

[The Retelling of History: A Poetics of Identity Negotiation in Alexie’s “Another Proclamation”]

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[Abstract] *Historical accounts and records of interactions between settler-Americans and American Indians in the United States are frequently marked by widespread violence and genocide. Such stories give contemporary American Indians a sense of alienation. This is so because these stories are insufficient in accurately portraying historical events, they fail to acknowledge the continuing existence of the American Indians, and they lack comprehensive examination of the atrocities caused by colonialism. This article addresses Sherman Alexie’s use of poetry to engage in the process of retelling history from a contemporary viewpoint of an American Indian. In doing so, Alexie articulates his perspective on issues of identity and survival, whilst also shedding light on the historical context of colonialism. A postcolonial analytical framework is employed to explain the poetics of survival narration, positioned within the context of third-space negotiations of culture and identity. “Another Proclamation,” the poem used for the interpretation, retells the history of 38 American Indians executed in public on December 26, 1862. The poem is conceptualized as a poetic medium that develops Alexie’s reflection on the executions, potentially challenging prevailing narratives and providing enlightenment to marginalized individuals who battle with a persistent sense of alienation.*

[Keywords] *Alexie; American Indians; Another Proclamation; Lincoln; poetry*

According to prevailing historical narratives, on August 17, 1862, four drunk Little Crow Indians from the Dakota tribes, generally identified as Sioux, participated in a violent action and slaughtered many settler-Americans. The chief, who was informed about the accident, assembled a large attacking force and assaulted many more settlers in their homes and farms. Over 800 people were killed at that time. In addition to the fact that many Sioux were imprisoned as convicts, 38 men were publicly executed on December 26, 1862. In modern times, this historical period is remembered for its significance in terms of the accomplishments that followed the Civil War (1861–1865) and for being the period when Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation (on January 1, 1863). Many history books have been written on the subject of the executed Sioux, but Hank H. Cox's *Lincoln and the Sioux Uprising of 1862* (2005) is regarded as the one that best contextualizes the murder within the crimes and expansions of settler-Americans in Indigenous territories.

In addition to Alexie's "Another Proclamation," this historical story has also been a topic of inspiration for Layli Long Soldier's "38," a poem published in the 2017 collection *Whereas* (49). Long Soldier effectively appeals to readers' emotions through the deft use of a recurring metaphor involving "grass," which is woven throughout the poem. While both poets address the same incident within narrative frameworks retelling the story of the execution, the central focus of this paper revolves around Alexie's representation, which is situated within a broader context of survival. Alexie employs various poetic techniques in this piece, including the use of rhetorical questions, the juxtaposition of paired questions and answers, transitions from seemingly general references to references of nuanced specificity, the integration of verse into prose, the absence of suspense, and the use of cognitive poetics. He provides an alternative viewpoint to the historical story surrounding the executions.

This examination of "Another Proclamation" demonstrates the presence of three main theoretical concepts that serve as the guiding notions of the study. These theories are Rahel Jaeggi's definition of alienation, Alexie's equation of survival, and Homi Bhabha's third space theory of cultural negotiations. Alienation, in light of Jaeggi's comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon, "does not indicate the absence of a relation but is *itself a relation, if a deficient one*" (Jaeggi 1; emphasis added). Accordingly, alienation is hypothesized as a deficient connection between the contemporary identities of American Indians and the endorsed popular and manufactured depictions that align with colonial power ideologies and opposing binaries. The main objective of mainstream historical accounts and records of American Indians, and likely of other marginalized communities, is to capitalize on their inhumanity while minimizing the imperialism and oppression perpetrated against them. To date, no official public apologies have been extended to American Indians by settler-Americans, and furthermore, there has been a lack of engagement to produce alternative perspectives or counterarguments regarding the oppressive colonial past of the United States. In the poem under investigation here, the alienation of American Indians – primarily Dakota – from those contemplations of the mass execution in 1862 is the primary focus.

Alexie is best-known for his contributions to American Indian survival narratives. “[He] presents a comprehensive view of life in contemporary America that is at once multicultural and Indigenous” (Wilson xi). Alexie has expressed his theory of survival as follows: “Survival = Anger × Imagination” (Alexie, *The Lone Ranger* 98). In Jeff Berglund’s opinion, deep economic, social, and political injustices are likely the cause of anger for Alexie’s characters, and this anger is a destructive force (xxix); the emotion of anger has the potential to result in fatalities. In contrast, imagination necessitates a foundation mode through which it can transcend both physical and symbolic limitations or apprehensions, thus unleashing its capacity for creativity. “Imagine an escape. Imagine that your own shadow on the wall is a perfect door” (Alexie, *The Lone Ranger* 99). The survival mechanisms that aid Alexie’s protagonists and narrators in envisioning a more promising future are the result of effectively channeling their rage and harnessing their imagination. By utilizing their imagination, they are able to harness the constructive potential of their anger, rather than allowing it to become destructive. In another work, Alexie articulates his theory of poetry construction likewise in the form of an equation: “Poetry = Anger × Imagination” (Alexie, *Old Shirts* 2). According to him, poetry is a skill that arises from a combination of anger and imagination. He asserts this viewpoint as a result of his personal affiliation as a Spokane/Coeur d’Alene American Indian, which has exposed him to similar experiences of alienation, oppression, and the struggle for survival. By examining the aforementioned equation, it becomes apparent that poetry is a product of both effective anger and imagination, and a means of survival. In essence, poetry is equated to survival; poetry = survival.

Thus, Alexie’s poetry functions as a survival paradigm, a resilient basis on which American Indians might thrive, and the variables of anger and imagination are concealed within the challenges investigated and presented through literary means of poetics. Alexie’s poetic style encompasses a fusion of conventional and cultural aesthetics, strategically employed to actively engage readers from diverse cultural backgrounds. In her investigation of Alexie’s sonority poetics, Susan Brill de Ramirez notes the difficulty of interpreting poetic texts: “the condensed nature of poetry invites close attention to the intricacies of craft in both its writing and reading” (108). As much as the central subject of survival is a crucial conclusion in Alexie’s poetry, it is his poetics deployed inside specific patterns of revisionary historical storytelling that drive the interpretation towards this conclusion.

An additional aspect to take into account is the negotiation of identity that Alexie conceptualizes through his retelling of history. This presentation is understood as an embodiment of Bhabha’s theory of cultural negotiation, specifically the concept of the third space. “It is that Third Space, though unrepresentable in itself, which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized, and read anew” (Bhabha 37). Bhabha’s perspective on post-colonialism centers on the concept that cultures are perceived through the lens of a third space, which provides marginalized individuals with a transitional zone where

they can construct interpretations of their identity and reconcile its conflicting aspects. The theory of "third space" can be comprehended as an alternative potential viewpoint used to surpass the binary opposition of marginalization, specifically the distinction between "self" and "others," which is commonly observed in colonial settings. In any theoretical framework that incorporates this spatial context, such as Alexie's poetic mode of survival, it provides an opportunity for individuals who have experienced marginalization or exclusion to express themselves rather than facing repression. The American Indian speakers depicted in Alexie's poetry derive empowerment from their real self-identification and the actual experiences they have had in reality. As posited in this analysis, their comprehension of the notion of survival exhibits a pragmatic orientation, wherein they transcend the confines of binary oppositions and delve into its underlying ideologies. Consequently, the utilization of poetic space facilitates the emergence of cultural manifestations that exhibit hybrid characteristics, as will be discussed below.

[1] Poetry: The Genre of Survival

In her study of the idea of genocide and continuance in the poetry of American Indian women, Paula Gunn Allen states that "a contemporary American Indian is always faced with a dual perception of the world: that which is particular to American Indian life, and that which exists ignorant of that life. Each is largely irrelevant to the other except where they meet – in the experience and consciousness of the Indian" (149). Consequently, the author argues for the necessity of contemporary American Indian poets to seek a means of harmonizing portrayals of their extinct cultures with those that reflect their ongoing existence, employing methods and themes centered around transformation.¹ As Allen argues, modernity in life is analogous to modernity in poetic writing methods. Modernity "provides various means of making the dichotomy [of extinction and continuity] clear and of reconciling the contradictions within it" (149). While Allen does not explicitly state that the prevailing belief about the extinction of American Indians is not only uninformed but also incorrect, her perspective lines up with Gerald Vizenor's theory of simulations. The "indian," in popular narratives and performances, is "a cued simulation, a native absence that becomes a logocentric presence" (Vizenor 34).² Vizenor, along with other American Indian intellectuals, contends that the ongoing discourses surrounding Indigenous identities, particularly shaped by settler-colonialists, are logocentric in nature, hence suggesting inherent constraints and biases.³ In the end, the American Indians' concept of resilience in poetry is constructed through a process of presenting persuasive arguments aimed at rectifying the widespread dissemination of deception and misunderstandings regarding their history and cultures. The claim made by Allen regarding the intricate dual perspectives of contemporary American Indian poets in relation to their identity is interpreted, in the context of this analysis of Alexie's retelling of historical narratives, as an expression of cultural and historical alienation. Based on the foregoing observations, it is apparent that the majority of Alexie's poetry addresses

historical events to deconstruct, critique, and contest the made-up cultural identity of American Indians.

A considerable proportion of Alexie’s poetry, which can be found in his twenty-one published works, has been examined with regard to its utilization of “formal poetic conventions” (Berglund xvii). Nevertheless, there are certain poems that “defy easy categorization, raising questions about whether they are nonfictional essays, prose poems, or experimental short fiction” (Berglund xvii). The examination of resistance to established norms and conventions in poetic works, specifically in the context of Alexie’s poetry, constitutes a subject of inquiry within the realm of aesthetics. This can be attributed to his prioritization of a set of objectives that he actively pursues during the development of his distinctive poetics. Prose poetry, as characterized in an encyclopedia of poetry and poetics, is a hybrid and innovative form. The oxymoronic title, Prose Poetry, along with the form of the work, both relying on contradictions, render the text well-suited to a wide spectrum of interpretations and modes of expression. The work encompasses both ambivalence in content and form, as well as elements of mimicry and storytelling (Preminger and Brogan 977). Every category in this definition can be found and argued in Alexie’s prose poetry. Alexie uses prose poetry as an entire poetic structure in some of his poems. He also, as will be discussed in the analysis of “Another Proclamation,” has the tendency to mix verse lines with prose sections. Alexie’s use of prose evokes parallels with the poetic construction found in Walt Whitman’s works. In his study of Whitman’s poetry, Sculley Bradley states that Whitman has his own way of writing because poetry is “a work of art [that] is indefinable and illimitable in effect” (437). Bradley also claims that Whitman’s prose-poetry is written in “balanced logical units” (438) that have been described by Bliss Perry as “ruined blank-verse” (108). The impact of modernity, as articulated by Allen, is being addressed with such usages.

Another factor that could be deemed significant in the examination of Alexie’s poetry is his cultural heritage. In contrast to other American writers, Alexie exhibits a partial reluctance to fully embrace his apparent categorization as a solitary author within a specific fictional genre, be it poetry or prose, and instead he frequently intertwines elements of both forms of writing. During a text-based interview carried out via the *YouTube* platform, Alexie said that a number of American Indian writers, such as Joy Harjo, Simon Ortiz, N. Scott Momaday, and Leslie Marmon Silko, have inspired him with their pursuit of a multi-genre writing style. Furthermore, he states that those diverse literary narrative works are a reflection of the oral storytelling traditions passed down by the ancestors. Hence, the author’s cultural subtleties are manifest not only in his compositions of poetry, short stories, and novels, but also in the merging of diverse literary formats. Alexie writes in a variety of literary genres because he sees “the artistic possibility in all of it,” despite the fact that poetry is his “reflex talent” (Big Think). Alexie’s disapproval of the global genre conceptions advantages his cultural heritage and ethnic narrative aesthetics. Some critics believe that “readers will be most rewarded with intertextual readings – readings across the genres of Alexie’s works – to find intricate reworkings and meditations on common themes, emblems, and motifs, as well as characters” (Berglund xvii).

In his scholarly examination of American Indian poetry as a genre, Dean Rader asserts that “genre functions as a kind of stealth bridge connecting otherwise opposing cultures and methods of expression” (142). It is likely that Alexie feels apprehensive about expressing his thoughts in verse because he believes they demand fewer words than those he has to use, and therefore he feels uneasy about it. In addition, according to Eric Gary Anderson, American Indian writers are “mild at best” when it comes to the “lure of genre” (37), as long as they can achieve “cross-genre fluency” (39). Anderson believes that American Indians’ limited engagement with poetry as a literary genre can be attributed to their desire to be recognized and understood beyond the restrictive title of poets. They “would like to be understood less as poets working in particular poetic genres than as American Indians using writing to make available – to their own people, to Indians of different nations, and to non-Native readers – connections between the ways they see and ways their readers might see, connections between where they come from, where they have been, where they are, and where they are going” (46). Poetry, if specified, is written to be their voice, which is why it is “*situated* differently” (54). With its fluid interaction of various genres, American Indian poetry does not merely stimulate cultural negotiations; it also imparts a distinctive blend of conventional poetics, traditional oral narrative styles of storytelling, and individual literary innovations.

To draw things together briefly, Alexie’s poetics is proposed as the means through which the retelling of history is conveyed in a third space. It encompasses the fundamental aesthetic disciplines that constitute the two variables of his survival equation. These variables are linked to the affective states of anger and imagination. Hence, the presence of poetic frameworks can be ascribed to these variables, with the various manifestations of poetics serving to facilitate the process of cultural negotiation. In an interview which highlights Bhabha’s politics of difference, references are made to his thoughts about “the acquisition of agency” and the notion that breaking things that are dominant, generalized, or fixed helps to challenge those things (Olson and Worsham 361). Alexie’s fascination with novelty should thus not be misconstrued as a yearning for seclusion or complete disengagement from the wider conventions of literary genres. In contrast to prevailing opinions, Alexie frequently self-identifies as a poet. This assertion shows that the poet demonstrates confidence and ease in his unique viewpoint on matters of modernity, and when deviating from prevailing or established conventions he does so in order to break common sense.

“Another Proclamation” is featured in the collection *War Dances*, which was published in 2009. The poem sheds light on a relatively obscure aspect of American Indian history by challenging the idealized perception of Lincoln as a prominent figure in the emancipation movement. For Sarah Wyman, this specific poem by Alexie is best categorized as a form of “revisionary historical prose poems” (246). Within this poem, the speaker expresses a profound sense of empowerment in relation to the act of narrating distinct identities. “As though unable to form this content into cadenced rhythms, [Alexie] rather piles words like blocks of truth, spelling out the implications of Lincoln’s dastardly act” (Wyman 246). By redirecting the focus onto Lincoln’s lesser-known proclama-

tion, Alexie proceeds to examine the mass executions of American Indians in Minnesota. The facts have been obscured or presented in a different light due to the prevailing narrative that portrays the era as a time of justice, in relation to the historical context of settler-colonialism and slavery. Alexie effectively conveys his perspective on poetry as a means of survival by utilizing two primary components. The author’s creative ability serves as the basis for a narrative retelling of a distinct historical period, wherein the victims are portrayed in a fictionalized manner, expressing their demise through sad death songs. In contrast, the author’s anger is conveyed by employing prose fiction within the framework of poetic lines to accentuate specific words and images. Despite the absence of a definitive conclusion, which is characteristic of Alexie’s works, the poem revolves around the speaker’s personal ethnic identity and the survivor’s sense of self. Through its structure and narrative approach, the poem offers a universal representation of marginalized individuals who have been alienated because of colonialism.

[2] The Other History

“The impact of genocide in the minds of American Indian poets and writers,” Allen writes, “cannot be exaggerated. It is a pervasive feature of the consciousness of every American Indian in the United States, and the poets are never unaware of it. Even poems that are meant to be humorous derive much of their humor directly from this awareness” (143). Like other American Indian poets, Alexie’s upbringing was immersed in narratives recounting the genocidal acts committed against Indigenous peoples. It is the hypothesis of this study that in his temporal present, Alexie experiences a sense of alienation from historical accounts that are predominantly framed within colonial narratives, as these narratives fail to incorporate an American Indian perspective. After becoming a poet, and as part of his interest in retelling history from the perspective of those who have been othered and marginalized, he deconstructed the mainstream historical archives and brought to life other stories of the history and genocide of American Indians. This other history primarily critiques and undermines the political authority that constituted the colonial regime. In doing so, Alexie expresses support for and raises awareness of the American Indians who continue to be victims of ethnic and narrative discrimination. From his vantage point, he highlights the presence of American Indians and negotiates colonialist and hegemonic historical narratives. His retelling of history is an endorsement of survival.

Understanding Alexie’s poetry requires an investigation of the historical and political relations between American Indians and settler-Americans, an interconnected past he often laments for its cruelty. This poetry of retelling history does not express a longing for a restoration of the previous old times of pre-contact Indigenous lives, neither is it a retelling of a very old past, but rather it recognizes the historical inequities experienced by Indigenous communities, as evidenced by their ongoing struggles for survival. Even in seemingly apolitical poems like “Ode to Mix Tapes,” “Food Chain,” and “Roman Catholic Haiku” – all published in *War Dances* – the poet engages with the complex issue of

colonialism through contemporary explorations of identity and culture. This is related to Alexie's frequent exploration of American Indian matters. He acknowledges that American Indian ethnic identities have been significantly influenced by colonialism, which resulted in their suppression and marginalization, while simultaneously constructing the image of the "Indian."

"Another Proclamation" begins by employing multiple poetic techniques, including a rhetorical question, the integration of poetic verses within prose, along with the absence of suspense from the narrative. The main purpose of these inceptive poetics is to present an initial statement that can break down the main idea and engage the reader through a reflection on history, thus encouraging a more thorough analysis of the subject matter. "When / Lincoln / Delivered / The / Emancipation / Proclamation / Who / Knew / that, one year earlier, in 1862, he'd signed and approved the order for the largest public execution in United States history?" (Alexie, *War Dances* 89). The first few words of the opening rhetorical question construct a section comprising single-word elements. Each stressed and capitalized word at the beginning of each line draws attention to two primary subjects: the ultimate objectiveness of Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, and the fact that few people know about his other acts and decisions (such as the mass execution). Even though the poem explains itself well, the capitalization of emphasized words serves not only to draw attention to those words visually, but also to stress their emotional and intellectual significance when recited or read to an audience. The concise nature of these words adeptly conveys the absence of suspense within the narrative of the story. The poet makes an obvious effort not to obscure the subject matter, which pertains to the limited public awareness of Lincoln's decision to conduct executions in a public venue.

The first one-word verse section moves slowly into becoming a prose section. Prose poetry, which is less structured than traditional verse poetry, allows for more flexibility in expression. Leaving behind the one-word lines which make the greatest impression, Alexie's question brings forth more details of the implementation of the executions that were performed in public under Lincoln's legal system; the same system that issued the Emancipation Proclamation for the marginalized slave communities on January 1st, 1863, had ordered a mass public execution in 1862. The "one-year" time frame was in actuality only a gap of a few days. Alexie, however, creates a sense of temporal space by using the fact that each event is recorded under a different year. The execution is recorded as having taken place on December 26, 1862. Even though Lincoln is mentioned at the beginning, he is not the poem's final focus; rather, the focus is on the public execution itself, what it suggests about the issue of double standards of law, and the scant portrayal that these events have in settler-colonial narratives of American Indians, which is where Alexie chooses to place the poem's negotiation of colonial history. Nevertheless, the utilization of the name "Lincoln" has a significant function; it is intended to grab the reader's attention and evoke a sense of uncertainty, prompting readers to evaluate both Lincoln's executions and the mainstream inclination to disregard this occurrence. Determining how many people are knowledgeable about Lincoln's other proclamation

is a particularly challenging topic. In turn, readers are motivated to inquire more deeply into this subject matter.

Alexie's poetic techniques extend to the juxtaposition of matched questions and answers. "Who did they execute? 'Mulatto, mixed-bloods, and Indians'" (Alexie, *War Dances* 89). There are three racial groups on the list of those executed, and in some ways they form part of a collective cultural reference to the United States, though in actuality they are absent and marginalized. The three groups are also hybrids in post-colonial terms, and they have undergone cultural embellishments and experienced a history of racism. By including "Indians" along with "mixed-bloods" and "Mulatto," a parallel narrative is presented. The story of "Another Proclamation" becomes a symbol that echoes multiple storylines involving minorities as targeted groups treated unfairly and unjustly. This reference performs a generalizing function. The inclusion of all three groups in the narrative broadens the scope of the discussion about the executed Dakota Indians, while simultaneously narrowing the focus due to their similarly marginalized demographic position.

Furthermore, Alexie elucidates the rationale behind the executions as well as the specific location where the act took place in more subsequent exchanges of questions and answers. "Why did they execute them? 'For uprisings against the State and her citizens.' Where did they execute them? Mankato, Minnesota" (Alexie, *War Dances* 89). According to Peter Stockwell's contemporary study that addresses the relationship between literature and cognition, the implied meaning in the two aforementioned answers involves cognitive poetics. "Autonomous texts can be parsed and described by linguistics, but the heteronomous object of literature can only be described analytically by a cognitive poetics that integrates textual patterns and readerly disposition and effects" (Stockwell 211). The first cognitive poetics is expressed by the employment of the nonstandard pronoun "her," turning the United States into a character-type figure. "Very strong examples of deictic shift cues are spatial and temporal locative expressions and new names or pronouns" (Stockwell 58). Alexie subverts the natural gender of the states, and instead uses a metaphorical feminine gender. The "her" pronoun contextualizes a metaphor of the United States to be a mother of people.

Before moving on to the next cognitive poetics, it is important to note the punctuation pattern utilized in crafting the replies. The first answer is enclosed in inverted commas, which indicates that it is a widely known story. The latter, on the other hand, lacks any such context, giving the words themselves a negotiating point of view. The reference to Mankato, Minnesota is the second cognitive poetics. In the 1850s, Mankato experienced a significant influx of settlers, leading to its transformation into a frontier region. These settlers seized the lands previously inhabited by the Dakota Indians and displaced the French colonial territories. "Often called 'settler sovereignty,' this belief included the general supposition that the land was theirs, and they could take a 'preemption' claim wherever they wanted" (Anderson, Gary Clayton 47). During this period of increased colonization of Indigenous lands, treaties were broken, massacres were committed, and poverty dominated the life of the displaced Indigenous peoples. Currently, and on the official website of the United States Census Bureau, white inhabitants of Mankato make

up 85.7 percent of the population, whereas American Indians along with Alaska Natives are 0.1 percent ("U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Mankato City, Minnesota"). The irony lies in the fact that the Dakota peoples, who are the authentic Indigenous inhabitants of the region, fail to be recognized due to the mass killing and displacement of their tribes.

While the act of initiating an uprising is a central aspect of this occurrence, it is approached in a measured tone as a plausible justification. However, the speaker's anger is notably heightened in response to the subsequent inquiry, as he becomes less cautious in disclosing factual information regarding the execution. "How did they execute them? Well, Abraham Lincoln thought it was good / And / Just / To / Hang / Thirty-eight / Sioux / simultaneously" (Alexie, *War Dances* 89). With the second usage of one-word lines and capitalizations, the answer to the question of "how" becomes effective – both visually and vocally. The insertion of one-word lines within the poem generates a second monosyllabic or fragmented rhythmic impact, emphasizing the significance of each individual word. This phenomenon occurs due to the prevailing Western literary convention, wherein lines of poetry typically commence with capitalization, so indicating a requirement for emphasis. The utilization of one-word lines can potentially allow for several interpretations, as readers need to actively engage with the text in order to ascertain the intended context. The inclusion of various layers of intricacy within the poem can be observed by considering how the act of hanging could possibly be understood as "Good And Just."

"Sioux" designates the tribal affiliation of those who were executed four days before the Emancipation Proclamation was issued. They are 38 Sioux, not "mixed-bloods, mulattos, and Indians," who are all colonial composites of hybrid generations. In making this statement, Alexie modifies his poetics of identity reference from a seemingly general marginalized identity into a nuanced specificity (Sioux); the latter plainly creates a link between the executed people and American Indians. It is a nuanced specificity because the executed people are Dakota, according to the Sioux. Alexie precisely designates the individuals who are hanged as Sioux only when he argues the act of hanging to be justice in Lincoln's point of view; with each word capitalized and emphasized. In this context, Lincoln assumes the role of a representative figure embodying the concept of coloniality, while the 38 Sioux individuals are emblematic of those who have suffered as victims of colonialism. Indeed, the 38 convicts can be considered victims due to a multitude of factors. The aforementioned legal sentence is performed in a manner that exhibits brutality towards mankind, as it is carried out simultaneously and in an open-air setting, with an audience that expresses enthusiastic support. The portrayal of power and oppression against American Indians takes precedence in describing the performance of the execution over its characterization as an act of justice.

Alexie's use of the word Sioux to identify the convicts is sophisticated, and it suggests other layers of meaning. The words "38 Sioux Indians" are inscribed on the old Mankato monument: "Here Were Hanged 38 Sioux Indians Dec. 26th 1862." Sioux is not a name of a particular tribe, at least from the perspective of American Indians. It is a colonial corruption of a name the Indigenous nations never used for themselves before

contact. It is also not the name of the tribes, the Dakota, to whom this story is affiliated in the history books written by Indigenous intellectuals. Sioux is an alliance of tribes with three major divisions in the United States: the Dakota to the east, the Yankton-Yanktonai in the middle, and the Lakota to the west (Gibbon 2). Each is subdivided into additional recognized tribes and additional minor political units. Therefore, this use may also be an act of reverence for a culture to which the poet’s tribe, Spokane-Coeur d’Alene, does not belong. Guy Gibbon, in his eight chapters of *The Sioux*, for instance, speculates on the significance of his book’s units and topics with the objective of dispelling the illusion that anyone can comprehend the Sioux or any other people (Gibbon 1). Sioux is a generic term used to refer to numerous American Indian nations with diverse languages and cultures. So, within the complexity of affiliation to the Sioux as one nation, Alexie makes a carefully “unspecific” use of this colonial label to shift his retelling of the historical narrative from general to specific. By employing this modification, Alexie adds a personal and concrete element to this work, which can elicit stronger emotions and create a more vivid image in the mind of the reader. When retelling the history of an individual tribe of American Indians or even other nations, this strategy is used to progressively build the poem’s credibility and emotional impact.

[3] Getting Along

As the poem progresses into its second and final prose-poetry part, Alexie calls the reader’s attention to a compelling transition in the retelling narrative of his poetic depiction of the 38 executed Sioux. He does so because the violence of the cause and the cruelty of the execution provides him with a limited chance to incorporate a survival-related cultural feature. As Alexie’s portrayal of history deviates from the usual notion of objective fact, he uses the opportunity to introduce fresh components to the historical story. These are his cultural signs to interpret the identity of the executed. The concluding part of the poem is a discussion of American Indian death songs and the fate of a condemned person who receives a last-minute reprieve.

But before they died, thirty-eight Indians sang their death songs. Can you imagine the cacophony of thirty-eight different death songs? But wait, one Indian was pardoned at the last minute, so only thirty-seven Indians had to sing their death songs. But, O, O, O, O, can you imagine the cacophony of that one survivor’s mourning song? If he taught you the words, do you think you would sing along? (Alexie, *War Dances* 89–90)

As Alexie expands the imaginative scope of the narration, the Sioux who are to be executed begin singing their death songs. Among Indigenous nations, singing a death song is a common cultural tradition that uses “the power of the sacred to overcome the horrors of the world” (Brill, Susan B. 10). It is one means of surviving. This is so because death is regarded as a natural aspect of life in many Indigenous cultures (Hampton et al. 10). In *Black Elk Speaks*, Black Elk explains that any time he and the other Oglala Sioux with him confront death, he sings his death song “because if it was the end of our lives and we

could do nothing, we wanted to die brave" (Neihardt 219). However, Alexie's use of death songs serves multiple purposes, contributing to the manifestation of the sad and complex character of the alienated story of the 37 dead Sioux and the survival of the one who is pardoned. The space given to the imagination of the death songs within Alexie's poetics thus includes a significant degree of identity negotiation.

Singing death songs has been documented and identified as a common traditional act of American Indians by several scholars, as well as being written about in popular texts exploring Indigenous ceremonies and spirituality. However, such acts are commonly simulated and referred to in various publications, so the acts are known and popular. In James Adair's book *History of the American Indians*, first published in 1775 and subsequently edited and republished by different publishing houses, sometimes under the title *Adair's History of the American Indians*, James Adair discusses several types of songs played during times of conflict, victory, death, and mourning. The book is mostly considered reliable in its cultural examination of southern American Indians. Death songs articulated in the book are frequently referred to as Halelu-Yah Yo He Wah, signifying their lyrics, while their vocalization is identified as whoop (Adair). Adair's study of American Indian cultures, as well as other studies with similar perspectives, continues to be seen as an established, accurate account. Accordingly, images of American Indians are contextualized within mysterious archetypes that do not admit the possibility of the evolution of any rituals due to modernization, hybridization, and cultural continuity.

"Another Proclamation," like the majority of Alexie's work, engages in cultural representation and generates an identity interpretation argument:

The dialogism of contemporary American Indian poetry reflects both internal and external border experiences. Emotional, political, economic, and cultural barriers are imposed on Native peoples from without and may then be internalized by individuals and communities. The appropriate response, the poetry often implies, is first to recognize these barriers and their effects for what they are. This recognition may lead to a redefinition and reinforcing of some barriers, as a protective way of reclaiming and reasserting the power of cultural, communal self-definition. Borders, then, may be understood as functional, even desirable, or as impediments to be opened, crossed, blurred, or eroded. (Fast 415)

As much as Alexie believes in capitalizing on prevalent cultural representations, he is also enthusiastic about crossing borders. Consequently, he does both in his negotiation of cultural identity. Alexie's cultural claim regarding the American Indians he represents is an elucidation of their tribal individuality, a concept articulated by embracing the death song's enigmatic archetypes. This argument's exposition is distinguished by his use of the plural "songs." The convicts identify as Sioux, a designation that encompasses a number of distinct cultures. If everyone sings a death song, multiple vocals will be heard. Eventually, the term "cacophony" is used to describe the disorderly sound created by the simultaneous reciting of death songs by thirty-eight (and then thirty-seven) Sioux Indians. The term "cacophony" underscores the dissonant and overwhelming nature of

singing in this context. It implies that while each death song is significant and dramatic on its own, their simultaneous performance would result in a chaotic and emotionally charged listening experience. It is a situation comparable to Adair's misconceptions of Indigenous traditions and lack of awareness in referring to such practices as whooping.

To lay even more stress on cultural identification and the concept of survival, the song of the saved man is highlighted. It is Alexie's second use of his poetics that transforms the story of a seemingly general identification to a nuanced specificity; the many death songs to that one death song. The single Sioux individual who is spared from death at the last minute becomes a criminal, an objective observer, and a survivor all within a very short period of time. As Alexie uses the phrase "But Wait" to suggest a moment of expectation before providing a startling twist of a transforming experience, the concept of the survivor becomes essential. The one who is saved must also sing; the song is one of mourning but not of death. However, it is too much of a cacophony. This is so because the singing depicts the survivor's emotional agony and the weight of being the last remaining individual after the others have perished. In this context, cacophony is a symphony of emotions – grief, relief, remorse, and survival – all intertwined into a powerful and emotional song of sorrow. This one saved man is on his way to being traumatized as a result of what is known as "survivor syndrome." The one pardoned Sioux Indian is a survivor, but he will always be alienated and depressed.

The cacophony of the survival song represents the syndrome of survival guilt. Various studies have diagnosed the reason behind similar cases, using distinct analytic approaches. It is a "cultural trauma" because "external pressures may challenge a culture to change and grow. However, sudden and catastrophic pressures may overwhelm the cultural system's ability to cope and thus can be traumatic" (Wiechelt et al. 167). The perspective that "cultural influences define grief, as well as the grief trajectory for each individual" deems it to be "complicated grief" as well (Spiwak et al. 204). Other sources refer to it as a "soul wound" (Duran et al. 341). In every diagnosis, it is acknowledged that each culture has its own grieving and healing practices. In this sense, Alexie uses the singing scene to express a form of cultural mourning politics, as the singing is therapeutic for the Sioux. And because Alexie does not believe in the efficacy of solo-traditional healing ideologies, he offers his own post-colonial paradigm. He extends an invitation to people from all cultural backgrounds and affiliations to participate in the practice of singing, while recognizing the inherent difficulties associated with pursuing this goal. The challenges primarily arise due to the cultural nature of singing a death song and the potential for the resulting song to exhibit a chaotic and melancholic emotional quality.

The final verse of "Another Proclamation" includes another use of rhetorical question poetics aimed at the audience, asking whether they are willing to envision or join in harmony with the survivor's cacophonous song. The repeated vocalization of the vowel sound "O," in addition to its usual function in poetry to address a plea to someone or something as an apostrophe, conveys a crying tone to the listener or reader. The poet employs this technique skillfully to create a distinct musical tone that produces a sense of emotional intensity and creates a direct connection between his listeners and the

issue being addressed. It also adds a personal touch to the phrases while presenting a melancholy tone that draws the reader in. The lack of an ethnic specificity inside the pronoun “you” means that all people are encouraged to sympathize with the pain and melancholy experienced by the survivors. The music in question departs from the culturally traditional persuasive harmonic framework used to evoke favorable emotional responses from the tribe. Instead, it is a chaotic combination that resonates with only a small number of people, signified in a lack of willingness or aptitude to participate in group singing.

In order to preserve the historical accuracy of the argument presented here, it is imperative to clarify that Abraham Lincoln granted pardons to 265 out of 303 American Indian individuals convicted of criminal offenses. Alexie views this act of generosity as hypocritical due to the mainstream narrative's excessive focus on it, which hinders people's ability to acknowledge the complex character of cultures. In particular, Alexie highlights the complexity of Lincoln, who is often portrayed sympathetically despite his involvement in perpetrating significant harm to American Indians. Hence, “Another Proclamation” challenges the prevailing perception of Lincoln as a prominent figure who, although affiliated with the system of colonization, is regarded as a savior (“Sherman Alexie on Living Outside Borders”). The poem selectively focuses on a single saved man in order to draw attention to those who lost their lives.

[4] Conclusion: The Emergence of American Indian History

Contemporary American Indian poetry is an utterance of a “statement of personal truth that substitutes an act of self-naming for an act of other-labelling” (Wiget 604). From a comparable perspective, Alexie's poetic approach to retelling history can be understood as a means of reinforcing the cultural identity of American Indians and pointing out their survival within a modern context of negotiation, distinct from externally imposed narratives. “Another Proclamation” is not the only poem in which Alexie retells historical narratives of American Indians; it is one of his recurrent patterns for which he specifies his genuine poetics. Poems such as “Custer Speaks,” “Crazy Horse Speaks,” and “Texas Chainsaw Massacre,” all from *Old Shirts and New Skins*, display a similar interest. Alexie blends his technical interest in writing literature with the cultural aesthetic that inspires him to be a multi-genre author. By placing these literary works within the context of American Indian literature, Alexie becomes closely associated with the parallel tradition of storytelling practiced by his ancestors, while also recognizing his own unique significance as a contemporary writer.

To summarize, the analysis presented here claims that 1) while describing a historical event in a book of history, the process involves providing a narrative of the event, with a focus on its chronological evolution and the establishment of factual understanding surrounding it. The main aim of such works is to provide a thorough explanation

of the nature and outcomes of events, with the purpose of uncovering the most precise and genuine accounts. However, the historical accounts of American Indians in the United States are predominantly presented via a colonial lens, frequently defined as master narratives, which means that the accounts are seen from a hegemonic perspective. In contrast, 2) the endeavor of Alexie's retelling of American Indian history in a poetic representation serves as a means to construct the speaker's sense of self, comprehend the surrounding environment, and safeguard cultural heritage and historical knowledge. The narrative in this process integrates a post-colonial critique and interpretations of historical events from a marginalized perspective. 3) Alexie's poetry aims to emphasize the themes of survival and reconciliation, hence prompting skepticism over the historical truth and reliability of history books. The act of retelling historical events holds the potential to contribute towards a more promising future. Alexie utilizes poetics to intentionally manipulate the dominant narrative of historical events, with the aim of imposing a cultural viewpoint from the perspective of surviving American Indians. As a contemporary writer of survival stories, Alexie feels comfortable liberating one of the convicts from the fate of being publicly executed and giving him up to another fate, that of a lifelong singer of death songs.

[Notes]

- 1 Allen's examples of aspects of modern life that can support the theme of the transformation (metamorphosis) of American Indians are "airports, traveling, powwows, burger stands, recreation vehicles and advertisement layouts" (149).
- 2 In Vizenor's *Fugitive Poses*, the word "indian" is written in lowercase to minimize its relevant description of Indigenous identities.
- 3 In Jack Derrida's philosophical contributions, the logocentric argument refers metaphorically to the Western metaphysics that places importance on language to convey the meaning of abstract ideas in terms of metaphysical philosophical understanding. (Wolfreys et al. 52).

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