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Decolonial Representations of Urban Space in Tommy Orange's Wandering Stars (2024) and Janet Campbell Hale's The Jailing of Cecelia Capture (1985)

التمثيلات ما بعد الاستعمارية للفضاء الحضري

في رواية "نجوم هائمة" لتومي أورانج (2024) و"سجن سيسيليا كابتشر" لجانيت كامبل هيل (1985)

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الملخص:

يقدم هذا المقال تحليلًا مقارنًا لرواية *نجوم هائمة* لتومي أورانج ورواية *سجن سيسيليا كابتشر* لجانيت كامبل هيل، حيث يدرس تطور التمثيل الأدبي لإزالة الاستعمار عن الفضاءات الحضرية من القرن العشرين إلى القرن الحادي والعشرين. ومن خلال قراءة تستند إلى نظريات السكان الأصليين، مثل مفهوم "نقطة التجمع للسكان الأصليين" و"الشتات المزدوج"، يجادل المقال بأن الرواية الحضرية المبكرة لهيل تصوّر رحلة سيسيليا الشخصية في التنقل بين الشتات الأيديولوجي والمكاني، سواء في محمية السكان الأصليين أو في المدينة، مما يؤدي في النهاية إلى الدعوة إلى إنشاء نقطة تجمع حضرية للسكان الأصليين. في المقابل، يقدم أورانج في عمله الأدبي الأحدث تمثيلًا أكثر دقة لإزالة الاستعمار عن المدينة، بوصفها فضاءً للتواصل العائلي والقبلي، والتعافي من الصدمات التاريخية، وإحياء الثقافة الأصلية، مما يجسد مفهوم نقطة التجمع الحضرية المتكاملة للسكان الأصليين في الولايات المتحدة.

الكلمات المفتاحيّة:

إزالة الاستعمار، الشتات المزدوج، أدب الأمريكيين الأصليين، نقطة تجمع للسكان الأصليين، الفضاء الحضري.

Abstract:

This article presents a comparative analysis of Tommy Orange's Wandering Stars and Janet Campbell Hale's The Jailing of Cecelia Capture. It examines the evolution of the literary representation of the decolonization of urban spaces from the twentieth century to the twentieth-first century. Reading through the indigenous theoretical lenses of the "Native hub" and "dual diaspora",the central argument posits that Hale's early urban novel portrays Cecelia's personal journey navigating ideological and spatial diaspora in both the reservation and the city, ultimately calling for the creation of an urban Native hub. Orange's most recent literary work ; however, presents a more nuanced decolonial representation of the city as a space for familial and intertribal connection , historical trauma recovery and indigenous cultural revival, thus embodying a fully-fledged Native hub for Native Americans in the U.S.A.

Keywords:

Decolonization, dual diaspora, Native American fiction, Native hub, urban space.

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1. INTRODUCTION: CONTEXT AND THEORITICAL FOUNDATION

The 1950s relocation program marked the first time Native people became a visible presence in major urban centers across the United States(Ibarrola-Armendariz 2020, p. 36). The 1960s report of the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Indian Education (1969, p. 169) points up to the predominant image of the urban Native during those early years of the relocation : ". . . the research available on the urban Indian pictures him as alienated, insecure, lonesome, poorly housed, disorganized, highly mobile, frequently arrested, and victimized by alcohol." Even into the 1970s and 1980s, academic discussions[1] still foregrounded the difficulties that Native people were facing in urban areas, especially because the relocation program of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) had fallen short of its promises, leaving many Native people to navigate the difficulties of city life without adequate support.

Contemporary scholarship[2].; however, has shown that many Native individuals managed to adjust and reshape their lives within urban settings. While cities were frequently portrayed as inhospitable environments in early Native American literature, demographers, anthropologists, and writers during the late twentieth century have offered research and stories that challenge such an antagonistic view of the city. Janet Campbell Hale is among the avant-garde urban writers whose fiction examines the relationship between Native identity and urban space, beginning with her debut novel, *The Owl's Song* (1974). In this novel , Hale follows the "homing plot," a narrative structure prevalent in Native American Renaissance fiction, most notably N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn* (1969). Hale's protagonist Billy White Hawk, a fourteen-year-old boy , experiences cultural displacement after moving from his reservation in Northern Idaho to Los Angeles. He eventually returns to the reservation, thus reinforcing the trope of returning to reservation for cultural reintegration and healing.

Hale complicates this narrative in her later semi-autobiographical novel, *The Jailing of Cecelia Capture*, (1985) where she diverges from the conventional homing plot and enters the decolonial realm, by interrogating the urban space as a potential home for Native Americans. I argue that , unlike the clear-cut return of Billy to reservation, Cecelia exhibits dual diaspora towards both the reservation and the city reflects the complexities of Indigenous urban life in the 1970s and 1980s, when Native urban experiences were still in their nascent stages and influenced by their reservation experience as a homeland marker. This dual diaspora is described by Neal McLeod as spatial , meaning to be alienated and stripped of a sense of home and attachment to

one's ancestral homeland and ideological diaspora involves the alienation from one's Native stories and cultural roots (Mcleod, 1998, p. 52). An extension to the ideological dimension of indigenous diaspora, that I find particularly applicable to Campbell's novel, is the absence of communal , intertribal support networks in reservation and particularly in the urban , that might exacerbate feelings of estrangement for diasporic Indigenous communities. Moreover, Cecelia's anxiety towards spatial belonging stems from her relationship with her childhood reservation which was strained due to familial dysfunction, poverty, and the confining condition of reservation that does not encourage economic prosperity and personal liberty. Cecelia's life in San Francisco city is contrasted and built on her childhood in reservation , the latter becomes an equivocal reference point for home.

In the critical examination of Hale's *The Jailing of Cecelia Capture*, scholars have offered varied interpretations regarding the portrayal of Native American urbanization . Noticeably , Frederick Hale and Laura M. Furlan engage in polarizing analyses of the novel. Frederick's paper "The Perils of Native American Urbanization and Alcoholism in Janet Campbell Hale's *The Jailing of Cecelia Capture*" paints a picture of the novel as a critique of urbanization and its often-devastating effects, especially alcoholism on Native American individuals. Frederick reads Cecelia's life in the city as another form of captivity to social and historical circumstances. Laura M. Furlan's critique ; however, frames the novel as rejecting reservation nostalgia and offering urban spaces as potential sites of feminist and Indigenous empowerment. In comparison, my research shares some common ground with Furlan's but diverges in key ways. I argue that it is interesting to read Hale's novel in the light of the concept of dual diaspora ; rather than captivity trope , Cecelia experiences spatially and ideological diaspora in not only the city but also her land base reservation. However, I emphasize that Hale proposes and urges through the end of the novel, of the potential to reclaim urban space as a Native hub where Cecelia starts envisioning a future for her, her childern , and for her career as a tribal lawyer. Another key contribution is that my analysis of this early urban novel's decolonial representation of urban space necessitates comparing it to the most contemporary urban Native American novel to date , Tommy Orange's *Wandering Stars*. Published in Feburay 2024, This prequal and sequal to There There offers a fresh view of the urban space as decolonized reclaimed space for Natives. By comparing Hale's novel to Orange's , it become evident that what is lacking in Hale's early urban novel , or what she implies lacking

in urban space back in the 70s and 80s is the collective support , sort of intertribal entourage that *Wandering Stars* clearly embraces , as we will demonstrate.

The thematic and setting progression from *The Jailing of Cecelia Capture* to *Wandering Stars* conveys shifting literary responses to Indigenous experiences in urban spaces, wherein contemporary Native writers such as Orange examine the city not just as a site of displacement but as a a native hub . The city as Laverne Roberts, who is one of the founders of the American Indian Alliance (AlA), a non-profit Native urban organization located in California city, maintains acts as "a collecting center,a hub of Indian peoples' new ideas, information, culture,community, and imagination"(Ramirez , 2007, p. 14) . These hubs are crucial for urban Natives who may not have access to their ancestral homelands. According to Reyna Ramirez, such hubs can take tangible forms, manifesting in intertribal events like powwows or sweat lodge ceremonies, and in social gatherings, such as meetings or family activities (p.3). However, urban Native hubs often transcend physical spaces. Since many Native Americans in urban areas, live away from their own tribal land bases, these hubs are sometimes temporary, centering around various gathering sites. In essence, hubs allow Native Americans to maintain their cultural and social ties to both tribal homelands and urban environments through shared participation in cultural circles and networks. Natives create these hubs through behaviors and symbols—whether through physical gatherings or virtual engagements like emailing, storytelling, music, or reading tribal newspapers online (p.4). As a result, these hubs, even when not rooted in physical spaces, help sustain Native identity and foster a sense of belonging, enhancing their political and social power. Ramirez also stresses the often overshadowed role of Native women play in sustaining a tight-knit urban community (p .4) . They act as cultural bearers, organizers, and nurturers, ensuring the continuity of Indigenous traditions, social networks, and political engagement within cities.

Orange constructs the urban space as a Native hub to decolonize the representation of urban Indians as exiles without culture, stuck in a liminal space between the traditional and the modem, problematically separated from an authentic ideal of Indian culture and identity , thus offering a contrast to the still-uncertain urban identity seen in Hale's work. I employ Indigenous diaspora theory, particularly Neal McLeod's concept of dual displacement and Renya K. Ramirez's reformulation of Roberts' notion of Native hub, to map out the thematic and structural differences in how Hale and Orange address the decolonial representations of urban space as a native hub in their respective works.

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2. Dual Diaspora in the City and the Reservation in *The Jailing of Cecelia Capture*:

At thirty years old, Cecelia Capture finds herself temporarily imprisoned in the Berkeley City Jail for driving under the influence and welfare fraud felony. During this period of incarceration, she reflects on her childhood experiences on the Coeur d'Alene Reservation in Idaho and a temporary stay in Tacoma city in Washington, as well as time spent on the Wapato Reservation. Her memories extend to her adult life in various urban settings, including San Francisco's Bay Area, Spokane, and Berkeley. Cecelia's recollections purport to put forth a dual diasporic tension between her experiences in her tribe land-base reservation in Idaho and the urban space.

2.1 Cecelia Capture's Ambivalence and Belonging in The Reservation

On Idaho reservation, and from a very early age, Cecelia is already grappling with ideological and spatial diaspora where her connection to her tribal land and identity is marked by ambivalence. Cecelia grew up in a household fraught with familial abuse and dysfunction. Her father Will Capture, who is a victim of government-run Indian boarding school, struggles with heavy alcoholism, while her mother , Mary Teresa Harrigan, also grapples with her mixed-blood identity—being both Native and Irish—which complicates her relationship with her Native heritage. Cecelia describes her mother as " a light-skinned, green-eyed half-breed who didn't show her Indian blood at all" (Hale, 1985,p. 61). Mary Teresa's disdain for her Native roots reflects internalized racism . As highlighted by scholars Jill Doerfler (2015, p. 75) and Joane Nagel (1996, p. 41), individuals with mixed Indigenous backgrounds often experience tensions between their two cultural identities, leading to feelings of inadequacy or rejection from both sides. Cecelia's mother's Irish background serves as a source of both familial pride and oppressive psychological influence. She clings to her Irish heritage through stories of her ancestors' struggles against British colonial oppression and of her Irish grandmother's nostalgia to County Clare, her hometown . Her constant retelling of these stories to the extent of regarding them of hers illustrates an emotional investment in her Irish identity, one that Cecelia views as misplaced given her own experience as an Indigenous woman. Her mother's nostalgia for Ireland reinforces a white identity that excludes Cecelia, particularly because Cecelia's darker complexion marks her as visibly Native, further distancing her from her mother.

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This internal conflict manifests in Mary Teresa's tyrannic behavior as she channels her frustrations into intimidation and humiliation towards her safest and weakest target, her very own little daughter. When both are alone , Cecelia's mother takes the chance to deliver a tirade laden of resentment, racism and belittlement of Cecelia and her Native roots: "Damned dumb Indians. You all think you're something" (p 83). Her derisive comments about the reservations as "worthless acres of sand and rock, Indian land that nobody wanted"(p. 83) evoke the colonial project of banishing Native tribes from their rich lands into reservations that were often established in areas that the U.S. government deemed undesirable for settlement or agricultural development (Brown, 1971, p. 73). On top of this , she actively discourages any meaningful connection with Native American traditions, as evidenced when she lambastes Cecelia for her choice to wear her raven-black hair long. Her mother sneers at Cecelia's appearance , and likens her to figures such as "Geronimo" or a "damned reservation kid,"(Hale, 1985, p. 55), thus trying to instill a sense of inferiority in Cecelia's indigenous identity. This emotional abuse traps Cecelia in a cycle of frustration, as she wishes her mother would identify more with her Indigenous roots. Cecelia's mother's attachment to her Irish background serves as a psychological prison for Cecelia, confining her in a familial narrative that overlooks and undermines her Indigenous identity.

This tension is compounded by her father, Will Capture, who seemingly displays a more nuanced relationship with their cultural background provided his full-blooded descent. Although he speaks their Native language and was only introduced to English at the age of twelve in mission school, Cecelia perceives a subtle sense of shame in his demeanor toward being Native American. Will's conflicted feelings manifest in his decision to send Cecelia to a white public school, twenty miles away, rather than the local Roman Catholic mission school attended by most Native children. At this predominantly white institution, Cecelia becomes the only non-Caucasian child, further isolating her from her cultural roots. Will's choice is motivated by his own unrealized ambitions—he once aspired to become a lawyer to defend tribal rights but was unable to complete his studies at the University of Notre Dame. Through Cecelia, he hopes to achieve what he could not, urging her toward intellectual and professional success, though this pressure ultimately contributes to her sense of cultural alienation.

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Her confinement in Berkeley jail during the present timeline of the narrative triggers a dreamlike vision of her reservation in Idaho, but instead of nostalgia, the dream portrays a cold, desolate landscape that draws images of snow, frozen hills, and howling coyotes (p.9). This scene parallels the emotional freezing Cecelia experiences—her "blood turned to ice"—which mirrors her sense of being alienated from her childhood reservation and home. This shows the extent to which Cecelia's formative experiences on the reservation are marked by estrangement rather than a romanticized connection to her homeland. Even so , ambivalent feelings towards the reservation strike young Cecelia when she hears her mother threaten to leave her drunkard husband and take Cecelia , due to their substandard living conditions on the reservation, such as the lack of basic modern conveniences like running water. Cecelia feels a palpable unease about leaving the only place she knows as "home", yet she is also intrigued by the prospect of escape. As she reflects, ". . . the idea of leaving was an enticing one, too" (p. 63).

The notion of departure presents both a source of anxiety and a tantalizing opportunity for change. Her expectations fall short; however, after her family's move in early 1960s to Tacoma city proved to only amplify this feeling of displacement. Cecelia's life in a bleak, ramshackle city apartment with her parents only intensifies her alienation. Tacoma, described as decaying and skunk-smelling , becomes an epitome of " urban sprawl"(p. 89), and yet another prison for Cecelia. Cecelia's school in Tacoma is unlike that of Idaho reservation. This urban school is depicted as an institution more focused on keeping students off the streets rather than providing an enriching educational experience. It functions as a "holding tank" (p. 89) for tough, inner-city White students and Black students engaged in their own social dynamics. Isolated from any sense of intertribal community or support networks, she experiences cultural dislocation which propels her to retreat inward. Her mother, unable to bear her alcoholic husband, decides to leave with Cecelia and move to her oldest daughter's home on the Wapato reservation, where Cecelia once again feels a semblance of familiarity within the Native community. Cecelia quickly fits in with the other Natives and soon makes friends. She, along with Sarah, Tillie, Ramona, and LaVonne (p. 104), forms a close-knit group that stays together , successfully creating an intertribal support group and mitigating her alienation throughout the few years in Wapato reservation.

2.2 Is the city a viable Native Hub for Cecelia Capture?

Hale allows the reader to probe into Cecelia's progressive reveries to chart her coming-of-age journey from the reservation to the city. In the midst of her father's alcoholism and her mother's rejection of Native identity, Cecelia's imagination allows her to escape into a vibrant world filled with possibilities. Initially, she fantasizes about being the daughter of Carmen Miranda, a glamorous dancer and signer that embodies joy and maternal warmth—qualities conspicuously absent in her daily existence and in her parents. As she matures, her imaginative flights evolve from whimsical aspirations to practical visions of riding a bus to a big metropolis , culminating in a yearning for autonomy. This shift illustrates a maturation in Cecelia's understanding of her spatial belonging; her ultimate desire to board a Greyhound bus to San Francisco city signifies a crucial turning point. It embodies her quest not only for physical liberation but also for the prospect of finding home in the city away from the the desolate , confining environment of the reservation.

At the age of sixteen and after she could no longer put up with her nagging mother and she could not perceive a prosperous future in Wapato , she takes that long awaited bus to San Francisco. She immediately finds a job as a waitress at a Mexican restaurant and rents a room in an old Victorian mansion (p. 131). As she reflects on her parents back on the Wapato Reservation, she feels pity for them but is relieved to have left. Cecelia is glad she is not in Wapato anymore. Her initial excitement about San Francisco's promise of freedom captured in her experience of the seemingly peaceful hippie subculture soon reveals the underside of urban life of that city, filled with dope dealing, disillusionment, and poverty. Not long after Cecelia moves to the city, she encounters Brian Donahue, an Irish-American soldier who goes by the nickname Bud. Their brief relationship results in her pregnancy just before Bud departs for Vietnam, where he is killed . Cecelia is left to raise their son Corey in poverty and relies on the welfare program to survive with only 147 dollars until she can enroll her child in a state-subsidized day-care center (p. 120) . This allows her to attend City College of San Francisco but with minimum budget to afford study supplies. Cecelia attempts to seek assistance by writing a letter to the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA)—practically the only federal Native organization then — regarding education grants but receives no response. This illustrates the systemic neglect and lack of engagement from organizations that are supposed to support and connect urban Native individuals together. Nonetheless, she excels in her studies and eventually is accepted at the University of California at Berkeley and awarded a scholarship to study law, fulfilling her father's dream.

In Berkeley city, Cecelia secures a shabby one-room apartment, but faces discomfort due to its tattered condition. Notwithstanding the cold and the presence of cockroaches, she finds a sense of autonomy in her living space, describing it as "cold and shabby as it was, it was hers and no one else's."(p. 14). This ownership transforms her apartment into a personal sanctuary. It contrasts with her memories of the reservation which, while invoking a sense of home, also evoke feelings of entrapment and lack of privacy . In her reservation house she did not enjoy a semblance of privacy ; "She longed for her own room, longed for privacy, but she had to share a bed with her mother"(p. 91-92). Cecelia recognizes the "character" (p.14) of her apartment even though "She had certainly made no effort to "make a home" of this place (p. 14). Having a place of her own reflects her new-found personal agency in reclaiming urban space as her home , realizing eventually one of her childhood fantasies.

Despite achieving financial stability, education, and securing a living space, Cecelia finds that these factors alone do not lead her to the pinnacle of urban belonging; she continues to yearn for the company of other urban Natives. In her search for Native hub in San Francisco, she visits the American Indian Center on Sixteenth Street and an Indian bar in South Van Ness. There , she is met with disappointment in its unwelcoming environment which fails to reflect a intertribal networks of solidarity and empowerment that Reyna Ramirez conceptualizes as a Native hub. Ramirez argues that "for many urban Native people, the hubs and organizations they belong to bolster senses of tribal identity, culture, and intertribal community" (p. 114). However, the Native individuals Cecelia encounters at the center appear disillusioned and trapped in cycles of addiction and despair , lacking activist consciousness. She encounters a community of "Big-city Indians" (p. 111) who, while they share a Native identities, seem trapped in cycles of addiction and despair. Their conversations about tribal identities—Arapahoe, Cheyenne, Navajo, Cherokee, Sioux—underscore a yearning for connection and belonging, yet the context reveals a sense of displacement, as they exist "no longer Indian, yet not white either."(p. 112). She feels cast adrift, without people of her own, except for her child Corey.

Cecelia attempts to ditch her loneliness by engaging in casual encounters with several white men and one Native man before marrying Nathan, a white man from a distinguished family background. Together, they have a daughter named Nicole. However, this marriage quickly devolves into a fiasco, marked by the racist and misogynist undertones of Nathan's interactions with her. To numb her feelings of failure and captivity, Cecelia turns to alcohol, leading to addiction and a series of

destructive choices, including adulterous affairs , missing college classes and finally landing in jail due to driving under the influence and an old welfare fraud. After being bailed out of prison by Nathan, who subsequently requests a divorce, Cecelia finds herself in a state of despair and contemplates ending her life.

She visits the cemetery where Bud, the father of her son, is buried and reflects on her longing for her tribal home in the Idaho reservation. She wishes to be laid to rest in Northern Idaho, in the small tribal cemetery alongside her father, her two deceased brothers, and other members of the Capture family. Yet she faces a harsh reality: the tribal cemetery will not permit the burial of someone who has taken her own life. Furthermore, she has made no arrangements for the disposal of her remains.

As she is holding the gun , she gazes out at the Bay Area stretching below her , and memories begin flooding her mind. She recalls visiting Alcatraz Island (which is located in the San Francisco Bay area) during the Indian occupation of Alcatraz in 1969[3] ; a time filled with hope and urban decolonization ambitions. She believes it was a period when Indigenous people felt effective, a time when even those marginalized by society like skid-row homeless people could visit Alcatraz and feel a sense of belonging to the larger Indigenous community. Hale only briefly mentions Cecelia's participation in the Alcatraz occupation towards the novel's critical conclusion which indicates the significance of such urban Indigenous upheavals that potentially forge the sense of urban Native hub. Perhaps if Cecelia had a community of urban Natives actively working toward decolonization and empowerment, she might not have fallen into the cycle of dual diaspora in the city that she has experienced on the reservation. These recollections about a time of Indigenous self-determination and quest for sovereignty give Cecelia a glimpse of hope to renew her life in the city. She retracts her decision to commit suicide, and begins contemplating her future and the responsibilities she must now face. She knows she has much to do, including finding a place for her and her children, Corey and Nicole, and completing her law degree. Despite the challenges, she is confident she can surely manage it all. At this moment , it starts to rain, then turns from drizzle to a downpour which symbolizes her emotional release and newfound freedom, as Cecelia feels relieved and unburdened by the end of her failed marriage. Empowered, she looks ahead with determination, no longer constrained by her past as she says good-bye to Bud's grave.

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Hale's stance on urban space is articulated through Cecelia's decision not to return to the reservation after experiencing a series of failures, in contrast to the protagonist of her earlier novel, The Owl's Song, who returns home due to an inability to adapt to the urban environment . This choice reflects a significant shift in Hale's exploration of urban space. In her memoir Bloodlines (1993), in the concluding essay "Dust to Dust", Hale meditates "I don't even know what it's like to have a place in my own tribal community, though being a part of an intertribal urban Indian community has been an important part of my life in the past" (Hale, 1993 , p. 222). This personal reflection reinforces the necessity of creating "intertribal urban Indian community" , i.e., urban Native hubs. Drawing the reader's attention to the famous Indigenous resurgence during the Alcatraz occupation highlights Hale's message of the importance of such hubs that may treat deficiencies in resources and community connections for urban Natives. The open ending of the novel implies that Cecelia takes a decolonial action here. She plans to move forward with building a future in San Francisco city where she would reunite with her children, finish her education, and earn a Doctor of Jurisprudence degree to become a tribal lawyer, qualified for urban Native Americans representation .

Cecelia's aspirations are not tied to a return to the reservation. Instead, Hale challenges the traditional dichotomy of reservation and city by allowing Cecelia to envision a future where her role as an urban Native can be one of empowerment. Her decision to continue her law degree signals her intent to use her education to fight for the rights of urban Native Americans, recognizing their unique struggles and diasporic vulnerabilities. As a tribal lawyer, Cecelia would be able to advocate for Indigenous sovereignty and justice, furthering the decolonial project within the city itself. This aspiration aligns with her father's teachings, who used to emphasize the importance of high-quality legal representation for Native Americans. He instilled in Cecelia the belief that it was the duty of any Native person who could become a lawyer to do so and dedicate their professional life to helping their people obtain justice: " the Indian people had a great, great need for high-quality legal representation." (Hale, 1985,p. 69). At some point in the narrative , she realizes that her drive to graduate from Berkeley university and become a lawyer could only be fully understood by her own Native people. Her non-Native former husband Nathan views graduating from college is a matter of course and not an exceptional achievement. Contrarily, a Native man Cecelia briefly encountered in the city , despite making an ill-timed joke about "educated squaws,"(p.186) at least understands the significance of her

accomplishment and what it means to her as a Native woman. In this way, the city holds the potential for cultural resurgence and Indigenous activism among Natives who recognize the value of higher education and activism. Hale resolves the plot with a hopeful dénouement to imply that urban Natives , especially women like Cecelia embody the possibility of urban Natives decolonizing the city into a Native hub where intertribal support and activism can thrive.

3. *The Wandering Stars* as a Narrative of Native Hub

Tommy Orange's *The Wandering Stars* (2024) offers a contemporary reimagining of decolonized urban space as a Native hub and healing space for the Cheyenne family of the Red Feathers, following their traumatic events of the Big Oakland Powwow , as depicted in Orange's prequel There There. There are several counterpoints that demonstrate how Orange's novel decolonizes urban space more effectively than Hale's. While Hale's novel portrays Cecelia's struggle with dual diaspora—both ideological and spatial—rooted in her disconnection from both the reservation and the city pinpoints the lack of essential elements of native hub in San Francisco city , Orange's narrative marks a departure from the reservation setting and spatial diaspora in the city. The characters do not struggle with the sense of placelessness that Cecelia does in Hale's novel. Instead, they turn to the urban space as a platform for cultural expression, recovery, and reconnection with their Native identities. Following the traumatic events of the Big Oakland Powwow in There There, *The Wandering Stars* shows how Oakland city (California state) becomes a space where Native characters pursue a connection with their cultural heritage and their family history through the letters left by their great-grandmother, Victoria Bear Shield . Rather than experiencing spatial diaspora, where characters feel alienated from their environment, the Red Feather family finds a form of healing through familial and intertribal support systems that reflect Reyna Ramirez's concept of a Native hub.

3.1 Familial Solidarity

Opal Viola Victoria Bear Shield ,together with her half sister Jacquie Red Feather, takes an active role to provide the emotional and psychological support that Jacquie's grandchildren, Orvil, Loother and Lony need, especially in the aftermath of the shooting which injured Orvil.Their steadfast presence and nurturing efforts indicate the critical function that women play in anchoring the urban Native hub, as articulated in Ramirez's work . For Opal, home ownership represents a critical step toward stability and rootedness after a life characterized by emotional displacement

for her sister's grandchildren who lost their mother in a very young age to suicide . Growing up without a permanent home, Opal only begins to consider the possibility of owning property after taking on the responsibility of caring for her grandsons. Her decision to "sink some roots" (p.138) by purchasing a home reflects a desire to create a sense of permanence not just for herself, but for the younger generation. The location of the house on Fruitvale Avenue, with its natural landscape holds a significance in terms of both urban and Indigenous identity. The neighborhood is adorned by fruit trees , primarily citrus, and nestled between the Sausal and Peralta Creeks, represents a physical connection to the land. Historically, this area was home the Ohlone tribe (Owens-Viani,1998,p.2); therefore, living in such a place stands for both an urban home and a subtle reclaiming of Indigenous presence in a space that was once a Native hub.

After the shooting, Lony is the only family member whose blood matches Orvil's, making him the vital donor when Orvil needs a transfusion at the hospital. This connection leaves Lony with a sense of wonder, leading him to believe he possesses "superblood." (Orange,2024, p.157). While he sits in the rosebushes, a rose thorn pierces his skin and he observes the blood slides his arm. Searching online, Lony finds a reference suggesting that the name "Cheyenne" means "the cut people,"(p.158) . Misinterpreting this as a cultural practice, Lony begins cutting himself. His self harm stems from a desperate need to find meaning in a place that has felt chaotic and threatening since the shooting. When his family discovers this, Opal reacts with compassion, crying as Lony shares his belief that cutting himself could reconnect him to his roots. Jacquie quickly intervenes and get Lony an emotional-support dog to guide him away from isolation and self-harm. This gesture aims to re-center Lony within a supportive, nurturing environment and helps him find a healthier path to reclaim his identity and cope with the trauma.

For Orvil, the most accessible coping mechanism for the aftereffects of trauma manifests in his dependence on prescribed opioids, such as morphine. It helps to him to numb down not only physical pain from the bullet injury but also the psychological distress that accompanies it.The trauma invades his sleep, with nightmares dredging up the the memories of the shooting incident , pressing him to double the dosage of morphine in order to dull the nightmares. Opal becomes aware of his dependence to morphine and fears for his well-being. Opal dedicates her time, labor, and financial resources to secure a better future for him. She purchases an acoustic guitar for him, which he initially dismisses, but over time, he gradually forms a connection with the

instrument. It begins as a simple exploration of sound, strumming the strings without fully understanding chords or notes. Over time, he comes to see the guitar as more than just an object, viewing it as a voice, a "mouth"(P.114) that he could use to express something deeper within himself. This newfound relationship with the instrument gradually replaces his time spent on video games and the internet, as he starts to see the guitar as a potential language—one that, if mastered, might offer him a form of salvation.

Opal ensures that Orvil has access to resources and frames therapy as a non-negotiable part of his recovery, yet carefully presenting it as something that will help if he needs it. This approach reflects her understanding of the importance of mental health care, especially for Native youth who, like Orvil, are coping with complex forms of trauma that are both personal and intergenerational as a result of his mother's drug addiction and suicide. She arranges for Orvil to meet with a Native therapist and signs loan disclosures for his tuition to continue high school. Opal's guidance is crucial, especially when she encourages him to "rise above what happened because bad things happening to you were opportunities"(Orange, 2024, p.142).Orange does not portray a happy ending so soon as Orvil's addiction to pain killers soon finds its way to stimulant drugs and hallucinogens. His friend , Sean hooks him up with a powerful highly addictive drug that plunges Orvil into a spiral of addiction, depression, and disengagement from school. His addiction culminates in an overdose that nearly takes his life.

3.2 Urban Intertribalism

In the "Rehab"chapter , Orange presents the Native hub as a dynamic and crucial space for Orvil's recovery, shaped by a combination of familial and intertribal solidarity, recovery programs , physical resilience, and a renewed engagement with his Native identity in Oakland city. Orvil checks into a lakeside rehab center in Copperopolis for sixty days. There, he forges intertribal connections with fellow individuals facing similar challenges, forming bonds that expose the realities of relapse and recovery. Among his peers, Virgil, a big Miwok man who opens up critical inquiries about the land they occupy: "who had been on it before and why weren't they on the land anymore, but even, like, if they were still on the land why didn't we know who they were or where they lived or how to properly respect the land's original people?" (p. 258). These questions prompt Orvil to confront the historical erasure of Indigenous peoples from Oakland, a city where the Ohlone and Miwok tribes once lived before their forced removal. This moment ignites a sense of dissonance within

Orvil as he wrestles with the fact that, despite identifying as Native, he has lived on this land without understanding its deeper Indigenous history. Instead of receiving a comprehensive understanding of Native histories, he recalls a childhood focused on superficial representations, such as constructing popsicle-stick models of mission buildings when he learned the history of California in school.

In this flash of awareness, Orvil confronts a deep-seated shame that arises from his unawareness of the Indigenous history tied to the land he has called home. Orvil's growing awareness leads him to recognize the importance of forging intertribal connections. In researching the tribes of California, including the Miwok and Ohlone peoples, he begins to comprehend that healing from addiction and trauma is intertwined with reclaiming these narratives. His desire to learn the names of the tribes becomes more than an academic exercise; it transforms into a form of cultural reclamation and solidarity with other Native peoples. The library scene is a critical turning point where Orvil immerses himself in the knowledge of the five hundred and seventy-six federally recognized tribes and at least four hundred unrecognized ones, unveiling a world of Indigenous nations previously invisible to him. This research is not merely an intellectual pursuit; it is an act of resistance against the colonial erasure of Native peoples and an affirmation of their continued presence and significance. Each tribe's name, spoken aloud, becomes a verbal affirmation of Orvil's journey toward reclaiming not just his own identity but the collective histories of Indigenous peoples in urban spaces. In this manner, Orange ties Orvil's recovery to the decolonial project of reconnecting with the land's Indigenous history and establishing an intertribal consciousness that extends beyond his own Cheyenne identity.Orange thereby dismantles the sense of isolation often associated with urban Native identities.

The Intertribal Friendship Center also plays a significant role as an intertribal hub that represents not only as a gathering place for Native people in Oakland but also as a space where familial and cultural histories are preserved, shared, and reclaimed. Ramirez highlights the presence of urban Indigenous social organizations designed to address the needs of Native populations in cities, drawing on examples from several organizations based in California.The fictional Friendship Center is modeled after the real Intertribal Friendship House, founded in Oakland in 1955, one of the first urban Native American centers in the United States (Intertribal Friendship center website). In *The Wandering Stars* , it functions as more than just a social services organization; it is a community archive where Native individuals and families, like Victoria Bear Shield's descendants, reconnect with their heritage and their ancestral stories. Orange

devotes the last chapter of the novel's first part to Victoria's second-person narrative in which she addresses her future self. She encourages herself to continue visiting the Friendship Center, referring to it as ". . .a place in Oakland where they have Indian events and where Indian people gather. Keep going back there"(Orange, 2024, p.102) . Victoria's directive to bring her father's journals and letters to the center reflects its importance as a repository of memory and intergenerational knowledge for the urban Native community.

For Opal and her family, the Friendship Center becomes a site of intertribal solidarity, where they rediscover personal connections to the past and the broader Native community. Opal's visit to the center, prompted by finding an old flier, leads to an encounter with Maxine, a woman who was present during the Alcatraz occupation. This moment reveals the center's role as a space where individuals from various tribes and backgrounds come together, sharing memories and experiences. Maxine's recollection of Opal's mother and her involvement in the occupation points to the critical role that Native women play in shaping and sustaining Indigenous spaces, particularly within urban environments. As Ramirez emphasizes, Native American women are central to maintaining urban Indian community life.

Moreover, the Friendship Center facilitates continuity between past and present generations. Opal, in reconnecting with Maxine and receiving the box of her family's history, is symbolically reclaiming a legacy of resistance and survival. The center represents a decolonized urban space where Native people are not only recipients of services but also active participants in shaping and preserving their own stories. This space allows them to engage with their histories on their own terms, promoting a sense of belonging and collective empowerment in a city environment. the Friendship Center stands as an emblem of the Native hub concept where urban Native people build community and cultural ties in the absence of a traditional land base.

3.3 Urban Reclamation of Native Identity

As Orvil works through his addiction recovery in the rehab center, music emerges as artistic form of personal expression and a conduit for reconnecting with his Cheyenne roots. Orvil articulates his longing for cultural belonging, stating, "I wanted to feel connected to being Native, and to being Cheyenne, but I didn't quite know how." (p.261). This yearning drives him to form a band and integrate Native musical elements into his band's experimental sound. His approach, which involves distorting and recontextualizing Native melodies speaks to his desire to honor ancestral legacies while navigating his unique urban experience. Moreover, Orvil's description of music

as an escape from the monotonous "loops" of daily life, including addiction, suggests that his creative output is a metaphor for his personal struggle with sobriety: "The goal for me and my bandmates was always the same, to try and make musical loops that wouldn't sound or feel like loops... Life tries the same as we try with music. . . Addiction is that way too." (p. 263). Here, music becomes both a reflection of and a resistance to the cyclical patterns of addiction, with Orvil using it to break free of the repetitive nature of his trauma.

Simultaneously, Orvil starts his running routine along the roads of Oakland for multiple purposes. Initially, it is a means of physical exercise that helps him cope with the oppressive weight of his addiction and the emotional turmoil that accompanies it. As he describes his routine, "I ran every day... I came to love running in the heat,"(p. it becomes clear that this practice is not just about fitness; it is a symbolic act of defiance against the cyclical nature of his past experiences. The roads of Oakland transform into a sacred space, enabling Orvil to confront his fears and emotional pain rather than running away from them. His evolving relationship with the urban environment deepens as he begins to see himself and the world around him differently."I tried to think of humans as not belonging to the earth but of the earth. And so too with its made things, all its buildings and cars and cities and satellites. Of the earth." (p.261). This quote echoes the understanding of belonging passed down through his great-grandmother, Victoria Bear Shield who shares a second-person narrative in the last chapter " Victory!" from the novel's part one. There is a line she reads from her father's letter to her mother, "we don't belong to the earth, but that we are the earth."(p.96). After his eye-opening interactions with the Miwok friend , he comes to appreciate his urban belonging even more due to his newly gained familiarity with its indigenous history.

The family's decision to visit Alcatraz Island for "The Indigenous Peoples Sunrise Ceremony" , also known as "Unthanksgiving Day" is another pronounced act of Native identity reclamation in the urban space . For Opal and Jacquie, the trip to Alcatraz is not just a physical journey but a return to a site of resistance. They recall the occupation of the island, which "was about much more than what the island represented to Indian people."It resonates with personal struggles, including their mother's battle with cancer and addiction. Orange contextualizes the occupation of Alcatraz as a decolonial response to the historical trauma inflicted on Indigenous peoples, particularly through the lens of parental imprisonment. He references the coercion faced by Native parents, such as the Hopi, who were sent to Alcatraz Island

in 1879 as punishment for resisting orders to send their children to boarding schools. Through Victoria Bear Shield's reflections, readers understand the significance of Alcatraz not just as a prison but as a site of collective Indigenous identity and empowerment. Victoria's assertion that "you will feel the most Indian and the most free on that island with that water tower sprayed in red paint with phrase Welcome Home of the Free Indian Land" (p. 91) underscores the potential of reclaiming spaces that have been historically marginalized. Her insight rings true with the case of Cecelia, who reminisces about her participation in the occupation; an experience that invigorates her resolve to push back against her dual diaspora in the city.

Victoria foretells the return of Natives , such as her two daughters, Opal and Jacquie along with her grandchildren to the Island to commemorate the temporary takeover and affirm their self-determination. In their banter about attending community events and sunrise ceremonies, Opal and Jacquie grapple with the duality of their feelings towards these gatherings. Opals suggestion to start attending more community events reflects a desire to foster a sense of belonging and heritage in their grandchildren, counteracting any past neglect of cultural connection. By intertwining the personal with the political, Orange demonstrates how familial support and community engagement enable the characters to reconstruct their identities in a contemporary urban context. The family all join the circle to take part in the Sunrise Ceremony "where people were taking turns praying and saying things on the mic, reading poems, and making proclamations, playing the flute and the hand drum and singing, most of it seemed to be singing."(p. 230). One of the speakers acknowledges the Ohlone people, the original inhabitants of the land, and calls for recognizing and honoring their contributions and presence. He also implores the audience to embrace a collective responsibility to remember those who have been forgotten, particularly Native individuals who are not federally recognized in California, asserting that they are no less "Indian" nor than anyone else and deserve to be included in the Native hub. the speaker humorously acknowledges the inclusion of people who are away from the area "tuning in to the live stream"(p. 231) alongside ancestors. Orange breaks through time and space in forging urban Native hub by illustrating how digital platforms enable wider participation in cultural events, creating a"virtual Native hub" (Ramirez, 2007, p.3) as Ramirez puts it. This moment shows how technology bridges intertribal connection and cultural continuity irrespective geographic location or temporal constraints. Similarly, Victoria foresees Alcatraz commemoration event will be celebrated not only in person but also through live streams, allowing participants to gather around both the fire and their computer screens.

Orvil mulls over the overwhelming power of being surrounded by so many Native people, a sensation reminiscent of the powwow, but now filled with positive energy, healing, and an affirmed sense of belonging. Overcome with emotion, Orvil starts to cry, pressing his fist into his eyes to clear the tears. Loother, pretending not to notice, busies himself with his phone but silently shares in the moment, feeling the same emotional weight. The visit to Alcatraz proves to be fruitful for Orvil, Lony, and Loother, for it allows them to participate in an intertribal event that contrasts sharply with the traumatic memories of the previous powwow marked by violence. Furthermore, the ceremony helps along the family's collective healing through reconnection with their urban community.

4. CONCLUSION

From the above discussion a clear progression in the decolonial representation of urban Native experiences and urban space emerges. The analysis draws a critical divergence between how urban space is portrayed ambivalently as a site of alienation and potential belonging in Hale's novel versus a space of cultural revival , healing and Native identity reclamation in Orange's . In Hale's text, the urban setting is set against the backdrop of reservation and both functions as a site of dual diaspora, where Cecelia is both alienated from her Indigenous roots and unable to fully integrate into urban life. This mirrors the general experience of Native peoples in the mid twentieth century, struggling against the systemic failures of relocation programs. Cecelia's attempts to reclaim identity and navigate a new reality of urban survival hinges on supportive communal or intertribal networks and her own resilience as a divorced Native woman, reflecting a lonely struggle for belonging in an urban environment.

From the other hand, Orange's *Wandering Stars* offers a more nuanced decolonial take on urban spaces as a Native hub. Through the Red Feather family's journey, Orange illustrates how urban settings can be reclaimed as Native hubs. The rehab resort and the Sunrise Ceremony of Alcatraz provide a platform for intertribal connections, storytelling, and survivance, embodying the decolonial project that Ramirez argues is essential for urban Natives. The narrative shift from individual isolation to collective identity and resilience marks a significant evolution in Indigenous literature, offering a , community-centered vision of recovery, belonging, and reclamation of urban spaces. Both novels highlight the importance of forming a Native hub to resisting alienation and reclaiming Native identities. While Cecelia's journey is individualized ,Orange's narrative frames trauma and recovery within a

communal context. Moreover, the advent of the internet and social media further enhances this communal aspect by creating virtual hubs where Native voices can unite across geographical boundaries. Through Orvil's healing journey , Orange asserts that trauma healing is not just personal but collective , with family solidarity being crucial in driving the narrative of healing and cultural reclamation.

5. ***CITATIONS*:**

1 A distinguished scholarly work that examines the challenges faced by Native Americans in urban areas during the late 1970s is Alan L. Sorkin's The Urban American Indian (1978).

2 Examples include Reyna Ramirezs's *Native Hubs: Culture, Community, and Belonging in Silicon Valley and Beyond* (2007) ; *Indigenous in the City Contemporary Identities and Cultural Innovation* by Evelyn Peters and Chris Andersen (2013) ; *Indian Cities: Histories of Indigenous Urbanization* by Kent Blansett et al (2022); Lindsey Clair Smith's *Urban Homelands : Writing the Native City from Oklahoma* (2023) ; and *Urban Indigeneities: Being Indigenous in the Twenty-First Century* by Dana Brablec and Andrew Canessa (2023).

3 The Alcatraz occupation, lasting from November 1969 to June 1971, was a pivotal protest by Native American activists. Spearheaded by the Indians of All Tribes, a group of activists took over the deserted Alcatraz Island in San Francisco Bay(Blansett,2018,p.168, 238). Their goal was to call for the return of the land and to highlight the U.S. government's failure to honor treaties and adequately support Native communities (Nagel, 1997,p.151)

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