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Bakalářská práce

Univerzita Hradec Králové  
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Katedra anglického jazyka a literatury

**Krise identity původních Američanů v dílech *There There* od Tommyho Orange a  
*Love Medicine* od Louise Erdrich**

Bakalářská práce

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Základy společenských věd se zaměřením na vzdělávání (minor)  
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**The Identity Crises of Native Americans in *There There* by Tommy Orange and  
*Love Medicine* by Louise Erdrich**

Bachelor Degree Thesis

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Bakalářská práce se zabývá tématem krize identity u postav původních Američanů v dílech There There od Tommyho Orange a Love Medicine od Louise Erdrich. Teoretická část práce se věnuje přiblížení otázky krize identity u původních Američanů, a to těch jenž vyrostli v rezervacích nebo těch co patří ke skupině tzv. městských. Práce také uvede, jak se celkově dívá americká federální vláda na identitu původních obyvatel. Praktická část analyzuje a porovná jakým způsobem postavy v dílech There There a Love Medicine prožívají a vyrovnávají se s krizí identity a jaké podněty působí na jejich formování vnitřního světa.

This bachelor thesis explores the theme of identity crises of Native American characters in There There by Tommy Orange and Love Medicine by Louise Erdrich. The theoretical part is devoted to the question of identity crises of Native Americans who either grew up on reservations or belong to the group of so-called urban Natives. The thesis is also going to illustrate how the American federal government looks upon the identity of Native Americans. The practical part analyses how the characters of There There and Love Medicine experience and deal with the identity crises and what stimulus affects their inner world.

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## **Prohlášení**

Prohlašuji, že jsem bakalářskou práci *The Identity Crises of Native Americans in There There by Tommy Orange and Love Medicine by Louise Erdrich* vypracoval pod vedením vedoucí závěrečné práce samostatně a uvedl jsem všechny použité prameny a literaturu.

V Hradci Králové dne.....

Jakub Nosek

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## **Anotace**

NOSEK, Jakub. *Krize identity původních Američanů v dílech There There od Tommyho Orange a Love Medicine od Louise Erdrich*. Hradec Králové: Pedagogická fakulta Univerzity Hradec Králové, 2025. 65 s. Bakalářská práce.

Bakalářská práce se zabývá tématem krize identity u postav původních Američanů v dílech *There There* od Tommyho Orange a *Love Medicine* od Louise Erdrich. Teoreticko-historická část práce shrnuje posledních dvě stě let americké federální politiky ve vztahu k původním obyvatelům. Dále se zaměřuje se na postup federální vlády v procesu připisování statusu původního Američana a jako roli podíl původní krve v tomto procesu hraje. Praktická část analyzuje a porovná jakým způsobem postavy v dílech *There There* a *Love Medicine* prožívají a vyrovnávají se s krizí identity a jaké podněty působí na jejich formování vnitřního světa. Zkoumáním různých podnětů práce ilustruje komplexitu otázky identity původního Američana, čímž ukazuje na kontrast mezi chápáním této otázky americkou federální vládou a jmenovanými autory. Praktická část také zkoumá možné rozdíly mezi postavami Orange a Erdrichové v prožívání krize identity, které mohou vyplývat z jejich odlišného sociálního zázemí, tedy prostředí města proti prostředí rezervace.

**Klíčová slova:** původní Američan, identita, rezervace, městský původní Američan, *There There*, *Love Medicine*

## **Annotation**

NOSEK, Jakub. *The Identity Crises of Native Americans in There There by Tommy Orange and Love Medicine by Louise Erdrich*. Hradec Králové: Faculty of Education, University of Hradec Králové, 2025. 65 pp. Bachelor Degree Thesis.

This bachelor's thesis explores the theme of identity crises of Native American characters in *There There* by Tommy Orange and *Love Medicine* by Louise Erdrich. The theoretical and historical part offers a summary of the last two hundred years of American federal policies towards Native Americans. It looks at the process of affirmation of Native identity by the federal government and what role blood quantum plays in this process. The practical part analyses how the characters of *There There* and *Love Medicine* experience and deal with their identity crises, and which factors affect their inner world. Through the analyses of these different factors, this thesis also illustrates the complexity of Native American identity, showcasing different understandings of this concept by the US federal government and these authors. The practical part also looks at possible differences between Orange's and Erdrich's characters in experiencing a crisis of identity, which may result from their different social background, that is, the urban area in contrast with the reservation.

**Keywords:** Native American, identity, reservation, urban Native American, *There There*, *Love Medicine*

## **Prohlášení**

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## Rozšířený abstrakt

Literatura, zvláště pak literární fikce, dává jednotlivým autorům prostor k tomu, aby se nejen vyjádřili k otázkám, jenž trápí dnešní společnost, ale také aby zpochybnili některé zavedené společenské konvence. Jednou takovou konvencí je zvyk americké federální vlády posuzovat otázku identity původních obyvatel z převážně biologického hlediska. Teoreticko-historická část práce ukazuje, jak v průběhu posledních dvou století i dnes, americká federální politika i přes veškeré změny stále spoléhá na biologický a rodinný původ při určování statusu původního Američana. Federální politice a jednotlivým zákonům je společné spoléhání se na podíl krve domorodého původu, jakousi kvótu, která se určuje na základě toho, zda rodiče, prarodiče a další předci, byly původními Američany. Tím dochází k tomu, že je tak komplexní otázka, jako je právě identita původních obyvatel Ameriky, zjednodušována a další možné určující faktory se opomíjejí. Důsledkem pak může být že jedinec, který se plně cítí být původním Američanem a je ostatními uznán jako původní Američan, není schopen získat daný status ze strany federální vlády. S narůstajícím počtem původních Američanů žijících ve městech a nárustem smíšených manželství získávají debaty ohledně identity původních obyvatel a kritériích této identity na síle.

Právě otázkou, jíž se Tommy Orange a Louise Erdrich ve svých dílech zabývají, je identita původních obyvatel Ameriky, případně jejich krize identity. Orange ve svém díle *There There* a Erdrich v románu *Love Medicine* ukazují čtenářům komplexitu a vícevrstvnost pojmu původní Američan, který na rozdíl od pojetí americké federální vlády, není stavěn na převážně biologických faktorech, ale bere v potaz i faktory další. Postavením literární analýzy proti shrnutí americké federální politiky vůči původním obyvatelům práce ukazuje, že pojem původní Američan v dílech daných autorů je něco více než procento domorodé krve, a to bez ohledu na to, zda daná postava pochází z městského prostředí nebo z rezervace.

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá tím jak Tommy Orange a Louise Erdrich ve svých dílech přistupují k otázce krize identity původních obyvatel Ameriky a jaké faktory jsou přítomny v procesu utváření této identity. Opírá se přitom o analýzu těchto dvou románů, zejména rozebírá postavy původních Američanů a jejich postoj a přístup k vlastní identitě. Pro zkoumání problematiky využívá také literárněvědné studie, které obdobné otázky zkoumaly ve fikčních světech, i antropologicko-sociologická zkoumání, která se zabývají identitou potomků původních obyvatel Ameriky.

Práce se opírá o jednotlivé studie a literární analýzy, které zkoumali proces vytváření vlastního sebepojetí jak u původních Američanů v reálném světě, tak u literárních postav vybraných autorů.

Bakalářská práce tedy odpovídá na otázku, jak se téma krize identity projevuje u určitých postav děl *There There* a *Love Medicine*. Konkrétně se práce zaměřuje na postavy Edwina Blacka, Deneho Oxendene a Orvila Red Feather z pera Tommyho Orange a dále na postavy Lipsy Morrissey, Nectora Kashpaw a Marie Kashpaw od Louise Erdrich. Práce se zaměřuje na otázku, jakým způsobem postavy prožívají své krize identit, jaké faktory pro vytvoření sebepojetí berou za primární a zda jsou jim tyto faktory společné. Dále práce zkoumá možné rozdíly v prožívání krize identity, které mohou vyplynout z rozlišného sociálního zázemí postav Orange a Erdrich. Zasazením do kontextu federální politiky chce tato bakalářská práce také ilustrovat komplexitu otázky identity původních obyvatel Ameriky.

Uvedených cílů bylo dosaženo skrz literární analýzu narativů, dialogů, vnitřních monologů a činů jednotlivých postav. Analýza identifikovala způsoby, jakým postavy prožívají nejistotu ohledně vlastní identity a způsoby, jakými se tuto nejistotu snaží překonat. Postavením postav z díla Orange a Erdrich vedle sebe se poukázalo na to, že autoři pracují s podobnými faktory důležitými pro utvoření vlastní identity a že mezi postavami jsou jisté rozdíly, jež plynou z jejich rozdílného sociálního zázemí. Analýzou a zasazením do kontextu amerického federálního práva práce odhaluje, jak jednotlivé postavy musí navigovat svůj soukromý život při cestě za vlastní identitou, a to nejen v prostředí města ale i v prostředí rezervace. Jak práce ukazuje povědomí o rodinném původu, dále povědomí o historii a kultuře, a nakonec akceptace a uznání okolím jsou témata, jež oba autoři využívají při práci s nadřazeným tématem krize identity.

Analýzy postav Edwina a Lipsy daly vyniknout důležitosti povědomí o rodinném původu při hledání vlastního já. V momentu, kdy se tyto postavy dozvědí o svém původu procházejí ohromnou vnitřní změnou. Skrz poznávání toho odkud pocházejí, poznávají sami sebe a dle toho mění definici toho, kým vlastně jsou. I když je jejich cesta za sebepoznáním v mnohém podobná, liší se v jedné věci. Mezitím co Edwin strávil většinu svého života hledáním odpovědi na otázku, co přesně znamená být původní Američan a hledáním svého biologického otce, Lipsa se většinu života vyhýbal rozhovorům o svém původu. Tento rozdíl vyplývá z toho že Lipsa, který vyrůstal na rezervaci ve společnosti

dalších původních Američanů, má jasnou představu o sobě samém. Má výhodu v tom, že se může zaměřit na jiný aspekt své identity, na svou roli léčitele. Oproti tomu Edwin, který vyrostl v prostředí města a jehož rodina mu nebyla schopna dát odpovědi na jeho otázky, nemá ucelenou představu o tom, co to znamená být původní Američan. Otázka jeho původu se tím pro něj stává zásadní.

Skrze postavy Deneho a Nectora práce demonstruje důležitost historického a kulturního povědomí pro koncept identity původních Američanů ve vybraných prózách. Aniž by za to mohly, nemají tyto postavy veškeré vědomosti o vlastní historii a kultuře. Aby tyto vědomosti získal, Dene pracuje na projektu, v rámci kterého vede rozhovory s mnoha původními Američany žijícími v Oaklandu. Vytváří tak kompletně jiný narativ než ten, který spojuje identitu původních Američanů s rezervacemi a tím přehlíží zkušenosti těch co žijí ve městech. Dene se pomalu ale jistě začne identifikovat s příběhy a zkušenostmi, které slyší. Získává přesnější představu o tom, co to znamená být původním Američanem žijícím ve městě, a jeho vlastní identita se tak stává stabilnější. Oproti tomu Nector nedává najevo hlubší zájem o poznání něčeho nového a drží se svých starých zvyků. V době nejvíce důležité pro formování vlastní identity byly Nectorovi dány zvyky dominantní společnosti místo tradic a historie jeho komunity. Ke konci svého života se Nector ztrácí sám v sobě, je pohlcen proudem svých myšlenek, aniž by zanechal stopu po muži, kterým byl.

Analýzy postav Orvila a Marie poukázaly na poslední faktor, který Tommy Orange a Louise Erdrich používají při formování identity svých postav, a tím je přijetí a uznání okolím. Orvil, frustrovaný tím, že neví, jak správně dát najevo to, že je původní Američan, obrátí svou pozornost k internetu. Rozhodne se, že jediný způsob, jak si zajistit uznání ostatních, je vypadat a chovat se jako původní Američan. I když má na sobě tradiční oděv a snaží se tančit jako powwow tanečník, stejně se cítí jako podvodník. Naštěstí pro něj je jeho strach z toho, že nebude uznán ostatními, bezdůvodný. Orvil je totiž okamžitě přivítán ostatními tanečníky na powwow, což ho posílí a povzbudí. Navíc také zjišťuje, že ti, které bral jako autority a od kterých požadoval uznání, jsou v jádru stejní jako on. Další postava, jenž hledá uznání ostatních, je Marie Kashpaw z *Love Medicine*. Ta se nejdříve obrací k myšlence stát se světicí. Pozice světce by jí dala moc nad všemi obyvateli kláštera, do kterého docházela do školy, a ve kterém později přebývá. Donutilo by ty, kteří v klášteře přebývají, ji akceptovat, zvláště pak sestru Leopoldu. Avšak i poté co se Marie stane světicí necítí dostatečné zadostiučinění a vydává se hledat

jiný druh uznání, takový, jenž by plynul z pozice manželky předsedy kmene. Ale i v tomto momentu je úspěch Marie bagatelizován sestrou Leopoldou. Tento pocit neúspěchu je umocněn Mariiným zjištěním o tom, že ji Nector opustil. Marie, jejíž představa o sobě samé je roztržena, má náhlé prozření. Uvědomí si, že akceptace a uznání po kterém celý život prahla, je dávno její, avšak ne z důvodů, z kterých předpokládala. Marie dosáhne uznání ostatních ne proto, že je světice, či žena předsedy kmene, ale kvůli tomu že silná osobnost, jež je schopna držet pohromadě nejen svou rodinu, ale i svou komunitu.

Analýzy jednotlivých postav odhalily nejen podobnosti v rámci toho, jak Orange a Erdrich přistupují k otázce krize identity, ale také určité rozdíly, které vychází z rozdílného sociálního zázemí postav. Postavy z románu *There There* pocítují krizi identity, která je úzce spjata s pocitem odcizení. Tyto postavy se cítí vykořeněny a mají problémy s definováním toho, co znamená být původní Američan. Na druhé straně postavy z díla *Love Medicine* nemají žádný problém s tím, popsat samy sebe jako původní Američany. Vědí, že jimi jsou a také se tak cítí. Jejich potíže s identitou jsou na mnohem osobnější úrovni. Porovnáním postav původních Američanů žijících ve městech s těmi žijícími v rezervacích nechce tato práce naznačit, že jedna skupina je nadřazena té druhé. Obě skupiny představují důležitý aspekt současné identity původních obyvatel.

Výsledky literární analýzy ukázali, že způsoby, jakými Orange a Erdrich pracují s tématem identity původních Američanů zpochybňují politiku a postupy americké federální vlády, která spojuje tuto identitu s převážně biologickými faktory. Tím, že autoři využívají vícero faktorů v procesu tvorby vlastního sebepojetí ukazují, že identita původních Američanů je více než biologický původ a krev.

Přínosem této bakalářské práce je prohloubení znalostí o tom, jak Tommy Orange a Louise Erdrich pracují s tématem identity a krize identity původních Američanů ve svých románech a jaké faktory považují za primární při tvorbě zdravého sebepojetí svých postav. Na výsledky této práce mohou navázat další výzkumy a analýzy, jenž se zabývají tématem identity původních Američanů v prostředí literární fikce ale i mimo ni.

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## **Introduction**

Since the arrival of European settlers, Native Americans have had to face many challenges and go through many difficult situations. Federal policies of the newly formed United States of America, such as the policy of forcible removal, the policy of the Allotment era, the Termination policy, and others posed a great challenge not only to Native Americans themselves but also to their identity. These policies imposed concepts of identity on Natives which did not necessarily correspond to their own notions. But the biggest effect of these policies on Native identity is the continuous racialisation of Native Americans.

Throughout the two hundred years of the US federal policies towards Natives, there has been a constant focus on the biological perspective when the state is trying to determine who is and who is not Native American. The theoretical and historical part of this thesis offers an overview of some acts and policies which have played a major role in creating the legal criteria that are used in the process of federal recognition of Native Americans. As these policies are predominantly based on ancestry and blood quantum, the percentage of Native blood one has to have, they fail to recognise other factors tied to Native identity. Because of the urbanisation and intermarriage of Native Americans, there are constant debates on whether the requirements set up by the federal government should change. The number of people who have Native origin but do not have sufficient blood quantum needed for federal recognition is rising. As more Native people come to live in urban areas, the discourse about Native identity grows in importance.

This debate is happening not only in academic circles but also in literary fiction. Literary fiction offers authors a place where they can fully contemplate and express their views on such complex issues as Native identity. Many authors of Native American origin have produced works in which they challenge the received narrative and showcase the real life and stories of Native communities. By doing so, they indirectly criticise the way the federal government regards Native identity and offer their more nuanced view on what constitutes Native American identity, taking into account old Native factors of identity based on kinship and community. This thesis will draw on the works of two representatives of 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century Native American literature, Louise Erdrich and Tommy Orange, who work with themes of Native identity and identity crises of Native Americans. By setting the works of Tommy Orange and Louise Erdrich, who both, as enrolled members of their tribe, are familiar with the enrolment and recognition process,

against the federal policies, the thesis highlights the inadequacies which authors feel are present in those policies.

Louise Erdrich is an enrolled member of the Turtle Mountain Band of Ojibwe people (Kurup 1). She sets her novels in a location with which she is very much acquainted, the upper part of North Dakota where she grew up. Her novel *Love Medicine* (1984) tells the intertwined story of multiple families throughout the decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Individual characters, be it Kashpaw, Lazarre or Nanapush, tell the stories about their everyday life on the reservation. As Seema Kurup puts it, Erdrich works with themes such as “the creation of a cultural identity, the struggles of tribal members and their communities to belong in the world at large, and the overwhelming pull of place, of home” (3). Erdrich is very receptive to the effect the dominant US society has had on Native Americans and their identity. Many characters of *Love Medicine* struggle with their identity and are trying “to reconcile their Native American identity with the mainstream Euro-American culture within and around their respective Ojibwe communities” (Kurup 11).

Tommy Orange, a Native American author enrolled with the Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes of Oklahoma, sets his characters in an urban setting of the Bay Area where they have to face many challenges associated with living in today’s America as an urban Native, a term crucial for Orange’s work. These tribulations range from alcoholism, drug abuse, delinquency and juvenile criminality to bad economic position, complex family relationships, and a sense of uprootedness. But at the same time, the novel *There There* (2018) depicts how urban Native Americans formulate and navigate their identities while going through before mentioned hardships. The setting of the novel is not chosen randomly, on the contrary, it serves a direct purpose. As Adisa Ahmetspahić writes, Tommy Orange wants to debunk the myth that links reservation with Native American identity (364).

In practical part of this thesis, I examine how Native American authors, namely Tommy Orange and Louise Erdrich approach the theme of identity crisis in their works. The thesis looks into how Orange’s and Erdrich’s characters struggle to navigate their personal lives, especially their struggle to establish their own identities. Through literary analysis of the chosen characters, the thesis delves into the ways they experience not having a content and secure idea of themselves. Although the characters come from the

works of two different authors, this thesis argues that Orange and Erdrich use similar factors in establishing their notions of identity. The factors include ancestry, historical and cultural knowledge, and acceptance and recognition by others. While the factors contributing to the characters' notions of identity overlap in case of these two novels, the thesis also looks into differences between them which stem from Orange's characters being shaped by their urban setting while Erdrich's characters live on a reservation. The aim of the analysis is also to showcase how individual authors challenge the established notions of Native American identity, which have been perpetuated by the US federal government and which are mainly based on biological aspects. This thesis wants to contribute to the current discourse about what constitutes Native American identity in fiction and in real life. At the same time, this thesis does not strive to provide a definite answer but to offer a perspective with which one can look at the issue of Native identity and recognise that as Hillary N. Weaver put it, "Indigenous identity is a complex and multifaceted topic" (Weaver 252).

In this thesis, I regard identity as a notion one has about oneself that is being influenced not only by one's connection to one's family, both biological and personal, but also by one's interaction with friends, community, and culture. It is an ever-changing concept encompassing every role people give themselves or are given by others. With this understanding of identity as something complex and capable of changing, I approach the literary analysis of Orange's and Erdrich's novels, examining how their characters construct their own notions of identity, and how it influences their actions.

# **1 The United States Federal Policy towards Native Americans and Its Implications on Native Identity**

The question of one's identity has never been easy. Numerous factors influence one's perception of oneself and, when trying to answer the question of which factor is the most important one, the concept of nature versus nurture comes to mind. Is personal identity something we are born with that stems from our DNA, already ingrained somewhere deep in our brain? Or is it something that develops over time by interacting with one's parents, family, community, and culture?

These questions, and even more the answers to them, were essential for the United States government and have historically shaped state policies when it dealt with the issue of Native Americans' place within the new state. During the westward expansion of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the United States spread to the west of the North American continent, the federal government displaced many Native Americans either by making treaties with Native tribes or by force ("Removing Native Americans"). During this time, the federal government also felt the need to intervene in Native American affairs and lives. To be able to do so, the government needed a definition of who is a Native American within the federal law context (Fixico 52).

As Donald Lee Fixico points out, when writing legislation about a certain group of people, what is needed first is to define who exactly belongs to that group, and what properties one should have to be recognised as a member of that particular group. However, as he adds, when one race starts to define another, it causes endless debates and controversies for both groups (Fixico 52).

The theoretical part of this thesis focuses on several pieces of legislation passed by the US federal government and their effect on the determination of who is Native American. There are many laws and acts that fall under the federal Indian policy and this work introduces only those which are deemed to have affected the notion of Native identity the most and have also brought a change to the process of federal recognition of Natives. Namely they are the Indian Removal Act of 1830, the Dawes Act of 1887, the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924, the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, the policies surrounding the Relocation/Termination era of the 1950s and 1960s together with policies of 1970s and 1980s. Each had both direct and indirect effects on the discourse of Native

identity which went through a long process that resulted in the creation of reservation Native, urban Native, and most importantly legal Native American.

## **1.1 The Indian Removal Act of 1830**

Native Americans have always had a special legal standing in the United States due to their undeniable status of being indigenous to the land and the history of the federal government making treaties with individual Native tribes. As Perry G. Horse states, this unique legal standing is even recognised in the highest law of the land, the Constitution of the United States, which allows the federal government to establish business relations with Native American tribes on a government-to-government basis (63). Treaties between Native tribes and the federal government remain in effect and the federal government recognises the special status of tribal governments as sovereign (Horse 63).

The need to enter into trade discussions was essential during the westward expansion of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and mid-19<sup>th</sup> century when the federal government desired tribal lands, culminating with the Indian Removal Act of 1830. Due to this act the President of the United States had the power to exchange land with Native Americans for their tribal land located within the borders of existing states and relocate them to lands on the west side of the Mississippi River (Bowes 65). The Removal policy is closely associated with the establishment of reservation lands and forcible removal of Native tribes under an ideology that Lyons (qtd. in Bowes 66) describes as perpetuating a systematic loss of Native way of life, language, religion, feeling of security, self-esteem, and respect. The removal of Native Americans from their tribal lands not only affected their way of life and with it their identity, but it also prepared the ground for the legal definition of who is Native American.

## **1.2 The Dawes Act of 1887**

The question of the legal status of Native Americans arose at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In 1887 the General Allotment Act, most commonly known as the Dawes Act, was passed. At the discretion of the President, this act divided Native reservations into individual allotments, which then became the property of individual Native Americans, giving them citizenship (Stuart 452). The aim of this law was to integrate Native Americans as

independent farmers into the US society (Stuart 452). However, only those who were seen as competent enough to hold ownership of their assigned allotments were given citizenship. Others, who did not receive citizenship, had to live on allotments that were held in trusts by the federal government (Barker 150).

The idea behind this act was that Native Americans, now citizens of the US, would abandon their traditional ways, take on Anglo-American values, and therefore, in the eyes of the US government, become civilised. These civilised independent farmers would then relieve the federal government of the need to supervise the lives and affairs of Native Americans (“Tribal Self-Government” 959).

Due to this land division, a census had to be done, as only tribal members could acquire allotments and so agents of the Bureau of Indian Affairs were sent to record all legitimate tribal members (Barker 149). The number of people who had to be assessed as to whether their claims were legitimate and whether they were capable of managing their private properties was enormous. The BIA agents had to look at the individual’s blood degree from both parents, age, marriage status, number of people dependent on the individual, and orphan status (Barker 150). Because of the scale of the operation, the room for possible human error was not insignificant. The entire process of compiling these census rolls was very complicated and there were pressures to expedite the process (Barker 150). This led to many Native Americans being denied tribal enrolment. Some Native Americans even resisted registering for these census rolls, which they saw as something that was trying to destroy their culture by destroying its foundation, the collective land ownership (Garrouette 232).

The Allotment era census rolls were the first big step the federal government took in defining who is and who is not a Native American. Even today, these census rolls are being used by the Cherokee Nation, the Chickasaw Nation, the Choctaw Nation, the Muscogee (Creek) Nation, and the Seminole Nation who use them as their base membership rolls (“Tracing American Indian”). Descendants of those who did not enrol or were denied enrolment find themselves in a difficult position when they apply to be recognised as Native American. Names of their ancestors cannot be found in the census rolls and the applicants are therefore unable to make a connection between them and historic Native communities in a way that is required (Garrouette 232). Despite the

evidence of considerable errors and missing information in these rolls, their legality is being continuously upheld (Barker 150).

### **1.3 The Indian Citizenship Act of 1924**

As was mentioned, only Native Americans who were deemed capable enough to manage their allotments as private property were also given US citizenship. This changed in 1924 when the Indian Citizenship Act was passed. This act granted citizenship to those Native Americans who were born in the United States (Office, 43 Stat.). Previously, the Dawes Act and other treaties and laws had procedures to grant citizenship to some Native Americans, but not to all of them (Fixico 53). The legal status of Native Americans was ambiguous as they held legal status under court rulings, government regulations, and federal laws, but their complete legal status was resolved in 1924 due to the Indian Citizenship Act (Fixico 53).

Unfortunately, even though Native Americans were now deemed as full citizens of the United States, the federal government still had not come up with a clear definition of who exactly is Native American. Instead, they added one more social role to the Natives. By granting them citizenship, “Indians” became Americans. This may have somehow implied an expectation of submission, as citizens are expected to follow the laws of their country and fulfil the state’s obligations. Such an obligation would include paying state and federal taxes (Barker 150).

Some Natives were cautious of their citizenship. Louis Bruce Jr., a former Commissioner of Indian Affairs, wrote about how Natives did not fully trust the government and thought it was just another trick of the white men while others, like his father, welcomed the citizenship as it also came with the right to vote (qtd. in Fixico 54). They could now join the process of decision-making by participating in elections and political life. Some Native Americans also thought they would have a bigger chance of resolving old disputes and grievances between them and the government. However, the right to vote that was granted to them with citizenship was governed under state law, and some states barred Native Americans from voting until 1957 (“Today in History”).

## 1.4 The Indian Reorganization Act of 1934

During this time, due to the lack of a proper legal definition of who can or cannot be recognised as a Native American, numerous new definitions emerged. The federal definition of Native American was derived from individual laws, legal documents, rulings of the court and other sources (Fixico 54). One of the earliest definitions of Native American, or “Indian” in this case, comes from 1932. A Jewish lawyer named Felix Cohen wrote a publication called *Handbook of Federal Indian Law* in which he argued that for someone to be recognised as an “Indian,” one’s ancestors had to have lived on a territory that is now the United States before its discovery by Europeans and one had to be recognised by their tribe and community (qtd. in Fixico 54). Just two years later, in 1934, an important federal law that had a crucial impact on defining Native identity was passed. This was the Wheeler-Howard Act, commonly known as the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934. The act stated that:

the term “Indian” as used in [this Act] shall include all persons of Indian descent who are members of any recognized Indian tribe now under Federal jurisdiction, and who are members of any recognized Indian tribe now under Federal jurisdiction, and all persons who are descendants of such members who were, on June 1, 1934, residing within the present boundaries of any Indian reservation, and shall further include all other persons of one-half or more Indian blood. For the purposes of [this Act], Eskimos and other aboriginal peoples of Alaska shall be considered Indians. (Office, 48 Stat.)

The most important part of this document is the one talking about the percentage of Native blood.

For the first time, blood quantum is explicitly used in the federal definition of Native Americans. Blood quantum, meaning the percentage of Native blood one has based on one’s ancestry, was not something new. According to TallBear the beginning of federal policies that aimed to identify who is Native American and were based on racialised notions of blood were first used in treaties and later on reinforced and reaffirmed in the Dawes Act of 1887 (88). However, some argue that the Dawes Act used blood quantum only as a criterion for enrolment on census rolls, which were then used for allotting individual parcels of tribal lands (TallBear 88). So, the use of blood quantum was not as explicit as can be seen in the Indian Reorganization Act.

The Indian Reorganization Act intended to give autonomy to individual Native tribes and promote self-government and self-determination. It gave tribes the right to organise themselves for common welfare, adopt their own constitutions, and other powers like “to employ legal counsel, the choice of counsel and fixing of fees to be subject to the approval of the Secretary of the Interior; to prevent the sale, disposition, lease, or encumbrance of tribal lands, interests in lands, or other tribal assets without the consent of the tribe; and to negotiate with the Federal, State, and local Governments” (Office, 48 Stat.). Unfortunately, it did not accomplish everything that was promised toward granting tribes autonomy (“Tribal Self-Government” 968).

Despite the rhetoric of raising the level of self-government and self-determination of Native tribes, arguments about other possible reasons behind the Indian Reorganization Act and even more about the use of blood quantum can be made. One such argument is the possible intention of the federal government to reduce the number of people to whom it has certain obligations. Implementing blood quantum to determine one’s Nativeness would mean that Natives would become indistinguishable from other citizens thanks to intermarriages and the mechanism of blood quantum calculations (Garrouette 225). The number of people eligible to be recognised as Native Americans would eventually diminish until all Natives became completely assimilated.

This is not as farfetched as one would think when it is compared to another blood quantum rule used for another social group, African Americans. The one-drop rule used to define who is African American has certain similarities to the blood quantum used for Native people, especially when looking at the economic or social benefits it brought to the dominant majority (Green 100). Just one drop of African American blood made one immediately African American. In the case of African Americans, the use of one-drop rule had the benefit of increasing the slave master’s inventory (Green 101). So, while the one-drop rule would ensure slave owners’ wealth, the blood quantum would lessen the economic obligations of the federal government to the Native people, such as business loans, education grants, housing loans, and other services. Whatever the case may be behind the true intentions of the Indian Reorganization Act, the fact is that it represents one of the most important and impactful pieces of legislation concerning the legal definition of who is Native American and that it still stands.

## 1.5 The Relocation/Termination Era

Another policy that heavily affected the Native identity, even though it did not create a new definition of who is a Native American, was the policy of the Termination Era, which started in the 1950s. After the Second World War, the federal government took another position towards Native Americans. Many congressional actions that were passed during the administration of President Eisenhower promoted the program of federal disengagement and integration of Native Americans (Stuart 458).

During the Second World War, many Natives decided to leave their reservations in search of employment in the defence industry or to join the military (Edmunds 735). They left their reservations for cities and this mass departure was more than encouraged after the war by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (Edmunds 735). In 1953, the United States Congress adopted the so-called “Termination Resolution,” which aimed to terminate the federal government’s responsibility to Native Americans as soon as possible. For example, in the 1950s Congress terminated federal responsibilities to several tribes like the Klamaths of Oregon, the Paiutes of Utah, and the Menominees of Wisconsin (Stuart 458). Under this policy, the Indian Relocation Act of 1956 was passed.

The act was aimed to give Native Americans vocational skills so they would be more inclined to leave reservations and come live in the cities and eventually become a part of the mainstream culture (Gasztold 286). Unfortunately, tribe members who relocated to cities faced isolation from their communities, racial discrimination and segregation, could not get good-paying jobs, had higher expenses, and lacked communal support (Gasztold 286). Native people who faced hardships on reservations now faced the same hardships in a city environment that was completely new to them and in which they did not know how to navigate themselves. They joined other Native Americans already living in cities, integrating into the group of so-called urban Natives.

Nearly half of the Native population lived in urban areas by the year 1990 (Edmunds 735). This urbanisation had a tremendous effect on Native identity as some urban Natives knew about their Nativeness but no longer knew to which specific tribe they belonged (Fixico 55). Also, there was the issue of language. Native parents were oftentimes too busy trying to make a living in the city to teach their children the traditional ways of life and so their children often developed a language deficiency, affecting their integration into Native society as urban Natives (Westerman 262). Language is an internal

part of social and personal identity. The loss of tribal language meant the loss of an integral part of an individual's identity. It highlighted the growing gap between Natives still living on reservations and Natives living in urban areas. The designation of urban Native carried or still carries a certain stigma. It suggested that those who decided to leave reservations to live in the cities turned their backs on their roots, upbringing, and traditions, choosing assimilation to mainstream society while betraying the Native community (Westerman 262).

Another issue of urbanisation was and still is the intermingling of Native and non-Native people. In cities, one has more chances to meet people of different ethnic, races, cultures, etc. The rate of intermarriages of Native Americans is very high in comparison with other racial groups (Nagel 952). This, combined with the blood quantum requirements set up by the federal government, could cause one to lose their Native identity by legal standards. The Termination movement ended with the coming of the new Democratic administration of 1961, when Stewart Udall, Secretary of the Interior under Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, disavowed the policy in 1961 (Stuart 459). However, even though the Termination movement ended, its effects on Native identity remained. The forming of a new group of Native Americans, the urban Natives, and with them the possible loss of tribal language, the negative connotation of the designation of urban Native, and finally a certain gap between urban Natives and Natives living on reservations that also causes discussions about who can be called Native, are all consequences of the Termination Era.

Despite the negative implications of the urbanisation on Native identity, it also had a positive effect as it gave Native Americans more options to receive education. Young Native students who were inspired by the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s decided to act. They began to protest, wanting the federal government to recognise their treaty rights (Fixico 162). This activism transformed into the Red Power movement, which is responsible for acts such as the Occupations of Alcatraz and later of Wounded Knee, or the Trail of Broken Treaties (Blakemore). The political movement of the 1960s and 1970s, together with other civil rights movements, might have also removed some of the stigma that was attached to Native American identity (Thornton 34). The Occupation of Alcatraz and other acts of civil disobedience, when watched on television or read about in newspapers, incited a feeling of power and pride in Native Americans. Those who were, for some reason, ashamed or did not disclose their Nativeness, like people of mixed

ancestry, began to feel proud about who they were and started identifying as such (Thornton 34). In 1960 the number of people who identified as Native Americans was 523,591 which then rose to 792,730 in 1970 and in 1980 this number became 1.37 million (Thornton 34). This clearly shows a rise in the number of people who chose to identify as Native Americans during the Red Power movement era. Unfortunately, there is the question of how many of these people were actual Natives and how many of them just claimed to be Native Americans. People with minimal or even no Native ancestry might have tried to assert a Native identity, which for them at the time seemed fashionable (Thornton 34).

## **1.6 The 1970s' Federal Policy towards Native Americans**

Since the mid-1970s, tribal membership has gradually become the issue of Native nations instead of the federal government (Fixico 55). This meant that individual tribes had more freedom in deciding which criteria they would use for tribe enrolment. This development, however, led to many issues. One could become Native American by either federal, state or tribal recognition while not meeting the conditions of the other ones (Fixico 55). Meaning someone could, for example, become a federally recognised Native without any tribal affiliation, or become an enrolled member of a certain tribe that did not have federal or state recognition. Moreover, in 1974, there was a court case in which the Supreme Court interpreted *American Indians* not as a racial category, but as a legal one (Barker 147). However, even though Native Americans were seen as a legal category, they have been, and still are, racialised (“Rethinking Race”). Another issue was the different criteria tribes used for their enrolment processes. To define their membership, Native tribes usually use either blood quantum or lineal descendancy (Fletcher 4).

The first problem with tribes using blood quantum is that each tribe can require a different degree of blood quantum, from one-half to one-sixteenth (Fletcher 6). The second problem is that the blood, the ancestry to be more precise, must either be of a particular tribe or of any tribe in general, as long as it is Native. This can cause issues for children whose parents each come from different tribes, which also have different blood quantum requirements. Those children can for example be admitted into their mother's tribe while being denied enrolment into their father's tribe which requires a higher blood quantum than the one of their mother's. Thornton argues that Native tribes living on

reservations tend to have higher requirements for blood quantum than tribes not living on reservations (37).

The issue with the requirement of the lineal descent is that, on one hand, it can be overinclusive, and, on the other, some tribes not only need their members to have the tribal ancestry but this ancestry also has to come from a particular parent (Fletcher 6; Garroutte 225). In 1978, Julia Martinez sued the Santa Clara Pueblo tribe, which requires paternal descent, because the tribe refused to admit her children to the tribe as their father was not of Santa Clara origin. The court decided in favour of the Santa Clara Pueblo tribe, saying that courts should not overrule the membership requirements set up by individual tribes, making an important precedent in the question of tribal identity (Fixico 59).

Tribes having the authority to determine their enrolment criteria gave tribes a higher level of self-determination, and this was very important to their tribal and their overall Native identity. Tribes could set up requirements which could be based on their tribes' traditions. This way they could in some aspect protect their current tribal identity and maybe even return a bit to their original one. However, as was illustrated, different tribe enrolment rules sometimes could lead to not-so-fortunate situations where one is denied their Native identity.

## **1.7 The 1980s and Today's Federal Policy towards Native Americans**

Since the 1970s, there have not been many major changes in the legal definition of who exactly is Native American. In 1983, a court case of *United States v. Torres* combined two previous sources used for determination of Native identity in a legal sense when the court made a decision that if someone wants to be recognised as Native, they have to have some degree of Native blood and also be recognised by the Native tribe and/or the federal government (Fixico 61).

The court case illustrated the biggest problem of Native identity, the continued trend of its racialisation. Even today, the federal government through the Bureau of Indian Affairs works with and uses blood quantum to determine one's Nativeness as can be seen in Certificate of Degree of Indian or Alaska Native Blood, or CDIB for short ("Certificate"). When requesting for the CDIB, one has to fill out not only the degree of blood of their parents, but also of their grandparents and great-grandparents. The form

also requires names, maiden names, birth and death dates, tribal affiliations, and roll numbers, imposing a huge burden on the applicant to gather accurate information (Samuels 144).

The problem of still using the blood quantum to determine Native identity is that it narrows the number of people eligible for Native recognition. Urbanisation and subsequent intertribal and interracial marriages lead to decreasing blood quantum in newer generations. Thornton argues that in this century, taking into account the high rates of intermarriage, “the proportion of those with one-half or more blood quantum will decline to only 8 per cent of the American Indian population, whereas the proportion with less than a one-fourth blood quantum will increase to around 60 per cent” (39).

The other problem with the use of blood quantum is the fact that it was forced onto Native Americans. It is not something they chose to be defined with, it is something the federal government created based on its ideas of race while also disregarding the Native notions of identity. Native Americans saw themselves as “members of an extended kinship network” where “tribal membership was communally self-determined” (Edmunds 733). One could become Native through adoption no matter their ethnicity, race, and origin (Fletcher 13). The only thing needed was the acceptance and recognition of the tribe.

All of these issues with the use of blood quantum might be the reason why some tribes have decided not to use blood quantum and instead have chosen different requirements. In 2001, almost one-third of tribes that populate the lower forty-eight states have rejected requirements for specific blood quantum in determining their tribal membership (Garrouette 225). Even though tribes have the right to determine their membership requirements themselves, thanks to the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 and other policies that followed, the federal government still encourages the use of blood quantum. Due to the policy of Native self-determination and self-government, it cannot force tribal governments to implement blood quantum rules. However, the Bureau of Indian Affairs is providing step-by-step guidance on the process of tribal enrolment, emphasising federal review of tribal law, while also providing charts that show how Native tribes should be determining their blood quantum requirements (TallBear 89).

## 1.8 Conclusion

Almost two hundred years of federal policies and laws aimed towards Native Americans have impacted the notions of Native identity in various ways and to various extents. From the Dawes Act of 1887, through the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924, the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, the Relocation Era of the 1950s and 1960s, and the policies of 1970s and 1980s to this day, the Native Americans have had to learn how to navigate through the changing legal definitions of who exactly can be considered as Native American.

Unfortunately, different federal, state, and tribal definitions concerning the eligibility of one to be recognised as Native have caused ambiguities and resulted in situations where someone can be denied their status of Native American just because they have not met the legal criteria. This denial happens not only in individual cases but also on a higher level. Pennsylvania is one of the few states that does not contain a reservation, nor does it recognise any Native group within its borders, even though, according to census more than 18,000 Native Americans lived there in the year 2000 (Minderhout and Frantz 61).

The only constant in this process of legal determination is the continued view of Native Americans as a racial category. From the question of kinship and community, the Native identity has been reduced to the question of biology and one's blood quantum. This has angered some people who are now arguing for the revision of blood quantum rules. They feel the need to return to the idea of Native identity based on kinship, family, community, and traditions. However, some people argue in favour of blood quantum, seeing it as insurance against those with minimal or no Native ancestry trying to pose as Native Americans. In a study done by McKay, one of the participants understood that the use of blood quantum could lead to exclusion, but also thought of it as the means to ensure that tribal sovereignty would not be encroached by non-Natives (18). Whatever the case may be, to this day, blood quantum remains one of the main aspects for determining Nativeness in a legal sense. Fixico states that "within the law and courts of the United States, your Indian identity is your CDIB in your wallet or purse, a card with worn edges, and sometimes you misplace it. This is *being Indian* legally" (64). Not one's upbringing or one's engagement in their community, but one's narrowly defined blood is what, in the eyes of the federal government, makes one Native American.

Unfortunately, the concept of Native identity is not as simple. Different criteria individual tribes use in their enrolment processes showcase that multiple factors need to be considered when one tries to answer what constitutes Native identity. Such discourse can be seen not only in academic circles but also in literature, as many authors explore this issue. Native American authors see that the federal concept of Nativeness based on a biological perspective and blood quantum does not fully take into account other important factors, and that is why they, including Tommy Orange and Louise Erdrich, work with multiple factors when they are portraying Native characters' inner worlds and crises. They represent some of the Native voices' contribution to this debate, offering different, more nuanced, view on what constitutes Native identity.

## 2 Analysis

The practical part of this work analyses literary fiction written by Native American authors Tommy Orange and his novel *There There* (2018) and *Love Medicine* (1984) by Louise Erdrich. The focus will be on the question of Native American identity, the crisis of identity, how Orange's and Erdrich's characters deal with their own notions of identity, and which factors affect those notions. The contrast between the theoretical and historical part and the analysis demonstrates that Orange and Erdrich view Native identity as a complex matter consisting of different but equally important aspects, unlike the federal government, which looks at this issue of Native identity from the predominantly biological perspective of blood quantum.

The analysis examines six individual characters, Edwin Black, Dene Oxendene, and Orvil Red Feather from *There There* and Lipsha Morrissey, Nector Kashpaw, and Marie Kashpaw from *Love Medicine*. By analysing their inner monologues, dialogues, and the way they behave in the novel, the thesis tries to prove that there are three factors common to both Orange and Erdrich which influence the characters' self-perception. These factors are the factor of ancestry and origin, the factor of historical and cultural knowledge, and finally, the factor of need for social acceptance and recognition by others.

The practical part itself is divided into three parts according to said factors. Each of those three parts analyses one character from each novel. By putting the characters next to each other, the thesis examines possible differences in their experiencing crisis of identity, which may result from the different social background of characters of *There There*, who are urban Natives, and the characters of *Love Medicine*, who live on a reservation.

### 2.1 The Factor of Ancestry and Origin

#### 2.1.1 Edwin Black (*There There*)

Cornelia Vlaicu argues that "Orange's characters experience absence in multiple ways – as loss of, or separation from family, marginalization, or the lack of a sense of identity" (6). One of the more visible characters of *There There*, Edwin Black, is an excellent example of this. Edwin is a young biracial man whose mother is Caucasian and whose father is Native. Unfortunately for Edwin, he does not know who his father is, the only

information he has about his father is that he is a Native American. This uncertainty about his origin leaves Edwin feeling lost and incomplete. He is unable to process his feelings and cope with them in a healthy manner. To feel alive, Edwin turns to eating as a way of coping, but as he becomes overweight, he is being consumed by his sense of social diminishment as he seems to exist only in the virtual world (Vlaicu 7). One can say Edwin is addicted to the internet and social media, infinitely scrolling down, refreshing, going from one website to another, and ultimately spending a lot of time playing games. But exactly this gives Edwin a sense of completeness, at least for a short while. The hole he feels there is inside him is being filled not only by food, but also by being constantly on the internet.

In an online game called *Second Life*, Edwin develops and maintains a sort of alter-ego. In there he has “a job and a girlfriend and his mom had died tragically during childbirth. That Edwin Black was raised on the reservation with his dad. The Edwin Black of my *Second Life* was proud. He had hope” (Orange 63). Edwin’s alter-ego has everything he lacks and everything he wishes for. It is the complete opposite of reality, and Edwin maintains this *Second Life* version of himself for almost two whole years. In there, he does not need to raise the question of who he is. In *Second Life*, he lives with his father on a reservation, which he sees as something that is connected with being Native. In this aspect, Edwin perpetuates the stereotype set up by the dominant majority that for someone to be Native American, they have to grow up or be connected to the reservation, creating a dichotomy between reservation and urbanity. This exact notion is something that Orange disagrees with. However, it is not so surprising that Edwin engages in this notion, given that he has not been taught anything about his historical, cultural, or biological heritage. This lack of knowledge about who he exactly is or is supposed to be is what makes him search for anything that would make him feel connected to his Native side. The need to know what it actually means to be Native American makes Edwin get his master’s degree in comparative literature, focusing on Native American literature. But his search does not end there.

Edwin searches for his father with the help of the internet and social media. Things he used to momentarily solve his feelings of incompleteness and inadequacy as a Native are now being used in hopes of finding the answer that would bring him permanent peace of mind. Unfortunately, there is minimal information he can work with as his mother remembers only his father’s name, Harvey, where he comes from, and him being Native.

The relationship between Edwin and his mother is complicated due to this. He describes how he feels distant from her, “not only because she is white, and me therefore half white, but because of how she never did a single thing to try to connect me with my dad” (Orange 69). The non-existent connection between him and his father negatively influences his connection with his mother, and more importantly, himself. The strain on their relationship might be why Edwin’s mother allows him to pose as her on Facebook, reaching out to ten possible father candidates. He describes this task like this: “I’ll never fully recover from the feeling of trying to write, as my own mother, in an alluring way to my possible father” (Orange 69). Even though he feels highly uncomfortable pretending to be his mother on social media, the hope of finding his father and with him the missing link connecting Edwin with his Native side, which he has not been able to fully connect with, makes him keep searching. And one day, it finally pays off as he receives a message back from one of the ten Harveys.

The moment Edwin receives this message confirming this particular Harvey truly spent the night with his mother, he immediately confesses the truth about posing as his mother, explaining that he thinks Harvey might be his father. After some initial conversation, this is proven to be true as both of them send the other one their photographs. “I see myself in the man’s face. He’s bigger than me, both taller and fatter, with long hair, wearing a baseball cap, but there’s no mistaking it. It’s my dad” (Orange 71). Edwin finally establishes not only a paternal link that has been missing but also a link directly connecting him to his Nativeness. Having a Native parent or parents, and thus being of Native blood, is a crucial link in the eyes of society, law, and Edwin himself. Evidence of Edwin being aware of this link surfaces in the form of a question when asking his father about his tribal affiliation. Edwin directly asks, “*What tribe are you/we?*” (Orange 71). Him using the pronoun “you” together with “we” implies that he is trying to establish his tribal identity through Harvey and not through his own accord. However, Edwin is not the only one using the collective pronoun “we”. Harvey uses it, too, when he answers Edwin about his, or better, their, tribal affiliation. Harvey tells him that they are “*Cheyenne. Southern. Out of Oklahoma. Enrolled with the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes of Oklahoma. We’re not Arapahos*” (Orange 71). At this moment Edwin’s self-perception goes through major change. He is no longer just half-white and half-Native, him being half-Cheyenne gives him a more precise notion about his identity.

Unfortunately, this sudden discovery proves to be too much for Edwin at that moment and instead of trying to get more information from Harvey, he ends the conversation.

Even though Edwin has established a connection not only to his paternal side, his Native side, but also to his tribe, he still lacks the cultural knowledge connected to it. Yes, he is half-Cheyenne, but he has trouble with not knowing how to be Cheyenne and so turns to stereotype (Vlaicu 7). “I am a Cheyenne Indian. A warrior. No. That’s super corny. Fuck. I get mad at that thought, that I even thought it” (Orange 77). For Edwin, knowing his Native ancestry and to which tribe he belongs is not enough. So once again, he finds himself somewhere between the two worlds, just like he did in the beginning. He knows he is Cheyenne but does not know exactly what it entails. Although he does not get the fulfilment he envisioned when he started looking for his father in hopes of learning his origin, he does not feel lost as he once did. Edwin felt something “not unlike hope” (Orange 78). All his life, he has struggled with his identity and tried to find as much information as he could. However, just like his life, this search had no certain direction. But this has now changed. Getting in contact with his father, and getting to know his tribal origin, while still feeling inadequate, has given Edwin not only a perception of himself but also a new purpose in life.

This is why Edwin agrees to take a paid internship position at the Indian Centre his mother has talked about. He wants to get closer to his father and maybe other Native people who might be able to tell traditional stories or show him traditional ways. This need to connect with other Native Americans to solidify one’s notion of Native identity is consistent with a study done by Nancy M. Lucero. As participants of this study started to better understand their Native identity, they felt drawn to work with or help other Native Americans, and by doing so, they achieved an even greater sense of their Native identity and feeling of being connected (333). The results of this sociological study can be applied to the literary depiction of the character of Edwin. As he works as an intern at the Indian Centre preparing for the Big Oakland powwow, he feels a sense of achievement he has never felt before. For him it “means more than a job”, it is “a new life” (Orange 243). He finally feels not only confident enough in his Nativeness, but also confident enough to be around other Native Americans. He no longer feels that he does not belong to either of the worlds, white or Native, but that he belongs to both. And it seems as if the Native world accepts him back. The moment Edwin meets his father in real life he “sticks out his hand for a shake, but Harvey grabs Edwin behind his head and brings him in for

a hug. They hold the hug for longer than Edwin is comfortable with, but he doesn't break it either" (Orange 259).

Only after resolving the fundamental question of his ancestry is Edwin able to come to terms with his mixed origin and gain the courage to engage in the Native community. Being able to finally prove that he is of Native blood gives him an incentive to turn away from the online world and go out into the real world. The issue of being related by blood to someone Native may not be as important to other Native people, but it is crucial for Edwin. He even writes his master's thesis on "the inevitable influence of blood quantum policies on modern Native identity, and the literature written by mixed-blood Native authors that influenced identity in Native cultures" (Orange 71–72). According to blood quantum rules, with which it is safe to assume he is well acquainted, Edwin as half-white and half-Native qualifies for federal recognition. The only problem is that he has to have proof of his Native ancestry which only a while ago he did not have. Because of that, he felt as if he was not Native enough. But now when he knows who his father is and to which tribe his father (and by extension also Edwin) belongs, he could theoretically go through the federal recognition process and be recognised as Native American. Knowing where one comes from and being able to establish parental links is what leads Edwin to self-acceptance and to a more stabilised notion of identity. Without it, Edwin would probably still spend the majority of his time in a virtual world, dreaming about and envying the *Second Life* Edwin.

### **2.1.2 Lipsha Morrissey (*Love Medicine*)**

The question of ancestry is also raised in Erdrich's *Love Medicine* through the character of Lipsha Morrissey, a young man raised by Marie and Nector Kashpaw, who he calls Grandma and Grandpa and who took on the role of his parents even though they are not. However, unlike Edwin Black in Orange's *There There*, Lipsha has a connection with his heritage and his Nativeness, and what is more, he is reluctant and even dismissive about inquiring further about his parental origin. This can be seen in a conversation between him and Albertine, a cousin-like figure to him:

"I want to talk about your mother..." [Albertine]

Lipsha nodded, cutting me off. “I consider Grandma Kashpaw my mother, even though she just took me in like any old stray.”

“She didn’t do that,” I said. “She wanted you.”

“No,” said Lipsha. “Albertine, you don’t know what you’re talking about.”  
(Erdrich 39)

Lipsha, who has been told that his mother did not want him and even tried to drown him when he was just a baby, cuts off Albertine mid-speech not wanting to talk about his mother, not knowing that in that moment she wants to reveal the true reality of his origin. He is content with how things are, and instead of thinking about his mother, he focuses on other aspects of his personality.

Lipsha is someone called a medicine man, someone with powers like a healing touch that cannot be understood by ordinary people. He describes his power as knowing “the tricks of mind and body inside out without ever having trained for it, because I got the touch. It’s a thing you got to be born with. I got secrets in my hands that nobody ever knew to ask” (Erdrich 227). This touch gives him a sense of belonging to people and place while also giving him a sense of personal identity (Sanders 150). Through using his touch to help other people, Lipsha maintains close contact with people from his surroundings, which gives him a sense of personal value. Sanders argues that “Lipsha’s touch is part of himself, of his identity” (149). Instead of focusing on who his mother and father might be, he focuses on his role as a medicine man and performs this as dutifully as he can, helping people as much as he can. Him being a medicine man becomes his sole perception of his own identity. After having missed when he shot at two geese whose hearts he wanted to use as love medicine that would make Grandpa Nector fall instantly in love with Grandma Marie, he feels depressed but immediately says to himself: “You might have problems in life, but you still got the touch” (Erdrich 240). Lipsha comforts himself by reminding himself that even though something did not go as he wanted, he still remains a medicine man. This clearly shows that the uncertainty about his notion of himself makes Lipsha fixate on the only thing that is certain in his life, and that is his touch. Said touch is also something closely connected to a certain notion of Native identity. Unfortunately for him, this in a way stabilised self-perception is challenged the moment he learns the truth about his birth origin.

After his death, Grandpa Nector's former lover, Lulu Lamartine, reveals to Lipsha that her son Gerry and June are his parents. June is a sort of adoptive daughter to Marie before she leaves to be raised by Marie's brother-in-law Eli. After growing up, June marries Marie's son Gordie with whom she has a son. However, their marriage is not an ideal one, and June eventually leaves him. June then spends some time with Lulu's son Gerry, and from this brief relationship, Lipsha is born. One does not truly get to know June as her story ends with her freezing to death. Following the reveal of his origin, Lipsha's notion of identity is shattered in just a few seconds. Something which he has been avoiding all his life has been thrown at him. It is no surprise that the moment he learns the truth he does not want to believe it. He says to Lulu: "You've went and made this up for laughs, ... I ain't June Kashpaw's son" (Erdrich 302). Lipsha tries to deny his origin as much as he can but deep down, he knows that Lulu, now his paternal grandmother, is right. His self-perception, which was built by fixating on his touch due to him not knowing who his parents are, has lost its foundation. He is walking around the reservation as if without a soul, constantly contemplating who he is. Lipsha tells to reader he "could not help but dwell on the subject of myself. Lipsha Morrissey, who'd learned so much in his short life. Who had lost and regained the touch. Lipsha Morrissey who was now on the verge of knowing who he was" (Erdrich 303). Just like for Edwin in *There There*, after he learns who his father is there is a path before Lipsha which may lead him to a completely new idea about who he is exactly. Lipsha has learned who he is in a physical sense, and now he sets out to find himself in a metaphorical sense (Schultz 90). Jeanne Smith describes this as though Lipsha is leaving the reservation to go on "a mock-American hero journey to find his identity" (21).

Lipsha is so shaken to his core that he does something he would not have even dreamed of doing. He steals money from Grandma Kashpaw so he can pay for a bus ticket. He knows that he is doing something immoral, something that goes against his nature of helping those around him, but he still does it. Lipsha justifies his act saying that he "was drove to this crime by mass confusion" (Erdrich 304). After Lulu's revelation, he is left in a constant state of confusion, questioning not only who he is but also his role as a medicine man. He is searching for a new purpose in life. That might be the reason why, in a moment of weakness, he decides to sign up for the military, only for him to regret it moments after. He decides to run away so he can evade enlistment. But just like his mind being at a crossroads and having no direction, he too does not know where to run as he

refuses to go back to the reservation. Lipsha's inner monologue clearly illustrates the indecisiveness he feels before suddenly reaching a decision about what he wants and where he wants to go. "There was no clear direction to follow, nothing to send me anywhere, until, as in this sort of case, I decided to ask myself point-blank what exactly I wanted. The answer came quick and surprising. 'I want to meet my dad,' I said aloud" (Erdrich 306). Lipsha decides to confront his situation head-on, wanting to meet Gerry Nanapush, his biological father, face to face. To meet him, he has to travel once again, this time to meet with King Kashpaw, son of June and her lawful husband Gordie Kashpaw.

Lipsha's relationship with King is difficult, to say the least. As the readers find out, everyone in the family knew about Lipsha's origin except him. Because of that King, who did not want to accept that Lipsha was his half-brother, behaved badly to him, at one point even threatening to "slice him up with a bread knife" (Erdrich 308). These threats are not what Lipsha has held against King, but the way King behaved towards him. Lipsha was called an orphan and not a real child. It is safe to say that this is also something which harmed Lipsha's self-perception. However, a change suddenly occurs. While drinking and talking about how he is always passed over for promotion, King not-knowingly acknowledges Lipsha as his brother. "'I'm gonna rise,' he said. 'One day I'm gonna rise. They can't keep down the Indians. Right on brother, huh?'" (Erdrich 312). It seems as though now that Lipsha knows the truth about his origin, those who are connected to him by blood have started to accept him. Having been accepted by King is important to him but not as important as meeting Gerry, who is reported to have escaped from prison.

Lipsha meets Gerry after he hears him climbing through the window in the kitchen. He gets to know that the reason for Gerry to come to King is because "King was a squealer, an informer. He'd got Gerry's confidence and then betrayed it" (Erdrich 319). Gerry did not expect that there would be anyone else in the apartment except King and his family, so he asks what Lipsha's name is. After learning his name, Gerry starts to laugh and something in this laugh gives Lipsha the impression that Gerry knows who Lipsha truly is. "The way he laughed, and then the slow method his eyes took me in by notches, when he was back to himself again, gave me reason to believe that he knew whose son he looked at" (Erdrich 320). Although it is not explicit there is an acknowledgement of a parental relationship between Gerry and Lipsha, which is being strengthened throughout the night. They share their family connection through certain codes (Stock 136). One of

these codes would, for example, be when Gerry recognises Lipsha's way of card-play as Lulu's, his mother's, when he, Lipsha, and King play for King's car paid with June's life insurance. Lipsha wins the game and with it the car, establishing a relationship with June, his mother, who he never knew as a mother (Schultz 90). The story ends with Lipsha travelling with Gerry in the car, driving to the Canadian border, running from police who came looking for Gerry at King's apartment.

During this ride, Lipsha confesses to Gerry that he is also on the run but from the army police. Thanks to this confession, he receives another, more explicit, confirmation about their relationship. "'You're Nanapush man,' he said... 'We all have this odd thing with our hearts.'" (Erdrich 332). All Nanapush men seem to have some sort of heart dysfunction which keeps them from passing the physical exam for the military. In a sense, Lipsha's ancestry, the biological aspect of his identity, has solved the problem that came to be due to Lipsha's uncertainty about his origin. His reconciliation with his father gave him a sense of security and self-identity (Sanders 152). He has accepted June and Gerry as his parents. Not knowing the truth about who he is led to his notion of identity and self-perception to revolve around his touch and him being a medicine man is no longer a problem. He is able to accept his origin and his ancestry, and based on this knowledge, he was able to alter his perception of himself, creating a more complex and secure notion of identity. The novel itself ends with Lipsha's words that "there was nothing to do but cross the water and bring her home" (Erdrich 333). By saying that there was nothing to do, he implies that he has no more questions that need to be answered and that he feels content with how he now feels about himself. Lipsha is no longer just a medicine man, he is a medicine man, adopted son of Grandma Marie, half-brother to King, grandson to Lulu Lamartine, and, more importantly, son of June Morrissey and Gerry Nanapush. Lipsha's identity journey showcases that one's identity is not defined by one single thing, but that it is multifaceted, something that encompasses many different parts and roles one has.

## **2.2 The Factor of Historical and Cultural Knowledge**

### **2.2.1 Dene Oxendene (*There There*)**

Another issue being raised in Orange's *There There* is one's connection to one's family, community, and people. The case of Dene Oxendene also opens up the questions of knowing the history of one's family, community, and people. Just like other Orange's

characters, Dene is of mixed origin which is also one of the reasons why he struggles with his identity. He is being described as “not recognizably Native. He is ambiguously nonwhite. Over the years he’d been assumed Mexican plenty, been asked if he was Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Salvadoran once, but mostly the question came like this: What are you?” (Orange 28–29). Dene has to go through what many urban Natives have to go through as well, and that is not being recognised as Native American but assumed to belong to a different US minority, such as Hispanics or Latinos. It is as if Dene and other urban Natives are invisible to the mainstream US society. He is very much receptive to not only this but also to the fact that “for Native people in this country, all over the Americas, it’s been developed over, buried ancestral land, glass and concrete and wire and steel, unreturnable covered memory. There is no there there” (Orange 39). Even if Dene wanted to get to know the history of his people and their heritage, it would be almost impossible as the stories about urban Natives are minimal or almost none and ancient Native places are now non-existent. This reality of stories of urban Natives, his stories, not being told, is what makes Dene feel frustrated and unrepresented. Stories one hears about one’s family or one’s people are also one of the factors that help formulate one’s identity. Unfortunately for Dene, he does not have any stories which would help him answer the question of who he is or is supposed to be, and that is why he wants to continue with his late uncle’s project, collecting stories from urban Natives themselves.

When applying for a grant to help finance the project he inherited, Dene explains his motivation behind it. People “haven’t seen the Urban Indian story,” what they have seen is “full of the kinds of stereotypes that are the reason no one is interested in the Native story in general” (Orange 40). The representation and the stories the world knows about Native Americans are not Dene’s stories. They are not something with which he can identify or something that would positively influence his self-perception. Stories, if any, he has about his people, the urban Native life, and himself are making the urban Native experience seem “pathetic”, but “the whole picture is not pathetic, and the individual people and stories that you come across are not pathetic or weak or in need of pity” (Orange 40). Dene and other Natives living in cities might have some hardships in their life, but he feels that their lives, and by extension his life, are not something one can look at with pity. He wants to feel proud about his life and himself as a person, but he cannot fully do that as the narratives about urban Natives like him do not validate this. He wants to create a completely different narrative, one which would allow people like

him to connect with each other, get to know their history, and help them reclaim their identity, reclaim his identity. Fortunately for him, he receives the cultural grant so he can start collecting stories from other urban Natives, finally getting to know the history of his people.

The issue of under-representation and seeming non-existence of urban Native narratives and the need to establish new narratives becomes much more explicit when Dene interviews Calvin Johnson for the project. Calvin describes to Dene how his father never talked about being Native and how he was hardly present before leaving Calvin and his family. “It’s like having him as a dad and not knowing, and how he fucked us up as a dad, I don’t wanna come off like I think that’s what being Native means. I know there’s a lot of Natives living in Oakland and in the Bay Area with similar stories. But it’s like we can’t talk about it because it’s not really a Native story, but then it is at the same time. It’s fucked up” (Orange 148). Calvin is saying and feeling the same thing as Dene. It is important for them to have the cultural and historical knowledge that would help them formulate their self-perceptions, but this knowledge has to coincide with their experience. The conversation between Dene and Calvin follows like this:

“I just don’t think it’s right for me to claim being Native if I don’t know anything about it.” [Calvin]

“So you think being Native is about knowing something?” [Dene]

“No, but it’s about a culture, and a history.” [Calvin] (Orange 149)

This conversation showcases the feelings of insecurity caused by the lack of historical knowledge and cultural alienation Calvin, Dene, and other urban Native Americans might feel, and which might negatively influence their notions of identity.

Dene is actively trying to solve the problem of feeling insecure about his identity by restoring “the missing bonds of community through filmed interviews with urban Native Americans from Oakland” (Gasztold 292). By interviewing others like him Dene is establishing new personal bonds and creating counter-narratives that challenge the historical narrative about Native Americans that does not match with his experience, and which undermines his effort to establish his notion about himself. This counter-narrative effort then creates a kind of shared space where others can freely share stories of their own. It is a space where Dene’s story and every other individual story becomes a piece of

a shared history of Oakland's urban Natives from which Dene and others can learn and take whatever they want. In this aspect, Dene, knowingly or not knowingly, continues in the tradition of storytelling. In Native American communities, storytelling and sharing of stories are generally perceived as integral to the well-being of the community and individual (Ahmetpahić 374). Gasztold also argues that storytelling is important as it "sustains historical memory and establishes continuity by preserving collective knowledge when social and communal aspects of traditional Native life are disrupted" (293). The project enables Dene to not only get to know all the different stories, which together introduce a fragmented history of Oakland's urban Natives, but also to continue in the tradition of storytelling, which is his heritage. Thanks to learning about the history of people like him and continuing the tradition of storytelling, although in altered form, Dene's identity goes through a shift.

The change in Dene's conception of identity is not as explicit, it is more implied. Orange's *There There* is divided into four parts named "Remain", "Reclaim", "Return", and "Powwow". The character of Dene appears in every one of them except "Return". The story about what led Dene to apply for the cultural grant can be found in the "Remain" part, while his conversation with Calvin is in the part called "Reclaim". This suggests that at the time of his application for the cultural grant, Dene was in a state of stillness, meaning his notion about himself has not evolved yet. He still feels uncertain about who he is and is insecure about his mixed origin and looking white. But in his conversation with Calvin Dene seems more confident about himself and what he wants to achieve. As the name of the part of the novel indicates, he is reclaiming his Nateness and his identity. Dene's reclaiming of his identity can be seen in the last question he asks Calvin: "...our ancestors all fought to stay alive, so some parts of their blood went together with another Nation's blood and they made children, so forget them, forget them even as they live on in us?" (Orange 149–150). The phrasing and the use of possessive pronouns can be seen as Dene coming to terms with the Native side of his identity. As he is meeting more and more people and getting to know more and more stories, his conception of who he is or is supposed to be is slowly changing, getting more secure and definite.

The commitment Dene feels about the project is not only a part of his identity journey, but it is also something that maintains a link to his ancestry (Runtić and Krivokapić 4). The first time he uses his late uncle's camera is when he learns about the uncle's passing. Upon learning about the death Dene runs away from home only to realise

that he has left his mother alone and that there was not one to be blamed for his uncle's death. Before returning home, Dene turns on the camera and lets it record the whole time. "He wanted to believe that when he turned on the camera, his uncle was with him, seeing through it" (Orange 43). When approaching his home, he sees his mother in the doorway crouching down with her face in her hands, mourning the loss of her brother, and he decides to record this scene too. And so, the first story Dene collects is the story that encapsulates the story of his uncle, his mother, and the theme of alcoholism and loss. It is an integral story that has a great influence on Dene and his life. It is also a story one recognises within the mainstream narrative of Native Americans and alcohol abuse, a recurring theme in literature and other cultural contexts. However, it does not make it any less authentic.

Through his identity journey, Dene shows the importance of narratives and stories, which carry in them the information about the history and heritage of one's family, community, and people. However, these stories and narratives have to align with the individual's life experiences for them to have a positive influence. The historical narrative seems to forget about the experiences of urban Native Americans, making them seem invisible. Dene counters this invisibility and erasure when he sets up a booth and records those willing to tell their story so he can record a history which will replace the one-dimensional model (Riggio 78). By using technology, he is ensuring the continuation of storytelling which is one of the pillars of communal identity while also creating a shared space (Ahmetpahić 374). To know the history of our family and the traditions and heritage connected with it, "being able to understand where we came from, what happened to our people, and how to honour them by living right, by telling our stories," is another integral part of one's self-perception and notion of identity (Orange 58).

### **2.2.2 Nector Kashpaw (*Love Medicine*)**

Having a connection to one's community and knowing the history, heritage, and culture has a tremendous effect on one's identity, as can be seen in Erdrich's *Love Medicine*, especially with the character of Nector Kashpaw. Nector is a lawful husband to Marie and also an adoptive father to Lipsha, even though he is being called Grandpa Nector by him. Moreover, Nector has a high-standing position on the reservation as a tribe chairman, a function to which he was raised thanks to the support of his wife Marie. One would think

that as a chairman of the tribe, Nector would feel pride, a sense of achievement, and a close connection to his roots and culture. Unfortunately, this does not seem to be the case. “It was 1952, and I had done what was expected – fathered babies, served as chairman of the tribe. That was the extent of it. Don’t let the last fool you, either... the night I accepted the job I became somebody less, almost instantly” (Erdrich 123). From the way Nector describes his life, it is apparent that he does not feel content with how his life has turned out. He seems to have almost no connection to his community, and instead of feeling pride about serving it, he seems resentful. Even saying that “Chippewa politics was thorns in my jeans” (Erdrich 132).

Nector’s uprootedness from his community and culture has a beginning in his youth. In the first chapter, the reader gets to know that Rushes Bear, Nector’s mother, let him go to the boarding school while keeping Eli, Nector’s brother, home. “She had let the government put Nector in school but hidden Eli, the one she couldn’t part with, in the root cellar dug beneath her floor” (Erdrich 19). The most formative years to one’s inner self are those encompassing infancy through adolescence with important milestones such as language acquisition, moral understanding, and identity formation within them (“Formative Years”). And it is this time that Nector had to spend in the company of presumably white teachers learning everything an ordinary white American child was expected to learn. Unlike his brother Eli, he did not immediately learn the history of his people and did not experience his culture and heritage first-hand. He “came home from boarding school knowing white reading and writing, while Eli knew the woods” (Erdrich 19). This sentence alone suggests the disparity between the two brothers and makes one ask whether Nector returned home only with the knowledge of reading and writing or whether other aspects of the dominant US culture have imprinted on him. The reason for this question is based on that boarding “largely shared the mission of assimilating Indigenous students by erasing their culture” and “those who dared to keep speaking their ancestral languages or observing their religious practices were often beaten” (Levitt).

In the same chapter in which Nector expresses his regrets about his life, he describes how, after a long time, he once again meets Lulu Lamartine, his former romantic interest. He asks for her help with delivering butter, but at the same time, his inner thoughts reveal his true intentions. While delivering the butter, he is trying to engage in small talk, but he is cut off by Lulu each time. “I am shut up for a time, then. I understand that this is useless. Whatever I am doing it is not what she wants. And the truth is, I do

not know what I want from it either. Perhaps just a mention that I, Nector Kashpaw, middle-aged butter mover, was the young hard-muscled man who thrilled and sparked her so long ago” (Erdrich 126). Here, Nector’s self-perception about himself is evident. He feels inadequate and wants to prove to himself that he is still wanted and desirable. Smith argues that “in *Love Medicine*, characters build identity on transpersonal connections to community, to landscape, and to myth” (13). And Nector is trying to do just that. However, the way he does so seems very desperate and, also, it comes at a high price. As he was not able to establish a connection to the history, heritage, and culture of his people directly, he is using Lulu as a link to that history, heritage, and culture. Lulu is seen as someone with a deep knowledge not only of the history of the reservation but also of the cultural knowledge. She is able to recall the remote history of the Chippewa people of the reservation. “The Chippewas had started off way on the other side of the five great lakes. How we were shoved out on this lonesome knob of prairie my grandmother used to tell. It is too long a story to get into now” (Erdrich 279). The connection to traditional heritage is displayed in the way Lulu embraces the world and in her magical aura (Sanders 139). By keeping an intimate relationship with her, Nector is compensating for his own historical and cultural ignorance. However, this substitution of the connection to history and culture proves to be weak and Nector is not able to let go of the values he has learned in boarding school.

When Lulu implies her intention to marry Beverly Lamartine, brother of her late husband, Nector’s reaction is horrific as he forces himself on her. He intended to “make her into my own private puppet that I could dance up and down any way I moved her” (Erdrich 133). The very next day after this act of sexual violence, Nector decides to leave Lulu. He describes his decision like this: “I was glad of my conclusion to leave Lulu forever... I was glad, because if I hadn’t betrayed Lulu before, I had to do it now, over the very land she lived on” (Erdrich 134). In some sense, Nector is behaving more like a white man than as a fellow Native living on the reservation. The values that come from knowing one’s history and culture seem to be missing in Nector. Instead, they have been replaced by the values of the dominant US society that throughout the years took many things from Native Americans. Nector uses Lulu to deal with his inferiority complex and when he gets to know that she will not be his anymore, he takes the land upon which she lives. To reject the communal Ojibwe values while accepting mainstream US values is the cause why some of Erdrich’s characters find themselves to be alone and isolated

(Schultz 87). Nector, who attended boarding and was brought up with the values of the ruling US majority, now feels alone and isolated, even though he is a member of a large family and community on the reservation. His self-perception is of a man who feels inferior, inadequate, and in a position he does not want to be in. His notion about himself is a fragile one that needs constant reassurance and validation from others.

The effect of historical and cultural knowledge, (or, in Nector's case, its seeming non-existence), on identity is even clearer in parts of Erdrich's *Love Medicine* that describe Nector in his later years. In the first chapter, Albertine Johnson, Nector's granddaughter, describes the difference between the Nector of the past and the Nector of the present. "He'd been an astute political dealer, people said, horse-trading with the government for bits and shreds. Somehow he'd gotten a school built, a factory too, and he'd kept the land from losing its special Indian status under that policy called termination" (Erdrich 19). However, the mind of this man has become "elusive, pregnant with history, his thoughts finned off and vanished" (Erdrich 19). It seems as though the rejection of culture and traditional values has made Nector alone and isolated not only from his community but in the end also from himself. It is interesting to compare Nector with Marie and Lulu when all of them become senior members of society. "Only Grandma Kashpaw wasn't one trifle out of current at the insight Lulu showed. She and Lulu was thick as thieves now. That too was odd" (Erdrich 300). Lipsha's description shows the tremendous difference between Nector and the two women, Marie and Lulu. While Nector seems to be mentally alone and lost, Marie and Lulu are not. Their coming to terms with their culture and heritage allows their mental state to remain the same and even practice an insight, a sort of sixth sense. Marie and Lulu are also able to move past their complicated past and relationship and form a friendship and connection. In his senility, Nector is not able to do that. His mind is in a world different to others, leaving him unable to form or even maintain a connection to others.

There is an even bigger difference between Nector and his brother Eli than there is between Nector and the two women. As was mentioned, Nector received a boarding school education while Eli was able to remain home at the reservation. The different effect it has had on the brothers is demonstrated in Albertine's inner monologue. "Now, these many years later, hard to tell why or how, my great-uncle Eli was still sharp, while Grandpa's mind had left us, gone wary and wild" (Erdrich 19). It is true that Nector's boarding school education was one of the things that led to his rise in reservation politics.

However, it has also caused him to be uprooted from his history, culture, and language. Unlike Eli, Nector has relied on the acknowledgement and validation of others for his sense of identity. Being with Marie and Lulu makes him feel strong, proud, and desirable. Now, in their later years, even though he presumably does not have any formal education, in terms of his mental state, Eli seems to be doing better than Nector. Eli has the cultural knowledge, and also the knowledge of the language. Sanders argues that the brothers “embody the complex nature of language usage and identification. They come from the same family and yet embrace vastly different values and lifestyles” (144). While Eli embraces his heritage and culture, Nector embraces the values of the dominant society and loses connection not only with his roots but also with himself.

The example of Nector Kashpaw clearly shows how important one’s heritage and culture are. Nector, because of his years spent in boarding school, lacks any sort of connection to his language, heritage, and culture which would help with the process of formulating his notion of himself. He “lacks an inner strength, an assured sense of who he is” (Sanders 145). As he cannot rely on the same historical and cultural knowledge as his brother Eli, he has to rely on other things that would give him at least any idea of who he is. One of these things is his relationship with Marie and Lulu. Thanks to Marie he is a husband, a father, and a chairman of the tribe, while Lulu makes him feel young, proud, and wanted. Unfortunately, these notions of identity, based only on the validation of Marie and Lulu, are not sustainable. When someone bases their identity only on relationships with other people, the roles they assume are not their own, instead, they are borrowed. Such concepts of identity are fragile, and there is a risk that when relationships on which one has based their identity collapse, their whole self collapses. The boarding school education has achieved its goal and has left Nector feeling alienated from his cultural and historical heritage. It has left him with no choice but to connect to this heritage through others who have said connection. Unfortunately, such a way of trying to solve an identity crisis is not stable enough and offers minimal hope of a lasting and authentic notion of identity, as can be seen with Nector.

## 2.3 The Need for Social Acceptance and Recognition by Others

### 2.3.1 Orvil Red Feather (*There There*)

For one to be able to formulate one's own identity, it is important to know one's ancestry, history and culture as it gives one a stable ground upon which to build. However, there is another aspect of this process which needs to be considered, and that is the acceptance and recognition of others. It is difficult to maintain a certain notion of identity if this notion is neither recognised, nor accepted by one's family, friends, and community. One such example of someone searching for the validation of others is Orange's character, Orvil Red Feather. Orvil is a fourteen-year-old Native American who is being raised by his great-aunt, Opal Viola Victoria Bear Shield. Orvil is very much interested in Native culture and heritage, but unfortunately for him, Opal does not want to teach him anything about what it means to be a Native. She believes that by shielding him from Native culture, she is protecting him from the traumas that are associated with being Native (Rocha et al. 71). That is why when he finds Native regalia in Opal's room, he tries them on in secret. "Orvil stands in front of Opal's bedroom mirror with his regalia on all wrong. It isn't backward, and actually he doesn't know what he did wrong, but it's off...He worries suddenly that Opal might come into her room, where Orvil is doing...what?" (Orange 118). He wants to learn and engage more in his Native culture, but, at the same time, he does not want to go against the wishes of Opal. This creates an inner conflict, within Orvil which is resolved by the need to know what it means to be Native and overcoming the need to listen to his great-aunt.

The need to be recognised as Native American implicitly arises in Orvil's thoughts as he is looking at himself in the mirror wearing full regalia. "It's important that he dress like an Indian, dance like an Indian, even if it is an act, even if he feels like a fraud the whole time, because the only way to be Indian in this world is to look and act like an Indian. To be or not to be Indian depends on it" (Orange 122). Orvil recognises the fact that in this world, the historical narrative has created a certain image of what Native Americans should look like. Literature, movies, television series, and the internet are full of stereotypical images of Native Americans that have both co-created and reinforced this narrative. Unfortunately for Orvil, the internet becomes his biggest source of information due to Opal's stance. On the internet, he sees what others do when they imagine a Native American. Weaver argues that "these external perceptions may influence how indigenous people view themselves" (247). So, for Orvil to ensure the acknowledgement and

recognition of others, he has to look the part and play the part. He knows that he is engaging in stereotype, but the lack of information leaves him with nothing else, making him spend hours searching on the internet. Everything he knows about what it means to be a Native American and a powwow dancer comes “from watching hours and hours of powwow footage, documentaries on YouTube, by reading all that there was to read on sites like Wikipedia, PowWows.com, and *Indian Country Today*” (Orange 121).

Orvil’s need for validation started and is connected to probably one of the most traumatising events in his life. When he was younger, Orvil found his mother lying on the kitchen floor with her nose broken and bleeding. After sending his brothers outside and ensuring she is breathing, he called 911. When the paramedics came, they brought police and a CPS worker with them. And it was this CPS worker who first recognised Orvil and his brothers as Native. “He was this old Indian guy I never saw again except for that one time. It was the first time I heard that we were Indian. He recognized that we were Indian just by looking at us” (Orange 124). Orvil gets to know that he is Native American not from his family but from a CPS worker he never sees again. This leaves Orvil with many questions which remain unanswered due to Opal’s resistance. However, it also ignites a passion within Orvil about reclaiming this other part of his identity. “Orvil knew he wanted to dance the first time he saw a dancer on TV... In that moment, in front of the TV, he knew. He was a part of something. Something you could dance to” (Orange 121). Orvil and others like him are called reclaimers, those who are trying to reclaim their Native identity. There is some evidence which suggests that if people around reclaimers do not recognise their Native identity claims, these claims are not fully meaningful (Jacobs and Merolla 67). That might be the reason why Orvil decides to participate in a powwow dance competition. At the powwow, others would have the chance to see Orvil in the way he wants them to see him, as a powwow dancer and as a Native American.

For Orvil, powwow represents a place where he can connect with other Native Americans and where he can be accepted as one of them. The Indian centres, where powwows usually take place, are in opposition to the prior experiences of rejection which reclaimers had to go through as they offer a welcoming environment (Jacobs and Merolla 76). It is extremely important for Orvil to participate in the powwow dance, as his home does not offer him these feelings of validation. The first time his brothers see him dancing wearing full regalia is not a very positive moment for him. “...that moment was also the first time his brothers saw him in regalia, dancing like that, they walked in on him in the

middle of it, and they thought it was hilarious, they laughed and laughed but promised not to tell Opal” (Orange 126). The moment when Orvil finally feels content with himself, when he does not feel as though he is only pretending to be Native is shattered by his brothers. For them, the image of Orvil dancing is an image at which they can laugh, not taking into account how he must have felt in that moment. Being laughed at by his family members certainly does not make Orvil feel recognised or accepted. It makes him focus on the powwow dance as the only place where he can search for acknowledgement.

This fixation on the powwow is evident when Orvil and his brothers ride their bicycles to the Coliseum, where the powwow will take place. They see a large number of cars arriving at the Coliseum. From these cars, hundreds of people get out. “These are other Indians. Getting out of their cars. Some of them already in full regalia. Real Indians like they’d never seen before...” (Orange 131). Orvil sees those Native Americans as those who are real, as those who, unlike him, do not feel as though they are pretending to be Native. For him, they represent a certain authority to which he has to prove himself. To feel like a real powwow dancer and Native American, to feel real as himself, he first needs to be accepted by them. Fortunately for Orvil, he soon gets to know that this authority is not as strict as he had thought and that his fears of not being acknowledged were unfounded. However, there is a moment when he thinks that he has been rejected.

The moment he steps into the locker room to change into his regalia, he thinks that those other powwow dancers are laughing at him. “The men’s locker room is loud with laughter. At first Orvil thinks they’re laughing at him, but then realizes someone had told a joke just before he got in, because more jokes come as he sits down” (Orange 231). Orvil is understandably nervous as this is the first time he is in the company of other Natives who are not his great-aunt or brothers. He feels that those men have the skill of recognising real Natives and those who are only pretending to be one. The timing of the laughter coinciding with his stepping into the locker room makes Orvil think that he has been recognised as not real, as a pretendian (someone who is falsely claiming to be Native American), even though it is not true. On the contrary, no one questions him about his origin, and he is, although implicitly, immediately accepted, which can be seen in the speech given by another powwow dancer, who says:

“Now you young men in here, listen up. Don’t get too excited out there. That dance is your prayer. So don’t rush it, and don’t dance how you practice. There’s

only one way for an Indian man to express himself... Any other way you try to say what you really mean, it's just gonna make you cry. Don't act like you don't cry. That's what we do. Indian men. We're crybabies..." (Orange 231–232)

The older powwow dancer collectively addresses everyone in the room, including Orvil, acknowledging him as a part of the group. But for Orvil, the most important recognition comes at the end of the speech when the older dancer talks about what they do as Native Americans. The use of the inclusive “we” by the older dancer finally gives Orvil the acknowledgement and the recognition he has sought. Not only has he been recognised as another powwow dancer, but also as another Native American. He no longer has to feel as though he is pretending. This feeling of finally being connected to his people, finally being a part of something, is later on strengthened when he realises that everyone is just like him, “Indians dressed up as Indians” (Orange 233).

The character of Orvil Red Feather showcases the importance of acceptance and recognition by others to one's self-perception. Orvil's inner journey is a powerful examination of the pursuit of identity and a sense of belonging (Rocha et al. 71). For Orvil and others like him who are trying to reclaim their sense of identity, being accepted and acknowledged means a great deal as it validates the notion they have about themselves. In this aspect, powwows and other events are important as it is here where reclaimers are able to engage in traditional practices and receive positive feedback regarding their Native identity (Jacobs and Merolla 78). The powwow is where Orvil is finally able to establish a connection to his people and where he is accepted back by them. It is also where he gets to know that those who he considered as real Natives are just like him, raising the question of whether there is something like a real Native.

### **2.3.2 Marie Kashpaw (*Love Medicine*)**

Marie Kashpaw, one of the characters of Erdrich's *Love Medicine*, is another example of someone seeking the validation of others. Marie, whose maiden name was Lazarre, is the wife of Nector Kashpaw and a sort of mother-like figure to Lipsha Morrissey. There is not much said about Marie's youth and childhood in *Love Medicine*, but there is a story about Marie at fourteen years old, when she was on her way to join the Sacred Heart Convent. At the very beginning of the story, one learns about Marie's inner thoughts and intentions behind her decision to join the convent. “I was going up there to pray as good

as they could. Because I don't have that much Indian blood. And they never thought they'd have a girl from this reservation as a saint they'd have to kneel to. But they'd have me" (Erdrich 43). From this sentence alone, it is obvious that Marie wants to become someone who is recognised and acknowledged by others, someone who has power over others. And as she is joining the convent, the role that would ensure that others are looking up to her and kneeling before her is the role of a saint, of which she has a very clear image in her mind. "And I'd be carved in pure gold. With ruby lips. And my toenails would be little pink ocean shells, which they would have to stoop down off their high horse to kiss" (Erdrich 43). Sanders argues that "Marie lacks a sense of who she is, of her own personal identity, creates a vision of herself that is borrowed from the role model scribed by the nuns, the Virgin Mother" (135). Becoming a saint would enable Marie to receive constant validation from the nuns at the Sacred Heart Convent, as they would honour her and pray to her. Unfortunately for Marie becoming a saint proves to be no simple task, and also the recognition and acknowledgement she receives as a saint will not satisfy her needs.

At the convent, Marie focuses her attention on one particular nun, and that is Sister Leopolda. She sees her not only as someone who has to be overcome but also as someone who can guide her and teach her so she can reach sainthood. "I was that girl who thought the black hem of her garment would help me rise...I had this confidence in Leopolda" (Erdrich 45). The feelings Marie harbours towards Leopolda are complex. In a way, she looks up to Leopolda. She sees her as an authoritative figure capable of keeping Satan in check and even drawing him out. Marie's seeking of acknowledgement, together with this sort of idealisation of Leopolda, makes her see herself through the perception that Leopolda has of her. "She always said the Dark One wanted me most of all, and I believed this. I stood out" (Erdrich 46). Instead of formulating her own sense of identity, Marie accepts Leopolda's preconceived notion of her, which is also based on the dislike of Native Americans. Leopolda's dislike of Natives is apparent in her words when she is describing what life choices Marie has. "One, you can marry a no-good Indian, bear his brats, die like a dog. Or two, you can give yourself to God" (Erdrich 48). The choice of words makes it obvious which stance Leopolda has towards Native Americans. But as Marie sees Leopolda not only as an adversary but also as a person of authority, a mother-like figure even, she too reflects this stance towards Nativeness in her inner self.

Marie believes that the devil himself is talking to her and can be found hiding inside her heart. "Before sleep sometimes he came and whispered conversation in the old

language of the bush. I listened. He told me things he never told anyone but Indians” (Erdrich 46). Marie is associating an important part of who she is, her Native side, with evil, with the devil. She does so because Leopolda hates the devil and Native Americans. Marie wants to stand up to Leopolda, to conquer her, and for Leopolda to recognise this. And to fight a nun one needs the help of the devil. Marie even starts to feel proud about her being able to hear the devil and her connection with him. “I was the only one who heard him, and I got bold. I smiled. I glanced back and smiled and looked up at her sly to see if she [Leopolda] had noticed” (Erdrich 46). Unfortunately for Marie, Sister Leopolda does notice and decides to rid her of the devil that lurks in Marie, and she does so by using physical violence. Although she suffers physical abuse at the hands of Leopolda, Marie’s feelings towards her remain complex and ambiguous. “And here was the thing: sometimes I wanted her heart in love and admiration. Sometimes. And sometimes I wanted her heart to roast on a black stick” (Erdrich 49). Marie’s fixation on Sister Leopolda also makes her reinterpret the way she wants to prove herself to others, especially to Leopolda, and how to overcome Leopolda. “I began to realize I had been on the wrong track with fruits of hell. The real way to overcome Leopolda was this: I’d get to heaven first” (Erdrich 48). Marie plans to prove herself to others and be recognised by them, not by listening to the devil, but by reaching sainthood.

Marie is seeking sainthood because she is associating martyrdom with power (Sanders 134). However, the power she is envisioning comes only from her defeating Sister Leopolda (Sanders 135). In the end, Marie reaches sainthood not by her own accord but with the help of Sister Leopolda. Marie and Leopolda get into a fight, which turns very physical. Leopolda stabs Marie’s hand with a fork and then manages to knock her unconscious. To hide this fight, Leopolda stabs Marie’s other hand to make the wounds seem similar to those of Jesus Christ. This cover-up works out. When Marie regains consciousness, she finds herself being worshipped. “For when I came around this was actually taking place. I was being worshipped. I had somehow gained the altar of a saint” (Erdrich 57). She very much enjoys finally being seen as a saint, finally receiving the validation she has longed for. These feelings intensify when she sees Sister Leopolda on her knees praying with other nuns. Finally, those to whom she wanted to prove herself and be recognised by them are kneeling alongside her bed. Marie quickly deduces what exactly happened, and it does not lessen her enjoyment of her suddenly gained sainthood. She even taunts Leopolda saying: “‘Come forward, Sister Leopolda.’ I gestured with my

heavenly wound... ‘Kneel beside me,’ I said” (Erdrich 59). One would think that Marie being recognised and accepted as a saint would finally make her content with who she is, with her notion of identity. Unfortunately for Marie, her identity as a saint proves to be “ephemeral and hollow” as it offers her “no cogent future” and “no positive identity” (Sanders 135). Marie decides to leave the convent, seeking validation elsewhere.

When leaving the convent, Marie runs into Nector Kashpaw. She gets into an altercation with him as he thinks she has stolen a pillowcase from the convent. As their fight progresses, they get closer and closer until the fight ends with them having sexual intercourse. Nector is so smitten with Marie that they eventually end up married. Back on the reservation, Marie once again feels the need to be accepted by others and she uses her husband Nector to do that. She is doing everything in her power to help him rise in politics, and as he eventually becomes the tribal chairman, she succeeds. Although Marie is the stronger of the two, she does not want a position of authority for her own sake (Castillo 16). Marie wants others to recognise that Nector got where he is today only because of her. Sanders argues that “although Nector is the tribe’s chairman, Marie is essentially the power behind the man” (138). This is evident when she goes back to the convent years later to visit Sister Leopolda, who in her later years has become sickly and confused.

Marie tells Leopolda just how successful her husband is, only for Leopolda to dismiss her saying: “‘So you’ve come up in the world,’ she mocked, using my thoughts against me. ‘Or your husband has, it sounds like, not you, Marie Lazarre’” (Erdrich 150). Marie’s immediate response to this illustrates her desire for others to recognise that she is the one who made it possible for Nector to succeed: “‘Marie Kashpaw,’ I said. ‘He is what he is because I made him’” (Erdrich 150). Castillo suggests that her response can be paraphrased and understood in two ways, “because she has literally forced him to achieve the chairmanship, and also because he is very much her creation” (16). Unfortunately, Marie does not receive the recognition she wanted from Leopolda, as Leopolda decides to dive under her bedsheets, only for her to rise again with a metal spoon in her hand with which she starts to bang on her iron bedstead. Infuriated by Leopolda’s dismissal, Marie once again gets into a physical altercation with her as she wants to take the metal spoon off of her. The reason for Marie’s sudden need for the spoon is that it would serve as a symbol of her overcoming Leopolda. It would give her the validation and force Leopolda to acknowledge that Marie is someone stronger, someone more than Leopolda. “Every

time I held the spoon handle I'd know that she was nothing but a ghost, a black wind. I'd have her helpless in the scar of my palm" (Erdrich 152). In the end, Marie is unable to take the spoon from her, deciding to leave the convent once again and return to the reservation. This encounter with Sister Leopolda makes Marie question her sense of self (Sanders 138). Marie's uncertainty about her identity is later strengthened as Nector decides to leave her for Lulu the very same day. Being unable to secure Leopolda's recognition and being left by her husband leaves Marie with no other way to prove to others that she deserves their acceptance and recognition.

Instead of going after Nector, Marie busies her mind with caring for her child and doing manual work. And as she is keeping her mind and body busy, Marie has a sudden realisation.

They would say Marie Kashpaw was down in the dirt. They would say how her husband had left her for dirt. They would say I got all that was coming, head so proud. But I would not care if Marie Kashpaw had to wear an old shroud. I would not care if Lulu Lamartine ended up the wife of the chairman of the Chippewa Tribe. I'd still be Marie. Marie. Star of the Sea! I'd shine when they stripped off the wax! (Erdrich 161)

As Marie overcomes this trial in her life, she finally gains a notion about herself as someone who is separate from her vision of a saint and also separate from Nector (Sanders 138). Her overcoming her almost obsessive need for validation might be a result of her already receiving a different kind of recognition, a recognition she initially did not seek. The recognition and acceptance of Marie as a mother. After a very difficult and exhausting birth, Marie is accepted as a daughter by Rushes Bear, her mother-in-law.

"I'm your son," he said. [Nector]

"No more. I only have a daughter." [Rushes Bear] (Erdrich 100–101)

The first true acceptance and recognition Marie receives is due to her position as a mother which might explain why Marie has decided to not only care for her own children but also to take in other children, just like Lipsha. In the end, after the death of Nector and after being able to repair her relationship with Lulu, Marie is regarded as a prominent member of the community and as someone with power. "They feared one of them [Marie and Lulu] would reach out, grab them into their room, and tell them all the secrets they

tried to hide from themselves” (Erdrich 300). The acknowledgement did not come from Marie being a saint or a wife of the tribal chairman, but from Marie being a strong person who can hold her family together. This agrees with Tanrisal’s argument that “women make up the backbone of the family which is of utmost importance to the Native American” (71).

The character of Marie Kashpaw is an example of someone who has spent most of their life seeking the validation of others, doing everything in their power for them to be acknowledged, recognised, and accepted. From trying to become a saint to the wife of the tribal chairman, Marie has spent much of her energy trying to prove to her surroundings that she is someone who deserves their attention, has a great influence, that she is someone who matters, or simply that she is someone.

The analyses of individual characters of *There There* and *Love Medicine* showcase that both novels work with the concept of Native identity as a complex and multilayered issue. Edwin looks at Nativeness as something that can be gained by getting to know your ancestry and birth origin. Dene seeks to reclaim his Native identity by documenting stories of people just like him, and Orvil focuses his attention on seeking acceptance and approval of others as a powwow dancer. Although the characters of *Love Medicine* come from different social backgrounds, their struggles with identity are similar to those of *There There*. Lipsha, too, experiences inner turmoil after finally finding out the truth about his origin. Nector also tries to establish a connection between himself and historical and cultural knowledge, and Marie reinvents her notion about herself in order to be accepted and recognised. However, there is a certain difference between Orange’s and Erdrich’s characters. While Edwin, Dene, and Orvil experience a crisis of identity connected with feelings of cultural alienation and uprootedness, the inner struggles of Lipsha, Nector, and Marie are not as closely linked to their Native American part of identity. Both Tommy Orange and Louise Erdrich demonstrate in their novels that Native identity is not only about someone having Native blood, but that other equally crucial factors together give a more nuanced answer to what it means to be Native American, regardless of whether one lives in a city or on a reservation.

## Conclusion

This thesis aimed to get a better understanding of the issue of identity crisis in *There There* by Tommy Orange and in Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine*, and how each author depicts said theme. Although the characters of Orange and Erdrich come from different backgrounds, through literary analysis, this thesis determined the common factors these characters used in shaping their identity. Knowing one's ancestry, having historical and cultural knowledge about one's people, and being accepted and acknowledged by others were revealed to be crucial factors in the characters' identity journey. Analysis of chosen characters showcases that the Native American authors recognise that the Native identity is a complex issue which, unfortunately, for the last two hundred years, has been simplified by the federal government. Since the Dawes Act of 1887, the US federal government has looked at the question of Native American identity as something which can be decided from the point of view of biology and blood quantum. Throughout the following years, the government has implemented laws and followed policies which tried to establish different definitions of who is Native, but the tendency of racialisation of Native Americans has continued. Even today, for someone to be federally recognised as Native, they have to prove they have Native ancestry and have a certain percentage of Native American blood. Due to increasing rates of Native Americans living in cities and their intermarriages, the question of what constitutes Native American identity is becoming more crucial to answer. Both Tommy Orange and Louise Erdrich in *There There* and *Love Medicine* demonstrate the realities of everyday life of Native Americans, with everything connected to it, including the issue of Native American identity.

The characters of Edwin Black and Lipsha Morrissey have to overcome the battle of not knowing who exactly they are as they do not know their biological parents. Both of them go through a major transformation after they learn about their origin. They go on an identity journey, trying to ascertain who they are by learning more about where they come from. Their quest for self-discovery is similar except for one thing. While Edwin has spent most of his life learning what it means to be Native and looking for clues about his real father, Lipsha has spent most of his life avoiding the topic of his birth origin. Through the analysis of their narratives, the reason for this difference between them is that Lipsha has a more secure idea of what it means to be Native American. Lipsha has the benefit of being able to avoid the question of his origin and turn to another aspect of

his identity, and that is being a medicine man, while Edwin does not have any other role on which he could focus, so the question of his ancestry is fundamental for him.

Characters of Dene Oxendene and Nector Kashpaw showcase another important factor that influences Native American identity, and that is the historical and cultural knowledge. Both Dene and Nector do not have said knowledge although through no fault of their own. Dene uses his project to interview and film many Natives living in Oakland to produce a different narrative than the one which connects Nativeness with reservation while disregarding the experiences of those living in urban areas. He slowly starts to identify with the stories he hears, gaining a more secure notion of what it means to be an urban Native and securing a more stable personal identity. Contrary to Dene, Nector seems uninterested in learning anything new and is set in his ways. During the most formative years for one's identity, Nector was shown the ways of the dominant US society instead of the history, cultural ways, and traditions of his people. That is why Nector's behaviour throughout the novel resembles the behaviour of a white man. In the end, Nector gets lost in himself, letting himself be swept away in the current of his thoughts, leaving no traces of his former self.

The analyses of Orvil Red Feather and Marie Kashpaw examine the final factor the authors used to shape their characters' identity and that is the validation, acceptance, and recognition by others. Orvil, frustrated that he does not know anything about what it entails being Native American, turns to the internet. To receive the recognition he so desperately seeks, Orvil decides that he needs to look and act like a Native American. He tries wearing full regalia and tries to dance like a powwow dancer, only for him to still feel like a fraud. Fortunately for him, his fears of not being recognised turn out to be unfounded as he is immediately welcomed and accepted by other powwow dancers. Another one seeking to be acknowledged by others, Marie Kashpaw, firstly turns to the idea of reaching sainthood, which would give her power over the nuns at the Sacred Heart Convent, especially over Sister Leopolda. But even after becoming a saint, Marie does not feel content and goes on to search for a different kind of validation, one which would come from her being wife to the tribal chairman. Even after becoming the wife of the tribal chairman, Marie finds herself dismissed by Sister Leopolda and left by Nector, leaving her sense of self shattered. However, at this very moment, Marie suddenly realises that she has already received the acknowledgement she wanted. Not because she is a saint

or the wife of the tribal chairman, but because she is a strong and powerful person who is able to hold together not only her family but also her community.

Individual analyses of chosen characters showed similarities in the ways in which Tommy Orange and Louise Erdrich approach the theme of identity crisis in their works. It showed common that factors the authors use to establish Native American identity and certain differences between the characters who are urban Natives and those who live on the reservation. The findings of this thesis show that the characters of *There There* experience an identity crisis that is closely connected to their identity as Native Americans. Orange portrays characters who feel cultural alienation and a sense of uprootedness, as though they do not know what it means to be Native American and how to be one. On the other hand, the characters of *Love Medicine* seem to have no problem in ascertaining Native identity. They know they are Natives and feel as such. Their crises of identity are on a much more personal level. By comparing the characters of individual authors, the thesis does not want to imply that a certain group, urban Natives or reservation Natives, is more significant than the other. Both groups represent important aspects of Native American identity. Literary analysis also proves that, in their works, individual authors challenge the policies of the US federal government which mainly base the Native American identity on biological factors such as blood quantum. By using multiple factors for establishing Native identity, Tommy Orange and Louise Erdrich show that Native identity is much more than just a certain percentage of Native blood.

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