses the Maxine statement, "It's my

only home. I wouldn't make it nowhere else" (18). She is expressing her deep attachment to Oakland and the critical role it plays in her sense of identity and survival. This statement reflects her recognition that Oakland is not just a physical space but a cornerstone of her life and community. The devastating effects of trauma caused by forced displacement, genocide, and disease are deeply ingrained in the collective memory of Native communities, leaving lasting scars on their cultural identity and individual well-being. These historical injustices have resulted in profound loss, alienation, and disconnection from cultural roots.

However, amidst the pain and disruption, Indigenous communities have developed various coping mechanisms to navigate and process this intergenerational trauma. These mechanisms, rooted in resilience and cultural preservation, provide pathways to healing by fostering connections to heritage, community, and self-expression. By exploring these strategies, it becomes evident how storytelling, traditions, and communal events serve not only as a means of survival but also as tools for reclaiming identity and creating spaces for healing and renewal. Coping mechanisms plays a crucial role in both individual and collective healing, providing pathways for resilience and recovery.

In *There There*, coping strategies are not only responses to trauma but also acts of resistance and reclamation of cultural identity. These mechanisms enable the characters to navigate their inherited pain and rebuild a sense of self and community. In *There There*, resilience functions as a critical coping mechanism, allowing the characters to navigate their inherited pain and work toward healing. As L Kimberg and M Wheeler defines resilience, it is "the ability of an individual, family, or community to cope with adversity and trauma and adapt to challenges or change" (28). This ability to adapt and persist despite the overwhelming weight of trauma is

evident in the characters' actions throughout the novel. The character Dene Oxendene's storytelling project serves as an act of resilience, as he creates a space for urban Indigenous individuals to narrate their experiences, despite the trauma that has silenced their voices for generations. He says, "There are so many stories here. I know this means a lot of editing, a lot of watching, and a lot of listening but that's just what our community needs considering how long it's been ignored and has remained invisible" (40). This statement reflects not only the necessity of telling their stories but also the resilience required to face the pain of their past and share it with the world.

Similarly, resilience is evident in Orvil's Red feather's journey of reconnecting with his heritage. When his brother asks, "Why does everyone dress up, dance and sing Indian?" Orvil replies, "They are just old ways. Dancing, singing Indian. We gotta carry it on. If we don't, they might disappear" (131). This statement reflects Orvil's strong desire to reconnect with his heritage and his recognition of the urgency to preserve Indigenous traditions. His determination to carry on these "old ways" demonstrates his resilience in the face of cultural loss, as he actively works to bridge the disconnection imposed by colonization.

Likewise, resilience is poignantly reflected in Jacquie Red Feather's journey too. After years of struggling with addiction and guilt, Jacquie expresses her determination to heal when she says: "I am trying to make my way back" (6). Her words reflect her resilience and her commitment to reconnecting with her family and cultural identity.

Wendy Sims Schouten writes in his book that, "personal involvement in collective, universal values, transcending the particulars of one's family history, may be a means of escaping the traumatic experience" (154). This perspective highlights

the importance of engaging with communal and cultural practices to address and alleviate personal trauma. In Tommy Orange's *There There*, the powwow serves as a powerful example of such collective engagement. It becomes a space where characters can transcend their individual struggles and family histories, finding solace and healing through shared traditions and values. For Opal, Powwow functions as a communal space that allows Opal to reconnect with her native heritage, offering her a moment of connection and meditation on her identity. Though Opal has distanced herself from her culture- "had been openly against any of them doing anything Indian (118)". It shows her ambivalence and unresolved trauma stemming from her unstable childhood days on Alcatraz Island and years on foster care. The experiences characterized by instability and disconnection have significantly influenced her complex relationship with her heritage. However, she attends the powwow to see her cousin's performance and it allows her to reconnect with her culture in a way she hasn't been able to before. This signals her a step toward healing from the trauma she inherited.

Orvil Red Feather's decision to compete in the powwow dancing competition is a significant step toward reconnecting with his Native identity. Although he has to win the prize money, "not the money" drives him, but the urge "to dance for the first time like he learnt, from the TV but also from practice" (232). This moment represents Orvil's quest for identity and belonging as he attempts to restore his connection to his culture. Similarly, Orvil has also said about Powwow that, "they are just old ways, Lony. Dancing, singing Indian. We gotta carry it on. If we don't they might disappear" (131). This statement emphasizes his sense of responsibility to preserve his cultural heritage and it also shows how the powwow is not just a celebration; it is a necessary act of cultural survival. For Orvil, reconnecting with

these traditions allows him to address his sense of separation as well as it also symbolizes resistance against the forces that have undermined Native identity for generations. Similarly, Orvil's statement are clearly related to the issue of transgenerational trauma as he believes that embracing and conserving these "old ways" is essential in maintaining his own and his community's identity. This demonstrates how powwow functions as coping strategy allowing Orvil to claim their heritage.

Likewise, Tony Loneman's recollection of attending powwows with his grandmother Maxine and his past participation in dancing further highlights the importance of cultural traditions in coping with transgenerational trauma. As Tony says, "Maxine had been taking me to powwows all around the Bay since I was young. I don't anymore, but I used to dance" (23). Though Tony no longer dances or attends powwows, the memory signifies an earlier connection to his native culture and heritage. Powwows, for many Native communities, are not just cultural events but spaces of healing, collective identity, and resistance to the erasure of Indigenous traditions.

The decision of Opal and Jacquie's mother to move her daughters to Alcatraz during the Native American occupation reflects Wendy Sims-Schouten's notion of 'personal involvement in collective, universal values' (154). Opal and Jacquie's mother's statement, "We are going to be with our relatives. Indians of all tribes. We are going over to where they built that prison. Gonna start from the inside of the cell, which is where we are now, Indian people that's where they got us, even though they don't make it seem like they got us there. We are gonna work our way out from the inside with a spoon"—reflects the deep symbolism of the Alcatraz occupation. The reference to being trapped 'inside the cell' captures the historical confinement of

Indigenous peoples within colonial systems of oppression. This metaphor of imprisonment ties directly to the idea of transgenerational trauma, where Indigenous communities have been marginalized and silenced by external forces. However, the idea of working "our way out from the inside with a spoon" symbolizes the empowerment of Indigenous people to reclaim their own agency and identity, using even the smallest tools of resistance to break free (11). In the context of the Alcatraz occupation, this "spoon" becomes a symbol of resilience and collective action. Just as the occupation was an act of defiance against the U.S. government's policies towards Native Americans, Opal and Jacquie's mother's words reflect a desire to overcome oppression not through individual struggle, but through unity with other Indigenous peoples, transcending personal histories of trauma through collective resistance.

Renee Lynn argues in her article that, "Cultural approaches are essential for indigenous people to move forward in healing from colonization" (20). Many characters cope by reconnecting with their cultural heritage and customs, looking for rituals or acts that make them feel connected to their ancestors and cultural roots. 'Indigenous storytelling' and 'cultural practices' (310) provide essential frameworks for processing trauma and restoring identity, as noted by Kirmayer et al. in their analysis of historical trauma within Indigenous communities. Powwow in *There There* acts as a communal coping strategy more than just a cultural event for native Indian as the unidentified narrator underscores its importance by stating, "We keep powwowing because there aren't very many places where we get to all be together, where we get to see and hear each other" (135). This statement highlights powwow is the only place where native people gather, connect with their heritage and shared cultural practices as they "dress up indian, with feathers and bead, dance sing and beat big drum" (23). Participants can recover their collective identity and receive support

in this context, boosting their resistance against the alienation and detachment that the native Indian feel.

Furthermore, at the end of the novel, all the characters attend the Powwow. Orvil has attended the big Oakland Powwow to participate in dance. Before going to the stage to perform dance, one of the dancers told him that, “that dance is your prayer” (231), and “your feathers a flutter of echoes centuries old” (234). This moment emphasizes the powwow as a transformative space where historical trauma and cultural disconnection can begin to heal through collective and individual acts of reclaiming identity. Orvil’s dance is symbolic—it is not only a form of cultural expression but also a ritual that connects him to a lineage of resilience and survival. The statement ‘the dance is your prayer’ underscores the spiritual dimension of the powwow, where traditional practices act as both a form of worship and a means of emotional and psychological restoration. Furthermore, the reference to his feathers as ‘echoes of history’ highlights the enduring legacy of Indigenous traditions, despite the forces of colonization and displacement. The powwow becomes a powerful site for “working through” transgenerational trauma by fostering a sense of belonging, cultural pride, and spiritual connection among the participants.

Similarly, storytelling serves as a powerful means to counter this trauma. By sharing their own histories and truths, Native people resist the erasure imposed on them. As Judith states, “The action of telling a story in the safety of a protected relationship can actually produce a change in the abnormal processing of a traumatic memory” (318). This highlights how storytelling provides a safe avenue for individuals to narrate and process their experiences, facilitating emotional healing. This idea resonates deeply with Dene Oxendene’s storytelling project in Tommy Orange’s *There There*, which creates a space for Indigenous individuals to share their

stories, reclaim their narratives, and cope with trauma. As Dene Oxydene explains, “I want to put a camera in front of them, video, audio, I’ll transcribe it while they talk if they want, let them write every kind of story I can collect. Let them tell their stories with no one else there, with no direction or manipulation or agenda” (40). Dene’s method ensures that participants have complete control over their narratives, which is crucial for trauma survivors. By removing any external 'direction or manipulation,' Dene creates a space where individuals can safely confront and articulate their experiences in their own way. This aligns with Herman’s view that storytelling in a protected environment can lead to meaningful changes in how traumatic memories are processed.

Furthermore, Dene realizes that storytelling is not just about narrating individual histories but about creating a sense of solidarity within a community. As he explains, “when you hear stories from people like you, you feel less alone. When you feel less alone, and like you have a community of people behind you, alongside you, I believe you can live better life” (123). Individuals coping with transgenerational trauma require a strong feeling of belonging. Dene's initiative, which brings together voices from across generations, allows participants to confront the inherited pain of colonization, relocation, and cultural loss as well as providing a supportive network for healing and reclaiming their identity.

The significance of storytelling is further emphasized by Opal’s mother, who declares, “Opal, you have to know that we should never not tell our stories, and that no one is too young to hear. We’re all here because of a lie. They been lying to us since they came. They’re lying to us now! ” (57). The character’s statement, “They are lying to us now,” refers to the continuous erasure and misrepresentation of native identity and history. Native people perceptions of themselves and their place in

society are still shaped by these colonial lies. As each new generation inherits the emotional and psychological consequences of these false narratives, this historical distortion leads to the continuation of transgenerational trauma. Because of these lies the trauma of cultural erasure identity loss and displacement isn't limited to the past, it still haunts native communities.

In this way, storytelling is a way to break the cycle of transgenerational trauma, giving future generations the truth and tools they need to heal. It also restores a sense of collective memory, allowing Native people to reclaim their identity and history, which have been distorted by the lies of colonization. By resisting the lies and telling their own stories, characters in *There There* protect themselves and future generations from inheriting the same unresolved trauma, turning storytelling into an act of survival and healing.

In conclusion, the causes and effects of trauma experienced by native communities, including forced displacement, genocide, and disease, have left a profound and lasting impact on their cultural identity and collective psyche. These injustices have disrupted traditional ways of life, severed ties to ancestral lands, and created cycles of loss and alienation that continue to resonate across generations. However, the resilience of these communities is evident in their ability to develop and sustain coping mechanisms that address this deep-seated trauma. Through storytelling, cultural practices, communal gatherings, and reclaiming their heritage, Indigenous peoples have found ways to process pain, preserve identity, and foster healing. These coping strategies not only help individuals and communities navigate the emotional weight of their histories but also serve as acts of resistance and reclamation, affirming their enduring presence and cultural vitality. By understanding both the profound effects of trauma and the powerful tools of resilience, we gain a

deeper appreciation for the strength and creativity of these communities in shaping paths toward healing and renewal.

Beyond its exploration of coping with transgenerational trauma, Tommy Orange's *There There* also addresses broader issues such as urban Indigenous identity, systemic marginalization, and mental health. The novel highlights the tension between cultural preservation and urban life, the lasting effects of institutional racism and poverty, and the impact of fractured family ties on identity and belonging. It also portrays addiction and self-destructive behaviors as responses to historical trauma. Exploring these issues enriches the understanding of *There There* as a multidimensional narrative that not only confronts intergenerational trauma but also critically examines the effects of urbanization, cultural displacement, institutional racism, poverty, fractured family structures, and mental health struggles on the lives of urban Indigenous people.

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