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## Bicultural Subjectivity and Modern Native American Identity in Alexie's *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part Time Indian*

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### Abstract

*The colonial enterprise of Euro-Americans, since its first contact, flourished on the false notions of Indianness, fixating the image of Native Americans as primitive and savages without any claim to civilization or history. This fixity and lack of presence involuntarily led to an absence marked by a lack of identity and subjectivity for the Indians. The current article explores Sherman Alexie's *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* through the theoretical lens of Jana Sequoya, affirming bicultural subjectivity propagated by mixed-blood writers on the nexus of inside-outside as a suitable solution to the paradoxes that constitute Indian identity. Denying the rigid approach of the insularity of cultures, this bicultural work offers the possibility of Indianization of American forms and adaptation and acculturation of those dominant forms that are integral for the advancement of Indians in the modern world. The current research also deduces that such a presence can powerfully combat and confound the discursive dichotomy and representation of Indians as the binarized version of modern and civilized Whites.*

**Key Words:** Acculturation, Bicultural Subjectivity, Identity, Native Americans, Representation

### Introduction

W. E. B. DuBois's (1953) powerful assertion more than 100 years ago that "the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color line" (p. xii) is still as relevant as it was back then. In addition to what DuBois dissected as the black/white binary, the American society and its literature has been marked by numerous ethnicities, racial distinctions and color lines, so to say. With Afro-American literature being the most prominent one in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Native American literature has gained momentum and prominence in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. 'The Native American Renaissance' (Lincoln, 1983), which started with Momaday's groundbreaking *House Made of Dawn* (1968), included a rich contribution by writers towards Native American literary tradition

embedded in centuries-old tribal and communal roots. These works stand as counter-narratives to the discursive formation of Native Americans by the whites as well as a representation of and attempt to highlight their distinct indigenous culture. As Krupat (1989) asserts in *The Voice of the Margin*, "[t]here is always a return of the repressed in one form or another: and now it is no longer possible to pretend the Other is simply silent or absent because the formerly conquered write – as they fight – back" (pp. 3-4). Along with celebrating and rejuvenating their culture and resisting the White's dominance, these writers also address the contemporary dilemma of survival and maintaining an identity for the Native Americans in today's America. The issue of Native American's identity as a speaking subject, therefore,

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is one of the major concerns of Native American literature. Whether there can be a speaking Indian subject in the first place is a question that comes prior to what constitutes such a subject. In the wake of historical trauma with centuries of genocide and displacement, Indian identity is faced with complexities and paradoxes of identity reconfiguration, which need to be addressed and resolved. Sherman Alexie, being one of the most prominent contemporary literary figures in America, has explored this issue in all its possibilities and diversities. Having named in 1996 as one of *Granta* magazine's "Twenty Best American Novelists under the Age of Forty" and in 1999 (Buford) among the "twenty best young fiction writers in America today" by *The New Yorker*, Alexie enjoys a position that makes him acclaimed in both the Indian and White worlds. Although his poetry is very passionate and aggressive in rebutting and defying the cultural apocalypse that Euro-Americans launched on indigenous culture yet his fiction is more practical and agenda-driven in offering a solution for formulating and maintaining an Indian identity that is strong, autonomous and surviving.

Sherman Joseph Alexie, Jr. was born in Spokane, Washington, to parents of Salish descent and ancestry from various tribes as well as mixed Euro-American ancestry. Having grown up on the Spokane reservation in Wellpinit, he later moved to an all-white school in Reardan for better education. This proved to be the right decision as he paved his way through the Euro-American system and education, gaining numerous awards and honors towards a highly successful literary career. The theme of surviving and balancing both cultures, making the most of both of them with a special focus on education for Native Americans, is one of the recurrent themes in Alexie's life and fiction. While on the Presidential Panel for the National Dialogue on Race (1998), Alexie appreciated the establishment of the American Indian College Fund and the twenty-nine colleges for the Indians on reservations and insisted that "we have begun that process of understanding that education can be just as traditional, just as tribal as a powwow or any other ceremony, that education should become sacred" (1998, p. 6). This paper attempts to investigate one such work of Alexie, *The Absolutely True Diary of*

*Part-Time Indian* (2007), a semi-autobiographical novel, where Alexie powerfully deals with the question of identity and bicultural subjectivity for the Indian Americans. The paper explores how through this novel, by drawing on his own life as a bicultural Indian, Alexie advocates bicultural subjectivity as a site of a reconstruction of identity and survival for the Native Americans.

### Literature Review

For the most part of history, the 'vanishing Indian ideology' has described Native American subjectivity and identity. The whole paraphernalia of the Euro-American discourse, including history, media, literature, judiciary and literary criticism, has nurtured this representation of Native Americans as noble savages bound to be doomed. This discursive representation as either vanishing tribal in need of preservation as artefacts or as primitive and savage cannibals left the Indians without any scope of agency and subjectivity, viewing them as objects of knowledge and discovery rather than subjects. The label of being "dumb, drunken, dirty and degraded" (Kent, 2007, p. 78) lent the biggest hand in justifying and legitimizing their genocide on all levels. Since the earliest period, Native American writers have written out of and against this form of stigmatization for the sake of survival, survivance and subjectivity. This striving has moved from a rigid refusal to come to terms with the dominant culture to a stage of hybridized existence where there is a scope of bicultural subjectivity. The question of how can a Native subject survive and, equally importantly, the question of the relation of Native subjectivity, whether and how it can be situated in relation to dominant Euro-American culture has been a prominent one for Native American theorists and writers. Native survivance, for Vizenor, "is an active sense of presence over absence, nihilism and victimiry" (2008, p. 17). Being one of the most fierce and subversive of the mixed-blood writers, Vizenor promotes a balancing of opposites, rather than resolving the tension, with irony and subversion. He negates the victimiry and lamentation attached with the trauma narratives in favor of a native survivance and subjectivity that is "more than survival, more than endurance or mere response" (Vizenor, 2000, p. 53). This balancing can be seen as a contrast to

literary separatism suggested by Craig S. [Womack in \*Red on Red\* \(1999\)](#), where he advocates a radical “Red Stick” (p. 12) approach in focusing on and initiating from an exclusive native perspective only which promotes a “Native consciousness” (p. 5). Elvira Pulitano in *Towards a Native American Critical Theory* (2003) also highlights the “highly hybridized nature” (p. 7) of Native American literature and theory and discusses how writers like Vizenor, Greg Sarris and Louis Owens indulge in the complexities of Native American literature. By bringing the spoken word as “the traces of oral stories” ([Vizenor, 2000, p. 62](#)) onto the written text with the tales of survival, these writers, on the one hand, celebrate the “tribal-centred approach” ([Pulitano, 2003, p. 6](#)), while simultaneously reflecting the different worldviews as mixed-blood authors. While writers like Womack, Allen and Warrior take up a “Nativist stance” arguing for a “tribalcentric” approach (p. 102) with the aim of speaking from and within the native perspective only, Pulitano lists [Silko's \*Ceremony\* \(1977\)](#), Momaday's *House Made of Dawn* (1968) and Vizenor's *Bearheart* (1990) among others as spokesperson of “mediational” strategy – connecting two different worlds and worldviews” ([Pulitano, 2003, p. 8](#)). She hails these works against the backdrop of separatist discourse, which runs the dangers of turning Native identity into a form of obsolete “museum culture” (p. 9). This cross-cultural dialogue and hybridity are inevitable for Native Americans and their literature as it mediates and connects both views without compromising on Native identity and presenting bicultural subjectivity as a site of survival and identity.

[Momaday's \*House Made of Dawn\* \(1968\)](#) has been considered a classic of Native American literature, inspiring major North American writers like Leslie Mormon Silko, Louis Erdrich and Sherman Alexie. Momaday speaks both as an insider and outsider of the American society, writing out of dual cultural context. [Silko's \*Ceremony\* \(1997\)](#) is another celebratory novel coming from a mixed-blood writer who has been hailed for the apparent duality of her work, representing resistance to and assimilation with the dominant culture. None the less there have been critics like Paula Gunn Allen who have criticized such writing traditions. [Allen \(1990\)](#) asserts that the tribal stories “are not to be told

outside the clan” (p. 383). Sherman Alexie's *The Absolutely True Diary of Part-Time Indian* shares with Momaday and Silko the possibility and presentation of a bicultural scenario, presenting it in a semi-autobiographical work. The novel under discussion is one of the most vehement in such representations that insist on both the acceptance in the dominant American society as well as an ‘Indianization’ of appropriated cultural forms with the recuperation of the Native Indian identity.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The current article uses the theoretical insight of Native American author and literary critic Jana Sequoya regarding the bicultural subjectivities suggested by bicultural mediators as an answer to the question of Indian identity. In her essay *How (!) Is an Indian: A Contest of Stories* (1993), she dissects in detail the paradoxes and possibilities of living and material conditions of being an Indian. She mentions this essay as part of an ongoing project to broaden the scope of discussion on Native American literature by emphasizing the sense of responsibility attached to viewing the culture as a lived experience with its representation in various modes of emergence, continuity and identity. This issue is further discussed by her in detail in *Revising the Ethnic Canon* (1994). She believes that to counter the Euro American discourse of “vanishing Indian” and “manifest destiny”, Indian-identified writers being bicultural mediators stand the best chance to configure a speaking Indian subject who is “still here” (Sequoya, 1993, p. 290) as a bicultural subject. However, this possibility of subjectivity comes with its set of paradoxes as it implicates “categories of meaning and codes of representation that convey an implicit set of social goals in many ways contrary to those that articulate their own stories” (p. 290). Sequoya further highlights the ethical question and issue of responsibility that comes with Indian “narratives of identity” (p. 291). These complexities, she believes, are evident at best in Momaday's *House Made of Dawn* and Silko's *Ceremony*, where these syncretic works focus on “recuperation of indigenous sources of identity” and thus posit the issue of ethical responsibility that results from the “dual social contexts” (p. 293) of these works. Another related issue is of the non-Indians being used as “experts” in

Vine Deloria's words, as cited by Ward [Churchill \(1988\)](#) in *A Little Matter of Genocide: Native American Spirituality & New Age Hucksterism*, and this practice is aimed at supplanting Indians, even in areas of their own customs and spirituality as Pam Colorado, an Oneida poet cited by Churchill, has protested. It ultimately leads to ideological and conceptual subordination of Indians along with the physical oppression where non-Indian starts owning the native heritage just like their lands and resources. Therefore, what all these critics strongly advocate is the modern Indians' need to "reinvent viable conditions of being Indian" (Sequoya, 1993, p. 296), and to that end, best teacher or expert for young American Indian would be fully bicultural American Indian himself. Although both the native and European cultures stand in contrast with each other with political, economic, and social differences, with Native American communities insisting and preserving "identification with ancestral events, customs and values" (p. 296) and Euro-Americans with expansionist and individualistic goals, bicultural subjectivity offers sustenance and flourishing of tribal communities within the dominant structures of the master narrative. Such works "articulate the social forces contending for dominance within the tribal communities" (p. 293) along with those of the mainstream society. For Sequoya, what is of paramount importance in works like *House Made of Dawn* and *Ceremony* is the attestation of the "assimilation of the American Indian structures of identity to the mainstream" as well as the "Indianization of the appropriated cultural forms" (p. 300). Writing from the social axis of "inside-outside" (p. 291), and having experienced dual life of both reservation and dominant White society, such writers and their works, characters, and stories articulate new bicultural identities responding to the clashing subject positions. Sequoya calls such works as "hybrid forms or mixed-blood" and "half-breed" (p. 301), which voice a moment of "hesitation" (p. 300) as Clifford puts it in *The Predicament of Culture*, 343, a hesitation which renders a stage of entering into a new form of conceptual and social reorganization. Sequoya (1993) calls it a "metacommunication" (p. 301) about their existential conditions done at the cultural level. These works, therefore, can be said to exhibit a

contemporary expression of Native American storytelling, which depicts adaptive transformations of tribal conventions as well as their continuity. The "half-breed protagonist" (p. 302) of such works represents and articulates the new emerging subjectivities, which arise out of the duality of colonial dependence and postcolonial resistance and thus "mediates" on the one hand and "negates the relation of the colonizer and the colonized (p. 302) on the other hand. Sequoya, therefore, emphasizes that these contemporary works with mixed-breed narratives and stories offer new paradigms of speaking subject for the Native-Americans on the "analogic mode of both-and, more-less" (p. 302) without totally collapsing the cultural differences into mere binaries of oppositions. She warns, however, against the misuse and transgression of the cultural sanctions on the tribal stories in this retelling which is again a paradoxical site for the writers and asks for a careful attitude in not betraying the origins and the roots. Sequoya also makes a point to highlight the material conditions of being Indian, which call for attention towards the viable conditions of being Indian or what she calls "how is an Indian" (p. 306). These material conditions of where the Indians are living, whether in reservation or cities and what financial and economic resources are at their disposal become highly integral to the question of the identity of Indians.

It is from this theoretical angle that the current paper aims at exploring and analyzing Alexie's novel *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* and discusses his narrative as suggesting bicultural subjectivity as the nexus where the Native Americans' indigenous identity can coexist within American mainstream culture. Acquiring a realistic and moderate attitude in his fiction, Alexie strongly advocates bicultural subjectivity as a modern Native American identity with the scope for achieving success in the White world without losing the connection to and spirit of the Indian world. What this bicultural subjectivity suggests is not a "move to a singular and homogenous subjectivity", like Deborah, L. [Madsen \(2008\)](#) observes in *Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence*, but a move that can account for a shift towards a "preservation of difference not sameness [...] of balance, not resolution and Freudian 'wholeness'" (p. 83).

### Textual Analysis

Sherman Alexie's expression across five genres of poetry, short story, novel, non-fiction and the film shares with many of the other American Indian writers the "central motif reaffirming Native lives and Native nationhood", but instead of focusing on the redemptive power of native nostalgia, he "affirms a more individual agency unique to Native identities, by a distinct artistic pattern of personal affirmation and reconnection" ([Moore, 2005, p. 297](#)). In *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, drawing on his own lived experience as a Native American having experienced both the reservation and the White high profile life, Alexie makes a powerful recourse to Indian identity with all its distinctiveness and the need of adaptation and survival in the modern world. The novel belongs to the genre of young adult fiction, highly controversial for its depiction of extreme poverty, alcoholism, school bullying and profanities and for this very reason, it becomes highly relevant for the issue of modern Indian identity.

*The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* is a semi-autobiographical novel that Alexie himself has described as being seventy-eight percent true in being related to his life. From plot to characterization, most of the incidents and episodes of the plot, especially the protagonist, bear a resemblance to Alexie's own life and family. The plot is uncovered in a first-person narrative by a fourteen years old Spokane Indian, Arnold Spirit Junior, living on the Wellpinit reservation with his family and later moving to Rearden High School, where he is the only Indian besides the team mascot (just like what Alexie himself had experienced). This journey from Wellpinit to Rearden proves to be a journey of self-discovery and realization where Junior, the protagonist, lands on greater truths about his identity as well as the latest reality of the American world. The story opens up with Junior introducing his physical condition, with his birth defects of hydrocephalus, seizures, poor eyesight and stuttering. All these physical defects make Junior an easy target for the bullies at his school, adding insult to the injury of his already devastatingly poor life at reservation. The novel begins with the first chapter dedicated to the description of Junior's physical deformity, and this emphasis on fractured body and brain can be said to

symbolize the fractured identity and identity crisis faced by Native American as a result of the assault on their cultures, lands and bodies. The narrative moves on to highlight the poverty Junior and his family, as well as the other Indians, face the problems related to excessive alcohol usage by almost every other Indian and the tragedies and deaths they all face due to alcohol. Frustrated and angry at all this, he decides to move to an all-White school of Rearden on being convinced by his White teacher at reservation. The next school year, his various interactions with White classmates and teachers make him reflect on Euro-American culture as well as his indigenous culture. Going through various episodes, where he is treated as a traitor by his tribe and gets offered inclusion by the Whites, he gains insight into the various strengths as well as the weaknesses of both cultures. This dual experience which ends with him realizing that he "was a Spokane Indian" ([Alexie, 2007, p. 216](#)) but he at the same time "also belonged to the tribe of American immigrants" (p. 216), offers the scope of survival and success for modern Indian in the non-Indian world through a bicultural subjectivity. He stops being guilty of leaving his reservation and tribe in search of a better life in the White world and decides to continue his search for that life while still obviously loving, missing and staying connected to his family and friends.

*The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* serves to present Alexie's perspective as a cultural insider about the Native American life on reservation as well as in the mainstream world and, in doing so, shatters the stereotypical representation by cultural outsiders like Ian Frazier, who wrongly project themselves as experts about Native American life. In his review *Some of My Best Friends* (2000), Alexie remarks about Frazier's *Off The Rez* that, "Frazier's formal use of 'the rez' marks him as an outsider eager to portray himself as an insider, as a writer with a supposedly original story to tell" ([Alexie, 2000](#)). He frequently criticized the white writers' assumed authority in speaking for and about Indians and asserted that only Indians could speak up for themselves. Alexie holds what Sequoya refers to as the powerful position of Indian identified writers and can therefore mediate and represent as a cultural insider at the axis of inside-outside, negotiating through the "multiple relationships out

of and into” (Sequoya, p. 291) within which narratives of identity and subjectivity are placed. In his own words, Alexie has described himself as “kind of mixed up, kind of odd, not traditional. I’m a rez kid who’s gone urban, and that’s what I write about” (Peterson, 2009, p. 58). This dual position occupies Alexie with a vantage point that is visible throughout the whole text. He speaks through Junior at the very beginning that “I looked goofy on the *outside* {emphasis added}, but it was the *inside* {emphasis added} stuff that was the worst” (Alexie, 2007, p. 3). Commenting from the insider’s view on the miserable life that Indians faced at the reservations, he says, “I want to go *outside*. Every kid wants to go *outside* {emphasis added}” (p. 4), implying an exit out of reservations to the outside but since he was an Indian “so I would always be an outsider (to the Whites)...I would always be an Indian” (p. 181). Alexie makes a highly suggestive comment to himself, referred to by the indigenous people as an “apple because they think I’m red on the outside and white on the inside” (p. 132). This dual situatedness of being at the inside and outside of the “facility with ‘both’ worlds”, as David L. Moore (2005) asserts in *The Cambridge Companion to the Native American Literature* (p. 303), sets the biculturalism as a solution right at the outset. Using literature and his ironic stance as a source to counter the Euro-American discursive objectifying of Native Americans, Alexie announces at the start of his narrative that he “wants to talk to the world [...] with a pen in my hand” (Alexie, 2007, p. 6). Since the Indians are not perceived as speaking subjects (Seuoya, 1993), they need to go beyond the mere use of words that are “too unpredictable [...] and too limited” (p. 5) and negotiate a world and subjectivity for themselves. That is why Junior loves to draw cartoons because that provides him and his friend Rowdy with “other worlds to live inside” (p. 23). This use of cartoons and sly and dark humour for telling his side of the story and resisting representation of Native Americans as primitive and ‘cannibals’ brings out the power of Alexie’s fiction in not indulging in reminiscence of a bygone era of “tragedy and victimiry” as Vizenor (2000) calls it (p. 13), but searching for hope of survival in the emerging world. Patricia E. M. Hollrah (2003) claims in *The Old Lady Trill, the Victory Yell*, that “the Spokane Indians have survived colonialism

and continue to exert their intellectual sovereignty, even through their humour” (p. 150). Alexie believes, like Vine Deloria, Paula Gun Allen and many other Native American critics, in the power of humour because it “makes tolerable, what is otherwise unthinkable”(Allen, 1992, p. 159). It is through humour that Alexie and Junior keep their story and hope in pieces.

Even the title of the novel with ‘part-time Indian’ is itself suggestive of the dual and hybrid existence of the modern Indians. Right from the beginning, Junior makes it clear that he wants to escape the reservation and the misery, tragedy and poverty it entails (p. 6). The Indians at the reservation don’t get the opportunity to “realize our dreams [...] Or choices. We’re just poor” (p. 3). For them, the formula of living at the reservation is “Poverty = empty refrigerator + empty stomach” (p. 8). Reservation and poverty, contributing to the material condition of being an Indian (Sequoya, 1993), puts a question mark on the identity of Indians and complicates the identity configuration. The reservation Indians are mostly without food, clothes and any money. Junior searches the kitchen before going to school and often finds nothing to eat. They often have to sleep without dinner too. He goes to school dressed as a homeless guy because that is what he is mostly dressed like in his everyday life. His father is almost always out of fuel for the car, so he mostly has to hitchhike to school, walking barefoot the two-plus miles. With his irony and dark humor Alexie reiterates that poverty, with its offsprings of diseases, unemployment, no food, money and educational resources, make the Indians think that they “deserve to be poor” (Alexie, 2007, p. 13). Consequently, it ends up into a vicious cycle with them believing that they are poor because of being “stupid and ugly” (p. 13), which is the result of being an Indian and since they are Indian, they are doomed to be poor.

Apart from this misery of being poor, Alexie also highlights one of the most devastating aspects of Indian and reservation life, namely the issue of alcoholism that Indians have to deal with. Junior sums it up as “all Indian families are unhappy for the same exact reason: the fricking booze” (p. 200). Junior’s father, Rowdy’s abusive father and every other Indian in the reservation is a drunk who tend

to disappear from the lives of their families. His grandmother and father's best friend Eugene get killed because some drunken Indian killed them. His sister and brother in law also get killed like many other Indians in a house fire after being drunk. So every other Indian in the text is either drunk or gets killed or run over by some drunken Indian. Alcohol, Christianity and processed food, all imported by the White colonizers for Natives, have made Indians lose their self and identity, "It was all booze and God, booze and God, booze and God". (p. 171). Alexie believes that it becomes an ugly and vicious cycle engulfing the Indians without a way out unless they break this cycle of internalization, "forging identity out of rupture" (Pulitano, 2003, p. 7) and strive for the hope which, as Junior's parents tell him, is with the White people. The subject that Alexie builds up here is one that is aware of the need for adaptive measures and opens for acculturation for the sake of survival and "liberating the contemporary Native people" (Blaeser, 2005, p. 257). This subject is not at all supporting the White discourse and ulterior motives of the Euro-American colonization but tries to find a balance where the modern Native American can claim a place for himself without losing his roots and connections. Junior represents this struggle to survive with both worlds as a journey full of confusions and paradoxes (Sequoya, 1993). He constantly feels pulled towards opposites, a "traitor" for his tribesmen and an "alien" (Alexie, 2007, p. 66) for Whites, towards loyalty for his miserable reservation fellows and a connection with his new White friends as if he is "two different people inside of one body" (p. 61). The syncretism that emerges from this kind of dual existence (Sequoya, 1993) represents a subject who fights and struggles at the bicultural level, feeling "half Indian in one place and half white in the other" (Alexie, 2007, p. 119). He feels for the tragedies and misfortunes of his community, and through his interactions within the tribe as well as with the White teachers and classmates, he resituates and re-contextualizes the inter-subjective relationships and ends up feeling/ and registering "I'm both" (p. 60). He still loves his family, friends and tribe but also opts for what is reassuring and welcoming in the dominant culture. This subject understands the need to redefine and reconstruct identity in the context of bio-force in the Foucauldian

sense (Foucault, 1990, p. 140). Denouncing the subjugation and control of his body and life and the discursive impositions by the Euro Americans to confine the Natives to the miserable life of reservations with no medical or educational facility or money and basic amenities for life, Junior makes a choice to form a life and identity of his own. And he does all this while struggling and striving in the white world and dealing with the white people. Alexie mentions this as the "loneliest time" (Alexie, 2007, p. 83) of Junior's life. He constantly keeps repositioning his self, waking up as an Indian in the reservation, becoming a lesser Indian on the way to Rearden and once at school, "something less than less than less than Indian" (p. 83). Despite his confusions and pulls that he feels for his tribe, Junior keeps going to White school, gets selected in their basketball team, proves his worth and makes friends with them, thus successfully trying to be an achieving Indian in a White world. Alexie challenges the hero/coward opposition and presents Junior as an anti-hero, a Native American warrior who does not fit into the stereotypical role of a hero. A physically impaired kid who is always bullied and underfed and yet faces the challenges in his life like a warrior

Arnold realizes that he and his sister are "being warriors" (p. 91) in trying to escape the reservation that is suffocating like a death camp. The character of her sister Mary is another signification of the way reservation proves to be suffocating and debilitating for the Indians. She had been living in the basement for so long before escaping to Montana, and Junior asserts that it signifies that both he and his sister were not afraid of confronting the outside world instead of living the enforced limiting the life of reservation (p. 91). Vine Deloria Jr. (2006) also argues that Native Americans had been deliberately put on the reservations to separate them from their traditional roles in the social hierarchy (p. xvii). It, therefore, becomes a matter of survival for modern Native Americans to get out of the reservation and situate themselves in the mainstream world.

*The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* remarkably brings out the differences as well as meeting grounds for both the worlds with the intercultural and interchangeable relations which redefine subjectivity, agency and identity for Indians Americans. Mr. P, Junior's White geometry teacher

at reservation school, becomes a source of his self-realization and motivation while depicting White guilt, which is one of Alexie's favourite theme to write about. Mr. P not only confesses of the wrongs on behalf of the Whites in front of him, admitting "we were supposed to make you give up being Indian. Your songs and stories and language and dancing. Everything [...] We were trying to kill Indian culture." (p. 35) but also asks for Junior's forgiveness on behalf of all Indians. Crammed with "shame and pain" (p. 42), Mr. P motivates Junior to not give up and leave the "sad, sad, sad reservation" (p. 43). He makes him see the devastating effect reservation has had on her sister and friend and how it was going to kill Junior too. It is ironic how Alexie makes a White man the turning point in Junior's journey of identity within a White dominant society. Mr. P also serves to point out and criticize the resignation of Indians in the face of being whitewashed by the colonial Euro Americans, having given up instead of trying to find hope. It thus offers "new paradigms of self-knowledge to the general public" (Sequoya, 1993, p. 303). It comes as a strong contrast to what Alexie propagates in his poetry, telling the Whites aggressively in his poem *Bob's Coney Island* (1996) that,

I want it all back  
Now, acre by acre, tonight...  
And the white men are sent back home  
To wake up in their favourite European cities.

Alexie's fiction in *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, as well as in *Flight* (2007) and *Ten Little Indians* (2003), speaks in favour of bicultural subjectivity, offering characters, situations and solutions which call for compromise and readjustment in the wake of modern realities. In his short story *What You Pawn I Will Redeem* in *Ten Little Indians*, which is full of dark humour regarding the degenerate conditions Indian life has come to, Alexie presents Officer Williams as the "good cop" (p. 185), a white police officer who lends Jackson money to get back his grandmother's Powwow regalia because he says, "I believe in what you believe" (Alexie, 2003, p. 190). Similarly, in *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian* Junior meets and interacts with various white people, including Penelope, Roger, the coach, the student counsellor Ms. Warren and they all become his friends, care for

him, weep for him and make his entry into the White world easier. On his two-mile journey to school, he often got a lift from some White fellow and many times got dropped off by Roger, helping him in his need of hour (p. 129). Junior comes to believe "If you let people into your life a little bit, they can be pretty damn amazing" (p. 129). As a bicultural writer and closely reflecting the story of his own life, Alexie puts forward this dual-situatedness approving of a hybridized discourse rather than a binarized one. It also contrasts the nihilistic vision that comes out of *The Indian Killer* (1996), suggesting a balancing approach instead of resisting any contact with the dominant, opposing culture within a dual cultural context. Alexie even seems to suggest the possibility of assimilation and Indianization of the Whites into the native culture as "anybody can start to act like an Indian if he hangs around us long enough" (p. 131).

The episode where Junior befriends the White boy Gordy in school is highly symbolic in suggesting biculturality. Gordy and Junior both hail from different worlds, where one is obsessed with Macs, and the latter doesn't even have food for breakfast before coming to school. But they soon find out that they both are young kids, irrespective of their race and class, similar in being lonely, isolated and sad. So they become friends who "didn't share *secrets* {emphasis added}. Or dreams. No, we studied together. Gordy taught me how to study...how to read." (p. 94). This can be read as a very straight forward prescription of biculturalism and acculturating for the Native Americans by Alexie. This is a subject position that responds to conflicting situations by incorporating the practical aspects of the dominant culture, i.e. studying and reading needed to advance in the modern world and educational institutions while at the same time retaining its culture and what is important for its tribe, i.e. their secrets and stories.

In the chapter titled *Red Versus White*, Alexie, via his protagonist Junior himself, discusses the oft-repeated criticism of favouring and advocating the assimilation into the White culture and insists why this dual subject position is important for the survival of Indians. He realizes and feels the richness of family life and love in his culture; the love and closeness that Indian kids share with their parents are missing in the White families. And despite having friends in

Rearden, he is not blind to their animosity for natives or the cultural and racial genocide by them and knows very well that not all White people want to see an Indian around them. Junior emphatically states that the biggest difference between Indians and Whites is the number of funerals he has to go to, being only a fourteen year old has been to forty-two funerals (p. 199). He thus satirizes the deaths and funerals that are a basic and recurring tragic part of Indian life that White kids are unrelated to. But being "realistic" (p. 154), he knows that "it's better to live in Rearden than in Wellpinit" (p. 154).

Alexie re-contextualizes and tries to answer "how is Native subjectivity situated in relation to the dominant American multi-culture within the context of post-contact historical trauma" (Madsen, 2008, p. 80). He understands the need for a speaking subject and sovereignty for the tribal Indian and that it is not possible living in the resourceless life of reservation. Hence it becomes impertinent for Indians to find hope through education and advancement in the dominant white world. He doesn't present a separatist discourse but a hybrid and multidirectional discourse on the axis of more-less and-both rather than sliding into mere oppositional tension without a balance. Junior prided in his stories and "privacy" as a true Indian (Alexie, 2007, p. 184) but wanted to show the world that he was "never going to quit living life this hard" (p. 186). He surely was more suspicious of Whites in the beginning as they were of him, but they come to a moment of transition, "the hiatus between the end of the old order and the beginning of the new" (Arendth, 1963, p. 205) where they become friends and comfort each other and Junior calls his school crowd as *Our* (Alexie, 2007, p. 190) and *We* (p. 195). When his white teacher Mrs Jeremy mocks him for being absent from school after his sister's death, all of his classmates stand by his side just like Rowdy, his Indian friend, used to and left the class protesting to her attitude (p. 175). That finally gives some hope and joy to Junior that he had been searching for all along. He comes to realize that the world is not divided between tribes of black and white or Indian and White, but between people who are, in a typical Alexian style, assholes and the people who are not (p. 176). Just like he can find love and joy in his Indian world and from Indian people, he can also get joy in

his life from things and people that are not Indians. It is from this rewriting, reediting, rethinking, redrawing and revising (p. 178) that Junior learns to find a balance between his anger and joy. Needless to say, that does not make him any less of an Indian as Rowdy realizes at the end that Junior is the true Indian of them all in the sense that he is the nomadic one like old-time Indians in being constantly moving between reservation and White world in both literal and figurative sense. Alexie, therefore, presents a new Indian subject who "was brave and crazy enough to leave the rez" (p. 217), a bicultural subject who realizes that he is a "Spokane Indian. I belonged to that tribe. But I also belonged to the tribe of American immigrants. And to the tribe of basketball players. And the tribe of poverty [...] It was a huge realization. And that's when I knew that I was going to be okay" (p. 217).

## Conclusion

To sum up, *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* promotes relational subjectivities presenting a bicultural subject who understands the viable material condition that configures modern identity while trying to remain true to the spirit of indigenous Indian life. Unlike cultural outsiders who romanticize the miseries and plight of Indians, presenting them as exotic primitives, Alexie's use of matter of fact and straight forward language with ironic narration mediates and negotiates the realities and frustration of reservation life for Indians and the need to revisit and re-establish their subjectivity in terms of biculturality. While doing so, Alexie's fiction powerfully performs the threefold task of avoiding victimry by replacing it with the active agency, insisting on Indian presence rather than absence and thus finally rewriting tragic narratives not with mere lamentation but in an ironic mode (Krupat, 2008). Bridging the gap between Euro Americans and Native Americans, *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* brings forth various facets of assimilation and resistance, showing Alexie's skill in offering "new ways [...] of being and speaking and authoring" (Womack, 1999, p. 6). Exploring the multiplicity of complexities and paradoxes inherent in Indian identity, Alexie foregrounds how it is possible to "run away from your house and find your home" (Alexie, 2007, p. 133).

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