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## 1. Introduction

“Power is everywhere,” Foucault (93) famously declared. Clearly, it can be found in young adult literature (YAL) too, which is not only a powerful industry, but also typically features adolescent characters who negotiate systems of power (Trites x). Teenage characters are also frequently portrayed as individuals who struggle to find their place in society and their identities. The protagonists in the selected novels try to come to terms with their fluid identities as well. As they move between different sociocultural contexts, they experience identity crises and raise questions of race and belonging. The present diploma thesis, thus, focuses on two novels in which the categories power, race, and identity are closely connected. They all shape, and are, in turn, shaped by one another. Adopting a postcolonial approach, I will explore the representation of power relations and identity formation processes in Sherman Alexie’s *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* as well as *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas. I will focus on race as a central aspect of the characters’ identity constructions as well as its intersections with class and gender, the non-white narrators’ marginalised positions in the dominant US-American society, which are rooted in the country’s colonial history, and the depiction of racism in the recent novels.

In a close contextual reading of the texts, I, thus, aim to answer the question how race, class, and identity are presented in the selected novels. Secondly, I will explore the narrators’ inner conflicts as well as the coping strategies they apply to resolve them. Thirdly, drawing on postcolonial studies and research on children’s and young adult fiction, I will investigate underlying ideologies and power politics at work in the texts and YA literature more generally.

First of all, I will ask what young adult fiction is and provide a survey of relevant literature on much-debated issues in the field. I aim to show what makes YAL a distinct body of texts and specific field of research. Then, I will sketch historical developments in YAL, from its mid-20<sup>th</sup> century beginnings until today. Moreover, diversity in YA publishing will be addressed, followed by an exploration of critical issues including ideology and power. YA literature’s ambivalent functions – to maintain or subvert prevalent ideologies – and the controversial role of adults will be of particular interest. In section 3, postcolonial studies will be introduced, focusing on developments, important thinkers, and key concepts in postcolonial literary theory. I will also explain why I chose postcolonial theory for the purpose of this thesis and elaborate risks and potential of applying it to a US-American context. Furthermore, I will discuss the link between postcolonialism and young adult literature, which is evident in power structures, but also in the contested metaphor of the child as colonised subject (e.g. Nodelman, “Other”).

Section 4, then, eventually applies theory to a specific text: *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* (henceforth *Diary*). A contextualisation of the novel will be followed by a close reading of race and identity in the text. Correspondingly, section 5 first establishes the context for *The Hate U Give* (*Hate*), the second YA novel to be analysed, and then zooms in on the text. Finally, I will compare and contrast the two books, summarise my main arguments, and provide concluding remarks.

Before I begin, I would like to comment on the highly controversial term race. Like several scholars quoted in this thesis (e.g. Botelho and Rudman; Bradford, “Race”; Fanon; McCann, Panlay; Trites), I understand it as a social category. I explicitly want to distance myself from the biological use of the term and its negative connotations. By no means do I wish to imply derogatory meanings, or even a hierarchy in the Social Darwinist sense, which was propagated in Nazi Germany and used as justification for imperialism. Because race is a politically charged and highly problematic concept, some scholars have called for the use of the term ‘ethnicity’ instead (e.g. Reichl, *Ethnic* 47-48). However, since it is used in postcolonial discourse (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *Concepts* 186), in several studies of YAL (e.g. Bradford; Panlay) as well as in the selected novels, I will also use race as an analytic category in my analysis. I agree that race is a fluid, changeable, political and historical construct (Innes 14; McCann xxvii; 110-111). Moreover, I would like to point out that it is not my intention to essentialise Native American and African American cultures by using these controversial, generic terms. I am aware that they entail generalisations and misrepresentations of diverse cultures and ethnical groups (Roemer 9; Graham and Ward 1). Nonetheless, I will apply the terms Native American and American Indian as well as black and African American, because they are used in the selected novels, in serious academic publications such as *The Cambridge Companion to Native American Literature* and *The Cambridge History of African American Literature*, and by a significant number of American citizens who identify as such, as the latest US census has shown (Humes, Jones, and Ramirez (3-4)). Like Bradford, I will also use the term indigenous to refer to the United States’ autochthonous population. Clearly, naming is a sensitive issue. Lastly, I would like to add that I do not wish to reproduce racist stereotypes by writing about them in this thesis. My interpretation of the texts inevitably reveals my own political stance, my opposition to racism and discrimination, and I think it should, because engaging with concepts such as colonialism, race, power, and adolescence is a political move, for they are all intrinsically political.

## 2. What is young adult literature? Definition and history

First and foremost, the question what exactly young adult literature is needs to be answered before a discussion of critical issues may follow. This section, thus, aims to establish a working definition of YA literature, to provide a brief overview of its historical development, and address underlying ideologies. To start with, the problem of definition, focussing on the unique and much-debated status of audience as probably **the** defining feature in children's and young adult literature (CYAL), will be examined.

### 2.1 The problem of definition

It is not an easy task to arrive at a clear definition of young adult literature, as there are many ways of categorising it. Certainly, there are various differences between young adult literature, children's literature, and mainstream adult literature, and yet they are not as straightforward as one might assume. Overlaps and ambiguities blur the lines. One of the problems is that the distinction between children's and young adult literature is not always made explicit. In children's literature studies, the latter is frequently treated as part, or sub-category, of children's literature (e.g. Bradford, *Unsettling*; Grenby and Immel; Grzegorzczuk; Hunt, "Same"; Johnson; Maybin and Watson; Nikolajeva, *Power*, Reynolds). Many scholars view YA as a "tag" invented by publishers (e.g. McGillis, "Beginnings" 338), or one of the many "specialisms" of children's literature academics focus on (Butler 2) and refuse to draw a sharp line between the fields. The umbrella term 'children's literature' is, thus, often applied to describe books for young readers, including young adults. Several academic publications which appear to be on children's literature (e.g. Khorana; Sainsbury) in fact also consider YAL. For example, in his discussion of trends in children's fiction, Hunt mentions titles such as *The Chocolate War*, *Junk*, and *Noughts and Crosses* ("Same", 80-83), all of which are usually categorised as young adult books, and avoids the term YAL entirely. Similarly, Grzegorzczuk's study titled *Discourses of Postcolonialism in Contemporary British Children's Literature* includes YA novels. She even says it surveys "writing for children and young adults" in her introductory chapter (1). And sometimes, conversely, publications which appear to deal with YAL, turn out not to. Kullman's *Einführung in die Kinder- und Jugendliteratur*, for instance, deliberately excludes teen literature (Kullmann 14). This, again, highlights the vagueness of the concept of YAL in literary criticism. Moreover, popular book lists like Time Magazine's "100 best young adult books" (D'Addario) do not draw a clear line between children's and YA fiction either. The list includes titles associated with child readers (e.g. Roald Dahl's *Matilda*), young adults (e.g. *Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson) as well as crossover works such the *Harry Potter* series by J.K. Rowling. It further includes novels like *The Catcher in the Rye* by J.D. Salinger, which were



originally intended for an adult audience (Cart<sup>1</sup> 30) and became young adult classics. Does this mean YAL is simply the literature read by young adults? one may ask. The answer is: no, not exactly, because this definition is too narrow. It ignores many other factors which contribute to an understanding of the complex field. Audience is a suitable starting point, nonetheless, because CYAL is frequently defined by its readers (Cadden 310; Coats 323; Maybin and Watson 3). In their introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Children's Literature*, Grenby and Immel discuss the question of readership as well:

Children's literature, uniquely, is defined by its intended audience, but neither childhood nor the child is easy to define. Overlapping and conflicting cultural constructions of childhood have existed since children's literature began [...]. Then there are the complications that arise out of the very polymorphous nature of its readership. The 'child' for whom 'children's literature' is intended can range from the infant being read to, to the teenager on the threshold of adulthood, not to mention those adults who delight in picture books, fantasy novels or fondly remembered classics. This 'crossover audience' is by no means a new phenomenon. It is just one of the reasons the question of audience presents all sorts of knotty problems. (xiii)

This paragraph already addresses some of the central problems of defining CYAL and its target audience. The 'crossover audience' they refer to is one of the most crucial aspects which needs further inspection. Firstly, children's and young adult fiction is not only enjoyed by the young. Many YA novels are popular with adults too. Market research has shown that a great percentage of YAL readers are, in fact, adults (Garcia 16). In his 2016 publication, Cart claims that "adults are now responsible for an astonishing 65 to 70 percent of all sales of young adult books" (ix-x). According to Publishers Weekly, more recent figures presented by Nielson show that even 80% of young adult books are purchased by adults (Gilmore). These sales reports treat adults as buyers and consumers. This means they are expected not only to purchase YAL for their children, but also, to a great part, to read the books themselves. Secondly, teenagers also read mainstream literature (Kullmann 13). Thirdly, the target audience and label of a book can change over time. Numerous adult novels such as *To Kill A Mockingbird*, *Lord of the Flies*, *Robinson Crusoe*, and *The Catcher in the Rye* have become young adult classics - and vice versa (Cart 131; Hunt, "Instruction" 19). Fourthly, to confuse matters further, there are books (e.g. *Little Women*) which cannot be specifically categorised as adult, children's literature, or YAL, as they belong to more than one category. So-called crossover texts appeal to a mixed audience. Finally, ultimately blurring the lines, some novels are (often simultaneously) published in children's, young adult, and adult editions to reach a greater range of consumers. Examples include *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (Cart 134- 135), and, of

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<sup>1</sup> Unless indicated otherwise, quotations from Cart only refer to *Young Adult Literature: From Romance to Realism*.

course, the *Harry Potter* books, which were published with different covers for different age-groups (Sawyer 205). Recently, Walker Books published an “adult edition” of *Hate*, also using an alternative cover which does not show a teenager on it. On their website, Walker even state the edition aims to bring the novel “to a wider crossover audience”. Latest research has even coined the term ‘new adult’ to describe literature for readers, or rather consumers aged eighteen to twenty-five or older (Cart 140). This distinction will not be further considered in the present thesis, however. All of these considerations show why it does not suffice to define young adult literature as literature read by young adults.

It is possible to distinguish between intended and actual audience and argue that whether or not it is read by adolescents, YAL is intended for them. But even this distinction is insufficient, because young adult books are not exclusively written for young adults. Surely, writers are well aware of the fact that their books are usually bought and reviewed by adults. Publishers, parents and relatives, teachers, librarians, scholars, lecturers and the committee, who award prestigious prizes - they all can be argued to be both actual and intended audience too. Therefore, again, a definition of young adult literature which focuses merely on its implied consumers, i.e. young adults, does not satisfactorily account for the fact that YA books are read by a wide audience. This “dual audience” (Wall 377), or “double address” (Egan, qtd. in Wall 376), is, indeed, a characteristic feature of YAL. Although it is important to keep other audiences in mind, young adults continue to be YAL’s main intended audience. The question remains who so-called young adults are and which age-group they belong to. According to Garcia, “there is not a defined age group that is specified within YA” (Garcia 6), while others, for example the Young Adult Library Services Association, claim that YAL is targeted at teenagers aged twelve to eighteen (“Alex”; Cart 109). The Oxford English Dictionary defines a young adult as a “person in his or her teens or early twenties; (now) *esp.* a person in his or her mid to late teens, an adolescent” and the adjective young adult describes cultural products intended for adolescents. Based on this definition, in this thesis, young adults are regarded as adolescents in their teens and young adult fiction is understood as literature primarily intended for them. The terms teenagers, adolescents, and young adults are henceforth used synonymously.

What YA literature is **not**, is literature written **by** young adults. YA books are usually written by adults, *The Outsiders* by S.E. Hinton being one of the very few well-known exceptions. Kullmann calls this a “paradoxe Assymetrie” (15). Maybin and Watson also draw attention to this paradox when they ask how books written by adults can aptly be called children’s, or rather YA literature (3). Similarly, Hunt asks:

does that mean that ‘children’s literature’ is inevitably an oxymoron? [...] And what does that awkward little possessive ‘s’ in ‘children’s’ actually mean? Do these texts really *belong to* children, or are they simply *aimed at* them? Are the texts we are talking about *of* childhood, *for* childhood, *about* childhood, or *by* children? (“Instruction” 13)

It has already been established that CYAL is not written by children or adolescents, however it is chiefly aimed at them. Whether or not children’s literature really belongs to children is another essential question which will be discussed in section 4.2.3.

Because it is almost impossible to define children’s literature by its audience, Kullmann (13) argues that it should rather be defined as literary texts published and marketed as such. The same can be said about YAL (Trites 7-8). Consequently, books only become young adult literature as soon as they are labelled as such and sit on the YAL shelf in a bookstore or library. Similarly, to Townsend “it appears that, for better or worse, the publisher decides. If he puts a book on the children’s list, it will be reviewed as a children’s book and will be read by children (or young people)” (89). Townsend goes as far as to question if there is “such a thing as children’s literature” at all and concludes that it is “part of literature,” separated only for “practical purposes (in the libraries and bookshops, for instance)” (89). Young adult fiction, too, is separated from general literature arguably mostly for pragmatic reasons. Publishing and marketing certainly play an essential and defining role in the YA business.

Furthermore, young adult fiction is not only literature **for** young people. It is, in most cases, also **about** them. For this reason, many definitions focus on teenage characters and themes rather than audience (e.g. Glaus 408), or a combination of both. Teen literature “includes books designed for readers from approximately ten through eighteen years old and deals largely, but not exclusively, with coming-of-age and identity issues,” Johnson-Feelings writes (134). Adolescent narrators and characters the readers identify with as well as relevant themes teenagers can relate to are among the most striking characteristics of young adult literature. As in literature for younger readers (Kullmann 30), the protagonists typically belong to the same age-group as the intended audience. Identity crises, or “inner turmoil, awkwardness, and vulnerability,” as Cart calls it (4), as well as friendship, sexuality, an individual’s struggle in society and relationship to powerful institutions (Trites xii), and simply growing up are a few of the central themes teenage protagonists typically deal with in YA fiction (cf. Kullmann 14). According to Cadden (310), YA books are about “change and growth,” “personal struggle and reflection” as well as the search and “discovery of a self.” Identity construction constitutes the YA novel’s “primary subtext” (308), he finds. All these themes can also be identified in *Diary* and *Hate*.

So far, it has been established that young adult literature is mainly targeted at adolescent readers and books typically include teenage characters and themes. The next question which needs to be addressed is if it is a genre. In academic discourse, there seems to be a broad consensus that it is not, although some (e.g. Garcia 5; Nodelman, *Hidden* 133; Trites 7) disagree. According to Hunt, “children’s literature draws on a huge range of genres” (Introduction 11) and Grenby and Immel explain that children’s literature “cuts across almost all genres, from myths to manga, humour to horror, science to self-help and religion to romance” (xiii). The same is true for YAL. Juvenile literature is not a single genre, but a vast and diverse field. It comprises several genres and sub-genres including problem novels, school stories, family stories, time-travel, fantasy, adventure stories, dystopia, diary fiction, historical novels, romance, horror, mystery, and speculative fiction, not forgetting non-fiction including biographies and informational books (Botelho and Rudman 291-220; Cart 97-112; Grenby v;). Apart from novels, YAL also includes forms like poetry, drama, and graphic novels, as well as picturebooks and comics (Anatol 624; Grenby 2). This thesis focuses on works of realistic fiction.

Another arguably characteristic, yet controversial feature of young adult literature is its educational purpose, which can also be detected in children’s texts (Cart 3-4; Kullmann 35; Nodelman, “Other” 33; Trites ix). There is a long tradition of children’s literature being a medium of instruction. One only needs to think of fairy tales, fables, primers, religious texts, and early children’s literature. The notion that literature should be educational, but also enjoyable, which was famously expressed in John Locke’s 1693 *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, in a way, still echoes in contemporary literature for young readers. Today, 326 years later, CYAL can still be said to instruct and delight - however, probably not in the same way Locke had imagined (cf. Bottigheimer 116). Even if overt moralising didacticism may have gone out of fashion, complex ethical and didactic questions are still negotiated in literature for young readers (Mills 1-6; Sainsbury 5-7). The educative purpose is less explicit now, but books for young readers, in contrast to mainstream texts, are still evaluated according to their appropriateness, suitability of content, and effect on their readers (see also Townsend 90-92). In extreme cases, especially in the USA, controversial books are banned from schools. Even if books do not undergo direct censorship, a certain level of control is certainly exercised by publishers, booksellers, and writers themselves (for a discussion of censorship, see Bean, Dunkerly-Bean, and Harper 291; Bottigheimer 123; Hunt; “Instruction” 24; Jenkins 452). *Diary*, for example, is a commercially successful but contested novel, which has been banned from several school districts in the USA because of its explicit language and depiction of violence and alcoholism (Cart 197-198; Nagin 15). Moreover, the latest controversy

surrounding the Netflix adaptation of the bestselling novel *Thirteen Reasons Why* and a reportedly related, dramatic increase in internet searches about suicide (Murgia) supports the observation that adults tend to fear the influence fiction may have on their children and their wish to stay in control of what they consume. Cart (171) claims publishers are often hesitant about publishing texts dealing with ‘taboo topics’ like suicide for fear of imitation. Parents are often advised to select appropriate reading material for their children (Nodelman *Hidden* 136-137). After all, texts are powerful in so far as they are read by “people at the period in their lives when they are most susceptible to new ideas” (Hunt, “Instruction” 15). It is, therefore, not surprising that books for young readers – especially for the very young – tend to have a reassuring, happy ending (Hunt, “Same” 81). Even YA fiction dealing with self-harm usually ends on a positive, life-affirming note (Reynolds 113). All in all, adults more than adolescents, judge which books are appropriate for teenagers, and decide what adolescents are supposed to read and what not. What is generally accepted to be suitable for young readers “is part of a complex network of social values” which “changes with time” (Hunt, “Instruction” 24). This emphasises the above claim that YAL is not only what adolescents read. It is largely what adults deem appropriate for them. This does not mean adolescents have no power at all, only that adults have more. Furthermore, texts instruct young readers on the workings of society. This “preparatory” purpose, Bottigheimer (125) argues, is precisely what distinguishes them from mainstream literature for grown-up readers. In her view, its “normative nature” is “the distinguishing element of children’s literature” (114). In books for young readers, there are underlying values and morals, usually shared by the majority society at a given time (Hollindale 30), which are purposely or subconsciously transmitted to the next generation of readers. On the one hand, this is highly problematic, as numerous scholars have pointed out (e.g. Hollindale; MacCann; Nikolajeva, *Power*; Nodelman, *Hidden*; Trites). There is the risk of indoctrination and perpetuation of norms, both of which are an act of power over children and adolescents. On the other hand, CYAL’s instructive function and transmission of values may have positive effects. Several scholars (e.g. Anatol; Bean, Dunkerly-Bean, and Harper; Botelho and Rudman; Garcia; Metzger, Box and Blasingame; Trites; Sainsbury) have indicated the educational potential of diverse CYAL and its contribution to transcultural learning processes (e.g. Reichl, “Doing”). Some publications even comprise practical advice for classroom use (e.g. Bushman and Haas; Hollindale 37-40; Engles and Kory) and there are extensive discussions of educational benefits to teaching multicultural literature, including *Multiethnic American Literatures: Essays for Teaching Context and Culture* and *African and African American Children’s and Adolescent Literature in the Classroom*. Further, YA novels are frequently used

as a “teaching tool” (Grzegorzczuk 6) in English classes at schools and universities to foster reading skills as well as a basis for discussions on controversial issues. I agree with both positions and believe that a critical engagement with books dealing with minority experiences - such as *Diary* and *Hate* - can benefit the reader’s personal development and foster transcultural learning as well as critical thinking, provided they are open for reflection. I also view the transfer of dominant social norms critically, especially conservative, reactionary ideas concerning gender and race. Readers, educators, and parents need to be aware of the potential of perpetuating norms through literature, I think, and reflect on the morals underlying stories, no matter how canonised they may be. The potential of passing on norms through literature is not limited to CYAL, of course, and adults would do well to scrutinise their own reading materials too. I believe that critics of CYAL are particularly concerned about “what stories we as a culture want to tell our children” (Cadden 312), because books children and adolescents read potentially influence them “at a particularly malleable time in their identity formation” (Coats 315). This thesis will elaborate its critical stance towards hidden morals and adult power in section 2.4.

YA texts further differ from children’s and adult books in terms of design, and style (Bottigheimer 121). The design of book covers and font sizes, for example, distinguish YAL from the more colourful and richly illustrated children’s books as well as the tendentially more sober adult texts. Of course, also in terms of design there are overlaps between the fields –as the illustrations in *Diary* show -, which add to the ambiguity of teenage fiction. Style needs to be examined in more detail: authors of CYA books usually adapt their language to match the proficiency level of their target audience. Sentence structure and vocabulary range vary according to the age-group of the intended readers. However, it would be too simple to argue that syntactical and lexical simplicity alone are a striking characteristic of juvenile fiction. According to Glaus, text complexity, which includes form **and** content, should be taken into account too. She explains that, for example, while *Diary* might be within the lexical range of readers younger than the main character, she would not recommend it to them, because “themes of racism, poverty, and the main character’s struggle with identity” might still be too difficult for them to understand (408). Consequently, books for young adults are frequently too complex for children to understand, and adult books can be too sophisticated for teenagers. Nikolajeva calls this an “age-related cognitive discrepancy” (“Theory” 13; see also Grzegorzczuk 8). An analysis of the text’s form and meaning, thus, may help solve the question what age-group it is intended for, and determine if it can be categorised as children’s, YA, or adult literature; a position which is also defended by Chambers (366). Referring to Iser’s influential publication

*The Implied Reader*, Chambers explains that an analysis of a text's style may indicate its implied readers. Authors may use different techniques and a different style when writing for young readers than when writing for adults. For instance, by adopting a child's point of view, they write what they think is "within the perceptual scope of his child reader" (Chambers 361). Writers, he proceeds, make assumptions about the readers' language proficiency as well as their "beliefs, politics, social customs, and the like" (365). These assumptions as well as the writers' own beliefs are apparent in their style (357) and they add to a text's complexity. According to Nodelman, books for young readers are not as simple as they appear to be, because beneath the surface lies something more complex, namely "adult knowledge" (*Hidden* 206). Grzegorzcyk (10), too, criticises the prevailing assumption that children's and young adult fiction is simple and childish. Many texts exhibit "postmodern stylistic experimentation" and "complex narrative strategies" (Beckett 1997: xi, qtd in Grzegorzcyk 12). Likewise, Cart reports a "growing sophistication of YA books in both subject and style" (x).

Cadden adds mode to his distinction between children's and young adult fiction. While comedy and romance are more common in the former, the latter also includes tragedy and irony. Dystopian novels like *The Giver* use modes children's literature rarely explores (306-308). He further claims circular patterns prevail in children's literature, while a linear structure, as in the home-away motif, can be found in YA fiction (308).

To sum this section up, YA literature is a complex field. In Maybin and Watson's words, "what children's [and YA] literature is remains an area for continuing debate" (3). There is a "plethora of definitions," deriving from "competing claims of different critical approaches, from a focus on the text itself to a consideration of authorial intent and of external pressures and expectations" (Grzegorzcyk 8). Hunt calls children's literature "a body of texts (in the widest senses of that word), an academic discipline, an educational and social tool, an international business and a cultural phenomenon" (*International* xviii). Maybin and Watson write it is "a foundation of shared intergenerational national and international culture, a barometer of beliefs and anxieties about children and childhood and a body of literature with its own genres, classic texts and avant-garde experiments." The same is arguably true for YAL. Although many critics subsume YA under the umbrella term children's literature, I believe YAL - or teen, juvenile literature, all of which are used interchangeably here - is more than a subcategory of children's literature and should be acknowledged in its own right (see also Coats 317). Despite numerous overlaps, significant differences justify a differentiated treatment of the fields. What is more, the study of YAL is currently evolving into a separate, yet still small academic discipline (Cart

64). I understand YA fiction as a body of texts mainly written for and about adolescents (cf. Coats 316; Garcia 5), which are primarily marketed to an adolescent audience aged between twelve and eighteen. The novels analysed in the present thesis exhibit many of the described characteristics of YA fiction. They were published as YAL and are primarily targeted at adolescent readers, they feature teenage protagonists, and their plots, style and themes, especially coming of age, are typically teen. They also display generic characteristics of the school story and *Diary* is often used in educative contexts (Perez 285; Nagin 2). Now that a working definition of YAL has been established, a brief overview of its development over the past 60 years or so will follow.

## **2.2 History of YAL**

Today, YAL is one of the “most dynamic, lively area[s] of contemporary publishing” (Cart ix). Thousands of new titles are published each year, an explosion in numbers unprecedented in history (Cart ix). This is why critics (e.g. Cart, Foreword vii) call this the ‘Second Golden Age’ of young adult literature. However, YAL is a relatively new phenomenon, which has only existed for slightly more than half a century. The following section will provide a sketch of the history of YAL in order to determine how it evolved into a separate category. A chronological overview of the developments in the field also aids an identification of trends and traditions which still inform YAL today. For instance, as Grenby argues, a contemporary school story will be written for a different audience than a school story written a long time ago, “but the producers of the twenty-first century text will nevertheless be inheriting traditions, expectations and perhaps limits from a long succession of previous practitioners” (3). In other words, although much has changed, “generic continuities certainly do exist” (Grenby 3). This historical overview is mainly based on the work of Michael Cart, because, to date, he is one of the very few who have written about the history of YAL. Historical surveys of children’s literature (e.g. Grenby) usually neglect YAL. In his book *Young Adult Literature: From Romance to Realism*, Cart draws a comprehensive picture of developments in YAL and publishing from the early 1900s until today. Although he writes from an often subjective, American point of view (as evident for instance in his opening statement that young adult literature is an “American gift to the world” (Cart 3)), peer reviewers of this “influential text” (Quealy-Gainer) applaud Cart’s “expertise in the field” (Annico 19).

The historical development of YAL is closely related to the history of children’s literature. Not only because it was (and is) often regarded as a sub-category of children’s literature, but also in terms of its origins. Like children’s literature, YAL emerged as a new field at a time the



soon-to-be target audience was first identified as a distinct group in society with special needs and interests, going through a turbulent developmental phase before entering adulthood. Although privileged, educated children and teenagers have read texts “from the very earliest periods of recorded history to today” (Grenby 1), literature written especially for them only began to be published when childhood and adolescence were established as “social concept[s]” (Trites 8). Children’s literature emerged in the late 17<sup>th</sup>, or early 18<sup>th</sup> century (Grenby 4) and it took another 250 years until books intended for adolescents started to appear (Cart 8-10). According to Cart, adolescence was first recognised as a separate developmental stage at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but it took another fifty years or so until the concept was firmly established. The terms and notions of ‘young adults’ and ‘teenagers’ only came into existence after World War II, with the beginnings of youth culture. As adolescents’ access to school education and leisure activities increased and their spending power grew, they were discovered as a new market. Booksellers and publishers saw this commercial opportunity and began to cater to this promising new readership. Capitalistic reasoning arguably was a strong impetus for the development of YA literature besides the early goals of educating and entertaining its readers. Magazines, pop music, films, and youth culture strongly influenced the emerging field (Cart 3-12).

The landmark publication of *Seventeenth Summer* in 1942 became one of the first successful American YA novels. Cart’s historical overview of the 1940s and 50s (11-20) suggests that early YAL was rather naïve in its idealised depictions of a sheltered life in suburbia and teenage romance. It was not until the 1960s that YAL offered more realistic portrayals of (troubled) teenagers and started to include taboo topics like sex, drug abuse, juvenile delinquency, gang violence as well as urban life. The most influential novel of its time was, of course, S.E. Hinton’s *The Outsiders*, published in 1967. Hinton managed to capture the mood of teenagers at the time by introducing realistic characters and real-life problems (Cart 21-29). *The Outsiders* informed subsequent YA publications until today. Parallels can be found, for example, in Angie Thomas’ 2017 novel *Hate*, which also depicts life in an underprivileged neighbourhood, violence, gangs, and first love. The 1970s were a prolific decade in which widely acclaimed books by authors including Robert Cormier (e.g. *The Chocolate War*) and Judy Blume (e.g. *Forever*) appeared. One of the most dominant genres of the time were so-called problem novels. Cart criticises the overuse of “recycled formula” (34-35) in these topic-oriented books (e.g. *Go Ask Alice*) which typically circled around a single issue like drug abuse, death, abortion, and many more. According to Cart (41-45), YA fiction in the 1980s saw a shift away from grave themes back to genre fiction, especially romance. This trend is significant, because hand in

hand with it went the increasing serialisation and affordability of YAL. Romance and horror paperback series were extremely successful with teenage consumers and soon dominated the mass market. Cart even claims the “popularity of such genre series is perhaps the most durable phenomenon in the ongoing history of publishing for young readers” (56). On display in emerging chain bookstores in shopping malls, they were now targeted directly at teenagers. In the 1990s, following a decline in sales, publishers of young adult literature sought to expand their target audience. They began to market YAL as a distinct category, separate from children’s literature. For instance, bookstores started to shelve YA titles in separate sections, away from the children’s departments to attract teenage customers. Books for and about various age-groups on the YA spectrum were published and several awards (e.g. the Printz Award) to honour excellent YA books were created. (Cart 55-85).

And then came *Harry Potter*. The extraordinary global success of the *Harry Potter* series, which was released between 1997 and 2007, marked a turning point in the history of children’s and young adult literature and the publishing world. The international *Harry Potter* craze was and still is a marketing phenomenon, with film and theatre adaptations, fan fiction, merchandise, spin-offs, theme parks, and tourism, generating “phenomenal financial success” (Maybin and Watson 2). The books appealed to children, teenagers, and adults and they broke record after record. In the wake of the *Harry Potter* phenomenon, more and more novels were marketed to a crossover audience and established writers of mainstream adult literature entered the field of YAL (Cart 115) – as did Sherman Alexie. The American Library Association even introduced a new award, the Alex Award, which is given to “books written for adults that have special appeal to young adults, ages 12 through 18” (“Alex”). Publishers were constantly looking for the next *Harry Potter*. Stephenie Meyer’s paranormal romance series, *Twilight*, and Suzanne Collins’ *The Hunger Games* were bestselling series that outshone most of YA fiction in the 2000s in terms of popularity and commercial success – with the exception of *Harry Potter*, of course. They, too, were adapted into films that grossed millions of dollars worldwide (Cart 121-122). Moreover, the popularity of fantasy in YA literature rose, David Almond and Philipp Pullman being two famous authors of this genre (Cart 98-99). Pullman’s *His Dark Materials* series is also an excellent example of a crossover work. Other genres which entered the YAL market in the late 90s and early 2000s include dystopia (e.g. *The Giver* by Lois Lowry), historical fiction (e.g. *The Book Thief* by Markus Zusak), and “chic lit” (e.g. the *Gossip Girl* series), a sub-genre of romantic fiction, which was marketed specifically to young female readers (Cart 102- 123). By the turn of the millennium, young adult literature had become such an enormous commercial success that publishers launched special YA imprints to attract

customers. Maybin and Watson (1-2) claim that literature for young readers gained “unprecedented public visibility, sales and popularity.” New titles mushroomed and the market grew. Additionally, the post of children’s laureate was created in the UK in 1999 and in the USA in 2008 (Maybin and Watson 2). Today, the YAL market is significantly shaped by the Internet. Despite the challenges the Internet poses to publishing, YA books are still commercially successful, since adolescents have not stopped reading (Cart 235-238). Maybin and Watson (2) even argue that media offer “new narrative possibilities”. New forms including “online novels, cyberfiction, hyperfiction, multimodal texts” (Cadden 312) are emerging. Moreover, writers such as the celebrated author John Green (e.g. *The Fault in Our Stars*) now increasingly use the possibilities of the Internet to communicate with their readers and involve them (Cart 128). Cart’s survey suggests that genre fiction such as romance, historical fiction and fantasy as well as bleak, realistic fiction are all-time favourites, which characterise YAL. It should be added that other established genres have been read at all times too.

The realistic YA novels selected for this thesis combine generic elements of the school story, romance, diary writing, and bleak, realistic fiction. They also promote diversity, an issue which will be briefly addressed next.

### **2.3 Diversity and multicultural YAL**

Until the 1970s, diversity was almost absent from US-American children’s and YA literature. Where non-white minorities like African Americans “did appear, they were too often presented as caricatures and stereotypes” (Cart 48), “depicted as either inferior or comic” (Paul 85). Until the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, most books had white, Christian, middle class protagonists (Cart 46-49; Paul 87) and there was a “dearth of images of characters of color” that “showed them in contemporary settings” (Anatol 632). Novels which addressed multicultural themes, racism, and migrant experiences remained scarce. The few multicultural books available exhibited a kind of “feel-good version of multiculturalism,” or as Stanley Fish calls it “Boutique multiculturalism” (1997: 378, qt. in Paul 89): a “façade, a fake front disguising a multitude of inequities, injustices and outrageous historical property thefts,” Paul (89) claims. Social movements in the 1960s and 70s contributed to a gradually increasing visibility of non-mainstream American literature. Rising multicultural awareness in the 1980s, literary prizes for multicultural literature such as the Coretta Scott King Award for African American writers and illustrators, special imprints and independent publishing companies encouraged greater diversity in YA literature (Anatol 634; Johnson 214), but “even then, books for and about young people from other cultures remained a hard sell,” Cart argues (50). Native Americans were

particularly marginalised. Absence or misrepresentation characterised their representation in literature for a long time (Cart 46-49; Cox, *Muting* 203-255); and it still does, despite increased indigenous literary production and the establishment of indigenous publishing houses (Bradford<sup>2</sup> 4). Native Americans are still widely overlooked in YAL, Sherman Alexie being one of the few exceptions (Cart 156). Similarly, African Americans continue to be not only under-, but also misrepresented in YAL. Too often, CYA books draw a monolithic picture of African Diaspora cultures by focussing mainly on folk tales, slave narratives and activists, Anatol laments (651). The issue of representation remains an ongoing concern. Although diversity has become more visible in YAL in the past decades, stories by and about ethnic minorities are still underrepresented in YA fiction, notwithstanding the growing percentage of non-white teenagers in multicultural societies like the United States. According to Cart, by 2018 “children and teens of color will have become the majority youth population” (152). I agree with Garcia (5) that it is troubling that YAL does not appropriately reflect the demographics of modern, multicultural societies and non-white teenagers’ experiences. If non-white teenagers are not part of YAL, where “definitions of what it means to be a teenager in western society are reified” (Garcia 5), this says a lot about the distribution of power in American society. Big, mainstream publishing houses do not pay enough attention to multicultural books, because it is not profitable for them, Cart explains (154-157). The already small number of YAL writers with an ethnic minority background are frequently denied the opportunity to get published. Awards may help to increase their visibility, but, without doubt, there is still room for improvement. At this point, it has to be noted that Cart almost exclusively considers the US-American context. He ignores multicultural book publishing in the United Kingdom and other English-speaking countries, not to mention non-English-speaking countries. In the UK, for instance, diverse books about multicultural life in urban spaces like London have appeared (cf. Gunning; Reichl, *Ethnic*; Stein). Celebrated black British YAL authors include Malorie Blackman (e.g. *Noughts and Crosses*) and Benjamin Zephaniah (e.g. *Refugee Boy*). Nevertheless, similar to the USA, there is a scarcity of non-white characters and writers in the field of CYAL, Reichl reports (“Reading” 211). This means black teenagers are inadequately represented in literature both in the UK and the USA. To borrow Cart’s words: multicultural literature “remains the most underpublished segment of YA” (x). The two novels to be discussed in this thesis offer the voice and point of view of teenagers of colour.

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<sup>2</sup>If not stated otherwise, all citations refer to Bradford’s monograph *Unsettling Narratives*.

## **2.4 Critical issues and the politics of children's and young adult literature**

CYA is intrinsically political (Grzegorzcyk 7) and never free from ideologies. Ideology often operates on an implicit level, sometimes even invisible to the writers themselves (Bradford 14). Texts are written at a specific time, within a specific culture and political system, and, therefore, they usually reflect the prevalent Zeitgeist. Consciously or not, the “political realities of their [i.e. the authors’] time [...] will resonate in some way in all reading material for the next generation,” Grzegorzcyk (6) states. However, as Bradford argues, writers are not necessarily “bound by dominant discourse” in the sense that they may resist it and challenge prevailing norms (“Race” 40). Most certainly, though, CYAL carries values and beliefs, which it may pass on to its readership. It serves specific purposes and it is firmly “embedded in our cultural, educational and social thinking” (Hunt, “Instruction” 12). All this can be said about literature in general as well, however, the impact of underlying ideologies and political agendas in CYAL is of particular cultural significance as well as academic interest, because it has the power to shape the world view of a whole new generation. This may be one of the reasons why CYAL has increasingly attracted the interest of literary scholars. Several critical issues, including the representation of gender, sexuality, disability, and many more, have already been discussed in a growing body of research into children's and young adult literature (e.g. Botelho and Rudman; Garcia). Literary and cultural theories such as feminist, queer, Marxist, and postcolonial studies, or a combination thereof, are increasingly applied to explore representations of the suppressed ‘other’ (cf. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *Concepts* 154-156) in CYAL (Grzegorzcyk 21). Unfortunately, however, the limited scope of this thesis does not permit any further treatment of these numerous critical issues. The following section addresses the distribution of power in the field of CYAL. It will mainly draw on literature on children's books, because to my knowledge, except Trites' work, there is no profound, distinctive theory of power politics in YAL yet and many ideas can be transferred to juvenile texts due to overlaps between the fields. Ideology, the “social function of the children's novel” (Grzegorzcyk 6), and the role of adults as producers and consumers of YAL will be the focus of the following section.

### **2.4.1 Ideology**

One of the main concerns in the study of texts for young readers is to reveal how writers and society view childhood, or rather adolescence, at different times and how literature functions as a site in which these notions are negotiated (see also Grzegorzcyk 6). Which genres are popular in particular periods, criteria by which literature is evaluated, even what adults think children find funny, reflect a society's conception of childhood and adolescence (Cross 14; Hunt, “Same” 71; Maybin, “Publishing” 115). These conceptions change over time, as does the

literature they underlie (Anatol 622). Of course, texts “never simply mirror a reality that exists in time and space, but embody interpretations and judgements of value” (Bradford 11). The notions of childhood and adolescence are, thus, constantly constructed and deconstructed in CYAL. Despite young readers’ more or less active participation in this negotiation, considering that they also bring their expectations and beliefs to the text (Bradford 54; Hollindale 35), adult writers are in a position of power in this discourse. Authors of children’s books have an idea of childhood and what it means to be a child, which consciously or subconsciously finds expression in their work, Hunt (“Instruction” 13) explains. For example, children’s books frequently present childhood in an idealised, innocent manner, be it for “political, sociological or dramatic reasons” (Hunt, “Instruction” 14; see also Bottigheimer 123). Writers “have their own ideological stance, their own ideas of what is right or wrong, their own way of seeing their world, and it is impossible that they should not in some way convey this in their writing, manipulatively or not,” Hunt further claims (“Instruction” 15). Ideologies can be overt, but usually they are conveyed through “subliminal messages,” “hidden meanings and subtext” (Hunt, “Instruction” 16). Trites even speaks of an “ideological manipulation of the reader” (142) in CYAL. To give an example of ideologies hidden in plain sight, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* displays Christian morals and values like friendship and courage, as well as a specific notion of childhood. In his much-quoted essay “On Three Ways of Writing for Children,” C.S. Lewis admits that authors’ morals are often mirrored in their work. To him, valuable morals are only those which authors hold dear themselves, not the ones they think children need. He also believes that one should write for children, if “is the best art-form for writing something you have to say” (18). However, he does not specify what exactly it is he has to say, nor does he question his own morals and objectives. According to Hollindale, “[u]nexaminated, passive values are widely *shared* values, and we should not underestimate the powers of reinforcement vested in quiescent and unconscious ideology” (30). Values which are taken for granted, thus, are the most powerful ones, because they are likely to be accepted and unquestioned by the readers. Nodelman (*Hidden* 185) and Bottigheimer (123-124), too, point out that CYAL expresses ideas about childhood, social structures and norms, which writers and readers either already share, or readers are invited to share. This also brings me to my next point: “[c]hildren’s literature has always been a vehicle for transmitting values to young readers” (Mills 1).

Books have the potential to teach the next generation cultural values of a society, and reading CYAL, therefore, contributes to the processes of socialisation and enculturation young people experience. This observation is particularly relevant in the context of this thesis, because CYA

texts “disclose conceptions of and attitudes to race, ethnicity, colonialism and postcolonialism, responding to the discourses and practices of the societies where they are produced” (Bradford “Race” 39). Through literature, predominant norms, ideologies, cultural practices, and stereotypes are frequently transmitted and often, but not necessarily, perpetuated (see also Garcia 5). This can be problematic, if one considers the prevalence of issues such as racism, sexism, and representation in CYAL as well as the fact that in the past, children’s texts typically centred on white, Christian, (primarily) male, middle, or upper-class characters (Bottigheimer 125). How much these parameters have actually changed is up to debate.

There are also subversive texts which challenge dominant views and offer different perspectives on critical issues. Some (e.g. Reynolds 14, Trites ix) have argued that CYA fiction is potentially subversive and experimental, transformative even, because it challenges cultural norms, plays with conventions and empowers readers to question their status quo (see also Grzegorzcyk 11-18). It may provide the reader with “tools of resistance” (Nagin 20). *Diary* and *Hate* are examples of subversive books which reflect critically on present developments. Alexie and Thomas regard their writing as political, a “form of activism” even, as Thomas claims in an interview (Walker), and Alexie says, his ambition in writing has always been to “change the world” (SPSCC). CYAL, then, can be used as a subversive political medium. According to Sainsbury, it also has “ethical potential” (194) in that books may invite “moral reflection” (192). She finds that literature for young readers can “stimulate moral agency” (193).

CYAL’s paradoxical potential of “working with and against dominant ideologies” (Grzegorzcyk 7) is striking. While books for young readers are cultural products that generally respond to dominant ideologies and political climates of their time (Nagin 20), they also have the potential to challenge them. As Bradford (24) phrases it: “Settler society children’s texts are caught between discursive pressures: [...] the dominant discourses that constitute cultural givens; and the counter-discourses that seek to undermine them.” I agree with the notion of “doubleness,” or “ambivalence,” of CYAL, as proposed by Nodelman (*Hidden* 179-186) and supported by Bradford (24), Grzegorzcyk (14-15), Hunt (“Same” 72), and Reynolds (3): texts can be subversive as well as conservative, they question, but also sustain power structures, and they can be didactic and entertaining.

#### **2.4.2 Adult power**

Texts for young readers usually reflect their author’s values and ideologies. This means that “children’s literature is at root about power – about power struggle. Adults write, children read,

and this means that, like it or not, adults are exercising power, and children are either being manipulated, or resisting manipulation” (Hunt, “Instruction” 14). Hunt believes books for young readers are “inevitably didactic in some way” (14), because they are all based on underlying attitudes. Academic study of CYAL, therefore, needs to ask “what it is that adults, through literature, want or demand of the child” (Rose 137) – a question which has also concerned recent examinations of ethics in CYAL (e.g. Mills, Sainsbury). In her groundbreaking publication *The Case of Peter Pan, or the Impossibility of Children’s Literature* (1984), Jacqueline Rose analyses the “impossible relation between adult and child” (1), as she calls it, and examines how childhood is constructed in literature. She was among the first to analyse the role of adults and their power in children’s literature. Children’s literature is never owned by children, she finds. It is controlled by adult authorities, who, for various purposes, determine children’s reading and, thus, exercise a form of power. Moreover, through the institution of children’s literature, conceptions of children and childhood are constantly repeated and re-enacted, Rose argues (141-142). I believe some of Rose’s ideas are still relevant today and can also be, in part, transferred to the analysis of YAL. Like children’s literature, YAL is largely controlled by adults. And like childhood in children’s literature, YAL constructs a notion of adolescence (Coats 324). However, I think it is questionable if adults construct adolescents and adolescence the same way they construct children and childhood. In contrast to children, adolescents have greater purchasing power (Cart 109) and, consequently, more influence on the market. They buy books, merchandise, and cinema tickets for film adaptations of popular novels; and even if their parents purchase the titles for them, teenagers have to like the books they read, or else they would not wish for sequels or another book by the same author. Teenage readers also interact with other fans and writers on social media sites (Garcia and Haddix 37-44). Further, prizes nowadays often include their opinions in the judging process (Maybin 118). This way, adolescents provide feedback. In how far it is considered in writing and publishing is another question altogether, which cannot be answered here. Clearly, though, teenagers are not powerless. They do have agency. Teenagers are not merely passive consumers and completely at adults’ mercy, as Rose believes children to be (1-2). Rather, an interaction takes place between writers and readers.

Rose’s pioneering work has greatly influenced the study of children’s literature. For example, in *Power, Voice and Subjectivity in Literature for Young Readers* Nikolajeva examines how adults exercise power and affirm norms in CYAL. Nodelman also investigates adult presence and mechanisms of power in children’s literature in his seminal work *The Hidden Adult*. Other



seminal studies on power in literature for young readers include the works of Lesnik-Oberstein and, most notably, Trites who claims that “Young adult novels are about power” (Trites 3).

### **2.4.3. YAL as a commodity**

With regard to power politics, the roles of adults as producers and consumers have received extensive attention in the academic discussion of CYAL. Ultimately, adults decide which stories are written, published, and bought – and which reading material becomes available for young people. In Bottigheimer’s words: “one generation defines the nature of children’s identity, childhood’s proper occupations, and children’s reading” (126). The fact that adults also purchase YAL – not just for teenagers, but also for their own pleasure -, has several implications too. The immense popularity of YAL among adults has affected publishing to a great extent and this trend also has cultural repercussions and possible effects on society. “If adults are the primary buyers of young adult novels,” Garcia (17) suggests, “it is likely that publishers are going to focus on the needs and interests of this demographic. Which begs an important question: what happens to a genre as it slowly focuses on a paying clientele that its name belies?” It is not clear, he continues, if certain trends in YAL are responses to the interests of teenagers or adults. With this new audience in mind, writers and publishers need to re-evaluate what to publish and how to market YA books.

Though this may not dramatically shift what these books look like or how they depict teenage struggles, they shift the priorities for publishers. Teenagers cease to be the sole clientele to please in a post-Potter YA marketplace. The whims, trends, and interests of adults now act as a factor to be considered in publishing decisions (Garcia 17)

Hunt (“Same”, 71-72) also questions whether specific themes truly respond to children’s interests and argues that the study of children’s –and YA books - reveals more about adults’ needs than young readers’. Some scholars question whether children’s literature is even meant for children at all, or if it is rather “produced for the adults who commission, write and buy it” (Grenby 8). The growing crossover audience of young adult literature is hotly debated in the discipline of children’s and YA literary studies (e.g. Falconer; Knoepfmacher; Wall). Some (e.g. Knoepfmacher 159) view crossover-writing a desirable, “interactive meeting ground for readers of different ages”. It could also lead to a gradual replacement of teenagers as intended and actual audience and, thereby, take away an important platform for teenage concerns and youth culture.

In addition, YA publishing largely corresponds to market demand and profitability. Mainstream books which promise to sell and which can easily be adapted into a film (preferably into sequels), are clearly favoured (Garcia 17). It comes as no surprise that a film adaptation of the

bestselling novel *Hate* was released in 2018. Moreover, super-bookstores and chains tend to overlook experimental concepts due to lack of profitability (Cart 67-68). Small, independent publishing houses vanish as nowadays; “the bulk of children’s book publishing is in the hands of a small number of large companies, and even those who maintain smaller publishing units within them are driven by the demands of mass-marketing” (Hunt, “Same” 81). Today, Hunt laments further, “the big sellers [...] are carefully planned, designed and marketed, almost (and sometimes literally) before they are written” (81). Writing for children and teenagers is a “powerful institution, controlled by powerful economic forces” (Nodelman, *Hidden* 309).

The decision which stories are published and awarded with prizes is political as well as an act of power. This is important to consider in context of this thesis, because the fact that minority perspectives are less visible than others mirrors power structures in publishing and in society. Despite increasing multicultural book publishing, children and adolescents of colour are still underrepresented in American CYAL (*CCBC*, see also Cart 153). To provide an impression of the scale, out of 3700 books considered, the Cooperate Children’s Book Center counted 122 books by African American and 38 by Native American authors plus 340 about African Americans and 72 Native Americans in the United States in 2017 (*CCBC*). Therefore, the commercial success of *Diary* and *Hate* and the widespread critical acclaim they have received is as impressive as it is surprising. *Diary* has won several prizes like the National Book Award for Young People’s Literature and *Hate* has led the *New York Times*’ bestseller list (Young Adult hardcover) for ninety-three weeks now, as of January 2019 (“Books”). It is extraordinary that Thomas’s debut novel attracted this much attention even before its release (the rights were sold in a 13-house auction and Fox 200 immediately acquired film rights (*Angie*)). Possibly, the currency of the topic and excellence of Thomas’s writing led to this success. Alexie, on the other hand, is an already established adult writer. Still, it is not less remarkable that *Diary*, his first YA novel, is this well received.

#### **2.4.4 Implications**

One of the main arguments in CYAL criticism and the crux of this section is that despite adolescent participation and influence on the market, it is dominated by adults. As writers, publishers, reviewers, and consumers, adults are in a position of power. “Perhaps, as some critics suggest, we should acknowledge that children’s books never really become the cultural property of children at all: they are written by adults, to suit adult purposes, and for kinds of children that adults construct to be the perfect readers of their books,” Grenby (227) states. For the novels analysed in the present thesis this means that they, too, were written by adults to fit

their purposes. It is true that the plots and characters stem from the imagination of adults rather than adolescents. Despite the semi-autobiographical nature of *Diary* and overlaps between the protagonist in *Hate* and Thomas's biography (*Angie; Politics*), the stories are not completely authentic representations of teenage experiences, and they cannot be, because they were imagined by adult writers. Also, the coping strategies they provide can be read as blueprints for teenage readers to follow. As Nodelman argues, children's and arguably also YAL "always tries above all else to be nonadult, and it always, inevitably, fails" (*Hidden* 341). However, I believe YAL is still "cultural property" of adolescents, no matter how great the influence of adult purchasers and crossover publishing may be. Whether adolescents are disenfranchised the same way Grenby seems to suggest children are in children's literature, is also questionable. I have argued that adolescents do have some agency, however limited it may be. As Trites argues: "adolescents occupy an uncomfortable liminal space in America. Adolescents are both powerful [...] and disempowered" (xi). Additionally, I think it would be a false accusation to say all children's and young adult books, or their authors, deliberately suppress their readers. *Hate* and *Diary* even empower them by portraying discriminated characters who, in their individual ways, free themselves from racist discrimination and pursue their own goals. Thomas dedicates her novel "to every kid in Georgetown and in all 'the Gardens' of the world: your voices matter, your dreams matter, your lives matter. Be roses that grow in the concrete" (*Hate*, Acknowledgements). Similarly, Alexie says his book speaks to children, especially Native Americans, but also non-natives worldwide, who "want to have a bigger and better life". *Diary* encourages them to embark on this ambitious "journey" (SPSCC). Of course, these statements also include value judgements. For the better or worse, values are always hidden in literature. Even the arguably subversive novels analysed in this thesis transmit certain values, however well intended and respectable they may be. I do not mean to suggest that they should not – books may have a "liberating [...] positive didactic drive" (Sainsbury 7) to them; *Dairy* and *Hate* promote antiracism (cf. Gunning), empowerment, and empathy, for instance - I solely want to point out the omnipresence of values and ideologies in literature (cf. Hollindale 37), which is particularly relevant since YA books are frequently used as a "teaching tool" (Grzegorzczuk 6) and, therefore, used to teach certain lessons. In short, my point is that the transfer of values through CYAL can be problematic, but also desirable, depending on the author's and the reader's ideological positions. To summarise, the critical academic discussion of literature and publishing for young readers boils down to the core problem that adults are in power and children are not. Children of colour are particularly marginalised. This power imbalance is the main link between CYAL and postcolonial studies.

### **3. Postcolonial literary theory**

This section introduces postcolonial literary theory, which serves as the main theoretical framework for this thesis. To begin with, this section explains why postcolonial criticism is suitable for the purpose of this thesis. It, then, aims to present postcolonial theory and some of its foundational concepts, which will also serve as a basis for the reading of *Diary* and *Hate*. It will elaborate the pitfalls and potential of applying literary postcolonial thought to the selected texts and contexts and it will explore its link to children's and young adult literature.

#### **3.1 Why postcolonial theory?**

What has teen fiction got to do with postcolonial literatures and how can postcolonial literary theory be applied to the selected YA texts? First, scholars (e.g. Nodelman, "Other") have argued that CYAL itself has a lot in common with colonialism, as similar power structures are at work. Children are compared to powerless colonised subjects, they, too, are viewed as voiceless 'other'. Secondly, key concepts from postcolonial studies can be borrowed to investigate not only how power relations, but also how race, racism, and antiracism are depicted in YA novels. Thirdly, a postcolonial reading potentially "uncovers the constructedness of cultural identity," to use McGillis' words ("Postcolonialism" 12). For these reasons, I will follow Grzegorzczuk' and Bradford's example and use postcolonial studies as my main framework of analysis for my reading of the two selected novels. I am aware of the danger of categorising and labelling books 'postcolonial' (Reichl, *Ethnic* 26-27) due to the heterogeneity of postcolonial literature as well as the texts' individuality. Clearly, postcolonialism is only one of many suitable theories with which the selected texts can be approached.

#### **3.2 Postcolonial literary theory**

Postcolonial studies emerged as a field of research in the 1970s, gained momentum in the 1980s, and has become a vibrant academic discipline since then. It is now established at universities worldwide, where postcolonial studies centres are connected to departments of literature, cultural studies, anthropology, history, art and many more; in short, the humanities and social sciences (Lazarus 1; 15). In the early days of postcolonial research, the term (usually hyphenated) was used to describe the historical period following the era of decolonization when states gained independence from the former British Empire. Although postcolonial studies derive from and still reflect upon experiences of colonialism and its social and historical consequences (Lazarus 2-3; Innes 4; Döring 6), it soon started to be understood in a political and cultural sense. Döring also stresses the "political emphasis on difference," which eclipses the "temporal notion in 'postcolonial'": "the difference between normative and subversive,

dominant and dominated, central and decentred modes of articulation” (19). Innes explains that postcolonial studies are generally concerned with “the subsequent interaction between the culture of the colonial power, including its language, and the culture and traditions of the colonized peoples” (2). The analyses of such interactions, she continues, “acknowledges the importance of power relations in that cultural exchange – the degree to which the colonizer imposes a language, a culture and a set of attitudes, and the degree to which the colonized peoples are able to resist, adapt to or subvert that imposition.” This deconstruction of power relations and the political reading of texts is precisely what will be borrowed from postcolonial studies for the purpose of this thesis. Here, thus, postcolonial literature is not merely understood as writing by formerly colonised people, but as critical, political medium, which challenges dominant representations of minority groups, especially with regard to race. In a rather cryptic definition, Bhabha, one of the most influential postcolonial thinkers, draws attention to the political aspect of postcolonial thought (see also Lazarus 3). “Postcolonial criticism bears witness to the unequal and uneven forces of cultural representation involved in the contest for political and social authority within the modern world order,” he writes (171). It challenges hegemonic representations of disadvantaged minorities and their histories as well as “issues of cultural difference, social authority, and political discrimination.” Based on Bhabha’s thoughts, postcolonial studies can be described as revolving around questions of representation, power, dominance, and cultural difference. Central issues in postcolonial literatures and studies also include criticism of Eurocentrism, resistance to discrimination and oppression, issues of ethnicity and identity, and (nationalist) reclamation of tradition and ‘native’ culture (Lazarus 6-13). Postcolonial thinkers (e.g. Fanon) criticise the representation of the colonised as the ‘other’, as an exotic and inferior human being (Innes 6). Invented, “imagined differences between colonizer and colonized” (McLeod, Introduction 3), which engendered inequalities, particularly of power, are also the subject of postcolonial studies.

### **3.3. Postcolonial thinkers**

The much-quoted ideas of four intellectuals have come to constitute the basic framework of postcolonial theory: Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Frantz Fanon (Innes 5). Their theories were inspired by post-colonial experience, poststructuralist and psychoanalytic theory, Marxism, and the works of thinkers like Foucault, Lacan, and Derrida, whose concepts of the “power of language and modes of discourse ha[ve] been particularly significant in the development of postcolonial theory” (Innes 5; cf. McLeod, *Beginning* 24).

In his seminal study *Orientalism*, Said analyses the way the West imagines the Orient and, thereby, constructs it. The Orient, at least the way the West conceptualises it, “emerges as an effect of Orientalist discourse” (Lazarus 10), he finds. Orientalist discourse plays a “socially constitutive role” (Lazarus 10) and it constructs the Orient as opposite of the West. Furthermore, Said claims fantasies about Orientals are “presented as scientific truths” and used to “justify their subjugation” (McLeod, *Beginning* 21). *Orientalism* has also been heavily criticised for its ahistorical depiction of an exoticised, homogenised ‘other’ and ignorance of anti-colonial resistance (cf. McLeod, *Beginning* 46-49). Said eventually addresses resistance in his later work *Culture and Imperialism*. There, he also illustrates the importance of cultural artefacts such as the novel to the imperial project as well as the power of (grand) narratives. Stories, he argues, are “at the heart of what explorers and novelists say about strange regions of the world; they also become the method colonized people use to assert their own identity” (xiii). Said’s thoughts are relevant for this thesis in so far as it is important to bear in mind the power of discourse and cultural products like novels to produce realities. In addition, culture, and therefore also literature, can reproduce, but also challenge imperialist ideologies (McLeod, Introduction 5). This opens up several possible interpretations of YA texts. For example, the way writers imagine the lives of adolescents, especially teenagers who belong to minority groups, influences their very reality. Through the act of reading, they might internalise and, subsequently, re-enact some of the dominant group’s imaginings. Furthermore, in the case of *Diary and Hate*, the books were written from and offer the perspective of minority groups. By presenting their views, the novels resist the dominant narrative which traditionally “render[ed] marginalized groups invisible” (Pinset, “Postmodernism” 173).

Homi Bhabha developed the concepts of ‘hybridity’, mimicry as well as the theory of the third space, which he elaborates in his seminal monograph *The Location of Culture* (see also Innes 12). The term ‘hybridity’ has faced serious criticism, due to its origin in the field of biology and its former, racist, application in discussions surrounding miscegenation (Smith 250-253). To distance myself from the term’s past derogatory meaning, I put it in quotation marks. “In contemporary critical discourse, ‘hybridity’ is employed in a cultural sense. It serves to talk about phenomena that elude the given structure of familiar oppositions or to describe processes which transgress cultural boundaries” (Döring 35). It denotes “the *in-between* space” (Bhabha 38) between cultures. I use the term ‘hybridity’ in this thesis, because it is a main concept in postcolonial studies and because it is useful to describe the selected novels’ protagonists’ movement between societies and cultures.

Frantz Fanon is another influential theorist. In *Black Skin, White Masks* he analyses the psychological effects of the ‘colonial gaze’, of being scrutinised and stereotyped by Europeans and measured against European norms (Innes 6). Fanon’s psychological analysis also aims to determine effects of racism and colonialism on the colonised. It claims that “black people had internalized the racism of those who ran the society, and either accepted an inferior status or felt the necessity to prove themselves fully human and equal – but in the white man’s terms” (Innes 6). In his later work, Fanon tried to understand and explain the “psychology of the colonizers” (Innes 8) and how they justified colonialist rule. Both of the selected novels’ protagonists include internalised stereotypes in their self-descriptions and they encounter justifications for the dominant group’s oppression of minorities.

Another focus of postcolonial criticism is the critique of representations of the ruling élite and the demand for a focus on civil society, ‘the people’, whose voices are usually unheard and who are rather spoken for (Lazarus 9). The concept of subalternity, developed by Gramsci and famously introduced to postcolonial studies by Spivak, reflects these ideas. The subaltern are those who are “subordinated by the dominant class, which is usually the author and subject of history” (Innes 11) – and literature, it should be added. Spivak asks if the suppressed voices of the subjugated, subaltern people, especially females, can be restored (McLeod, *Beginning* 24). Her point is not that colonised women cannot **speak**; rather, she problematises the oppressive system’s reluctance to **listen** (McLeod, *Beginning* 195). In YAL, as discussed above, adolescents’ voices are suppressed too, since adults speak for them. It can be argued that African Americans and Native Americans (as shown in the selected novels) struggle even more than white adolescents to make their voices heard. *Diary* and *Hate* also address the issue of not being heard as a marginalised, underprivileged, yes, subaltern, teenager. In *Hate*, Starr’s account of the killing of her best friend by a police officer does not get sufficient attention and media coverage. Almost as if in response to Spivak’s famous question: “Can the subaltern speak?” Starr eventually finds her voice and speaks out against racial violence and discrimination. Resistance of the subjugated is important in postcolonial and subaltern studies (McLeod, *Beginning* 24).

Finally, one more celebrated (e.g. Döring 16), although now slightly dated, book needs to be mentioned: *The Empire Writes Back* by Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin. The title (with its humorous intertextual reference) is originally based on a quote by Salman Rushdie and ‘to write back’ has become known as a synonym for resistance, for presenting the view of the colonised, and it has become a key term in postcolonial studies. It means a “reversal of the agency and

direction of writing” (Döring 18). In colonial discourse, colonised countries and peoples were only written about by Europeans and now they represent themselves and revise the canon. I argue in this thesis that Thomas and Alexie also ‘write back’ to the canon as they (re-)present voices of oppressed groups. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin have received criticism, because of their undifferentiated treatment of formerly colonised peoples, but it is still regarded a foundational text of postcolonial studies (McLeod 27-28).

### 3.4 Key words

To sum up, key words to keep in mind, according to Döring (15-34), are power, resistance, translation, diaspora, identity, and ‘hybridity’ (Bhabha). In addition, the notion of the ‘other’ (Lacan, see Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *Concepts* 155-156), mimicry (Bhabha), Orientalism (Said), the subaltern (Spivak), to write back (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *Empire*), representation, authenticity, as well as the conviction that race and identity are constructed instead of fixed and predetermined are central to postcolonial criticism. McLeod claims that it is also an attitude. It “refuses to accept the legitimacy of the relations of domination and subordination” (Introduction 8). **Doing** postcolonialism, then, means “to look critically at the world” (9). It is an “enabling concept” and a “reading practice” (McLeod, *Beginning* 2; 5). In Döring’s words, “Postcolonial Studies [...] ultimately aims to show that stable notions of colonial dominance are, fundamentally, groundless” (27). Now that some of the main concepts of postcolonial discourse have been presented, the questionable (in-)compatibility of postcolonial studies and US-American novels requires further investigation.

### 3.5 Risks and potential of applying postcolonial theory to US-American novels

Since postcolonial theory is usually applied to literary works written “by members of the colonized groups just before or during the historically postcolonial period in the colonies formerly dominated by Britain” (Innes 3), the question arises whether or not it is valid to use it for an analysis of US-American novels. One of the problems with the application of postcolonial studies to US-American literature is that, in contrast to most colonies on the African and Indian sub-continent, today’s United States were settler colonies, which gained independence long before other post-colonial states, and nations which became independent prior to the 1940s are typically excluded from postcolonial analyses (Innes 2-5). What is more, it has been argued that countries like the USA should be categorised as a colonial instead of a postcolonial country, as its indigenous groups “have yet to recover that territory and achieve self-government” (Innes 2; cf. Porter 59). Scholars (e.g Allen) have questioned the applicability of the postcolonial approach to Native American texts also because postcolonial criticism



usually focuses on African, Caribbean, and Asian, sometimes also Irish experiences as well as diaspora/migrant literature produced at the (post-)imperial centre (cf. Baldick; McLeod, Introduction). Above all, the application of postcolonialism to such a great variety of contexts has been regarded with scepticism due to the consequential danger of generalisation (cf. Innes 2).

On the other hand, since comparisons between different cultures and different histories is problematic anyway, why not include the USA? After all, the history of the United States is also shaped by colonisation, repression and displacement of indigenous peoples, slavery and racial discrimination of African Americans. A settler society, the territory now called The United States of America is a space which was invaded by Europeans who “exercised radical domination over the autochthonous inhabitants [...] and where Indigenous peoples continue to seek recognition, compensation, and self-determination” (Bradford 4). Decolonisation is not completed in the United States. Sherman Alexie even said in an interview (TIME) that the USA are “still a colony”. Clearly, the trauma of colonisation still reverberates in the cultural memory and racism as well as discrimination are as topical as ever. The social status of minorities and current outbursts of racial violence speak for themselves. According to Bradford, who agrees that the United States should be regarded as a postcolonial culture (2-4),

the trauma and disruption of colonization continue to impact on the material conditions of the colonized peoples, and are evident in markers of disadvantage that include high rates of youth suicide, levels of incarceration out of all proportion to Indigenous populations, higher infant mortality statistics than those for the general population, and so on (9)

Therefore, I believe that due to the legacy of colonialism, overreaching structural similarities when it comes to power politics and oppression of minority groups based on their ethnicity – in the past as well as today –, experiences of minority groups and their representation in literature, the use of postcolonial theory for the reading of US-American literature for young readers is justified. As Stuart Hall says, “Not all societies are ‘post-colonial’ *in the same way* ... But this does not mean they are not ‘post-colonial’ *in any way*” (1996: 246 qtd. Innes 3; original emphasis). The view that the United States and its literature can and indeed should be viewed as postcolonial society has further been advocated by Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin:

The literature of the USA should also be placed in this category [postcolonial literatures]. Perhaps because of its current position of power, and the neo-colonizing role it has played, its post-colonial nature has not been generally recognized. But its relationship with the metropolitan centre as it evolved over the last two centuries has been paradigmatic for post-colonial literatures everywhere. What each of these literatures has in common beyond their special and distinctive regional characteristics is that they emerged in their present form out of the experience of colonization and

asserted themselves by foregrounding the tension with the imperial power, the imperial centre. It is this which makes them distinctively post-colonial (*Empire 2*)

In the case of the United States, the centre has changed, but the society is still post-colonial. Moreover, the fact that Civil Rights, Black Power, and Black Arts movements as well as the academic disciplines Black Studies and Third World Studies were some of the major influences on early postcolonial thought (Innes 4-5), supports my argument that postcolonial studies and US-American minority literature are compatible. Innes explains that postcolonial studies “embrace [...] a wide range of European settler colonies as well as predominantly indigenous and former slave colonies” (5) and that the social movements “encouraged an increasing emphasis on issues of identity, racial and cultural difference, and social and economic empowerment particularly with regard to people of African and Asian descent” (5). According to Gilroy, African Americans’ struggle for freedom was even compared to anti-colonial wars of liberation. “Black America’s younger leadership likened U.S. ghettos to colonies and the militancy of organisations like the Black Panthers suggested that their fight against segregationism and white supremacy would be conducted in the same spirit as an anti-colonial war” (106-107). Finally, I focus on two texts which I believe are suitable for a postcolonial reading (Bradford also reads *Diary* as a postcolonial text (“Race” 46)), and I do not mean to claim that all Native American and African American YA novels are. I suggest the novels share certain characteristics with ‘typical’ postcolonial literatures, especially in terms of plot and themes: they depict ‘hybrid’ identities and the struggle of growing up in marginalised, non-white communities in a predominantly white society. Moreover, written by non-white Americans and portraying non-white American teenagers, the texts can be seen as subversive, because they do not represent the dominant groups. Rather, they are written from the point of view of the oppressed. The authors ‘write back’ to mainstream young adult literature by introducing non-white, non-middle-class protagonists and present their experiences – stories which are usually unheard and unread.

If postcolonial literary theory allows itself to be bent to fit the purpose of analysing African American and Native American YA novels, it admittedly has to be abstracted. Key terms will be borrowed and applied to different settings, focussing on mechanisms of oppression and resistance. At the risk of generalising, this thesis adopts a broad, “functional understanding” (Döring 20) of the term postcolonial. Like Ashcroft (2001: 13, qtd. in Bradford 9) and Bradford, I understand postcolonial as “a form of talk” which “offers an array of concepts and critical strategies” (Bradford 9) with which young adult texts can be discussed, especially with regard to the way they represent colonial heritage. Although some critics (e.g. McLeod, Introduction

13-16) criticize the excessive and seemingly arbitrary application of postcolonial theory and its terms to any location and demand that postcolonial studies consider the geographical and historical specifics of a region, a detailed examination of the history of the United States cannot be elaborated here, as such considerations would exceed the scope of this thesis. I do acknowledge the relevance of this critique and agree that it is important to differentiate between the many manifestations of colonialism, colonial histories, and experiences of oppression around the world in order not to homogenise them. I neither wish to claim that the colonial past of the United States is identical with other post-colonial nations, nor that experiences of Indigenous American peoples and African Americans are alike. I will, therefore, incorporate some relevant, context-specific background information which is necessary for the reading of the selected novels. In an ambitious balancing act, this thesis, then, aims to deal with postcolonialism in a very specific and, at the same time, broad, abstract manner. I am well aware that this is a risky endeavour, but it is the only manageable way I can imagine approaching a close contextual reading of the two novels, which are completely different, yet share strategies in their portrayal of experiences of minority groups in the USA. Equipped with postcolonial terminology, I aim to analyse them as two recent examples of YA books which portray the struggles of non-white American teenagers in present-day America.

### **3.6 Postcolonialism and children's and young adult literature**

The link between postcolonialism and children's and young adult literature has only received little scholarly attention so far, which makes postcolonial criticism of texts for young readers a small field of research (Bradford 6-8). Additionally, the few existing publications tend to focus on children's rather than juvenile literature. To my knowledge, no works on postcolonial YA fiction, that is to say a specific postcolonial criticism of young adult texts only, has yet been published. My ambition to carry out a postcolonial reading of two YA novels, thus, is bound to rely on criticism of children's literature, which frequently (e.g. Bradford) implies YAL anyway. Seminal works include the anthology *Voices of the Other: Children's Literature and the Postcolonial Context* edited by Roderick McGillis, Meena Khorana's book *Critical Perspectives on Postcolonial African Children's and Young Adult Literature*, Perry Nodelman's article "The Other: Orientalism, Colonialism, and Children's Literature" as well as Clare Bradford's monograph *Unsettling Narratives: Postcolonial Readings of Children's Literature* (Bradford 7).

The few available postcolonial analyses of texts for young readers typically explore issues of power and representation, subjectivity, race, and ethnicity (Grzegorzczuk 21-22). Scholars have

analysed historical novels and adventure stories set at the time of the British Empire (e.g. Bradford; Pinset), 20<sup>th</sup> century fiction in which colonial discourse is still detectable (for example Roald Dahl's *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (Bradford, "Race")), colonial children's classics (e.g. *Kim* by Rudyard Kipling (Said, *Culture*) and *The Secret Garden* (e.g. Eckford-Prossor)) as well as contemporary postcolonial realistic and fantasy novels, picturebooks, comics, and films aimed at a young audience (e.g. Grzegorzczuk; Bradford). Indigenous literary production (Bradford) as well as specific national and ethnic YA literature has also been under academic scrutiny (e.g. Khorana, "Children's"). Similar to CYAL in general, postcolonial books provide the attentive reader with some insight into the values and beliefs of a society it aims to pass on to the next generation. For example, in her overview of African publishing for young readers, Khorana argues that postcolonial African books foster national identity and thereby they often serve nationalistic ends (2-5). "Literature for children attempts to fill the void created by the 'rootlessness' or 'nonbelonging' that is a legacy of colonialism" (Khorana, *Children's* 7). Sometimes it is the very act of writing for children **itself**, which is investigated and criticised as a colonial endeavour. To use Grzegorzczuk's words: "[c]hildren's literature may be seen as an imperial project aimed at submitting the needs of its readers and subjects to adult desires and expectations with regard to children" (22). One of the boldest ideas brought forward is the theory that literature is a site of colonisation of children (e.g. Eckford-Prossor; Nodelman "Other"). It is one of the very few theories on children's literature and (post)colonialism and, thus, needs to be considered in more detail. In his 1992 article "The Other: Orientalism, Colonialism, and Children's Literature," Perry Nodelman<sup>3</sup> and, more recently, in "Colonizing Children: Dramas of Transformation," Eckford-Prossor draw several parallels between colonialism and the domination of children. From a postcolonial perspective and based particularly on Said's concept of Orientalism as well as Rose's thesis, they point out overlaps between the discourses of Orientalism and childhood. In particular, they highlight similarities in the relations between child and adult to colonised and coloniser.

First, the articles have in common the conviction that childhood and the Orient are imagined constructs (Eckford-Prossor 239; Nodelman 33) used for the exertion of power over others: for adult dominance over children and European dominance over the colonised. "The assumptions about children, the desire to mold them and therefore control them, are very similar to those made about natives" (Eckford-Prossor 246). Moreover, children and subjugated people are often represented in similar terms. In colonial discourse, the indigenous population was

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<sup>3</sup> In the following, quotations from Nodelman refer to said article only.

typically described as childlike, or childish (Eckford-Prossor 238-247) and the language of imperialism is also used to discuss childhood. Children are often presented as in need of civilising and disciplining. Secondly, both articles agree that, in the discourses of Orientalism and childhood, the colonised as well as the child become speechless (Eckford-Prossor 50; Nodelman 30). Children are spoken **for**, they are silenced and, thus, dominated by adults. Adults purport to know and understand children and fail to listen to them; they study children, theorise about them, approach them as ‘other’ (Nodelman 29-30; Eckford-Prossor 248). Thirdly, adults treat children not as individuals, but a homogenous group opposite of adult maturity and generalise childhood as unchanging category (Nodelman 29-31; Eckford-Prossor 239). Fourthly, both scholars note that representations of childhood and children, for instance in children’s literature, reinforce adult authority and superiority, which children eventually submit to (Eckford-Prossor 247; Nodelman 29). Adults use children’s literature as a site to transport values, which children will eventually accept and adapt (Nodelman 30). Lastly, both agree that the crucial, paradoxical difference between the constructs of childhood and the Orient is the fact that children will eventually grow up and turn into adults and the colonised will not (Eckford-Prossor 247; Nodelman 32-33). What distinguishes Eckford-Prossor’s article from Nodelman’s is her particular focus on language as a medium of oppression (248). Via the act of translation and explanation, childhood and children are transformed, objectified, and established as ‘other’ (251-254). Nodelman’s article particularly focuses on the representations of childhood in children’s literature and psychology. To him, children’s literature is a form of adult power, because adults want children to accept the stories’ morals and identify with, yes “become like the fictional children we have invented” (32). Children are made into children the way the Orientals were “*made Oriental*” (32). And eventually, like in a self-fulfilling prophecy, they do “submit to our ideas about what it means to be childish and do show us the childish behaviour we make it clear to them we wish to see,” Nodelman claims (32). Children learn how to act like children by reading books written by adults (33).

While Eckford-Prossor’s and Nodelman’s ideas are an interesting contribution to the study of children’s literature, it is important to ask how they can be applied to YAL. After all, adolescents are neither children nor speechless. I have already explained why I believe teenagers’ voices are heard more loudly (section 2.4.2). Teenagers are, nonetheless, patronised by adults. What interests me about the proposed analogy between child and colonised is the way writing and theorizing about under-age citizens is an act of power, which arguably resembles colonial dominance that renders the child’s voice unheard. This may implicate that by writing about adolescents in this thesis, I exercise power over them too – which is obviously

not my intention. Moreover, the notion that childhood as a category is constructed and meant to evoke childlike behaviour is an interesting point. The question how adolescence and teenage behaviour is constructed in literature and imitated by adolescent readers could be raised in further, reception-oriented research. The selected novels construct a specific notion of adolescence, as they portray teenagers' realities; their problems, fears, hopes, and dreams. They depict typical YA themes like teen love and sexuality, acne, school, and bullying, but also issues such as racism and shame of being poor, marginalised teenagers experience. A possible consequence would be, for instance, that white readers of *Diary* who do not know Native American teenagers themselves imagine all Native American adolescents to be like Junior. Another consequence could be that Native American teenagers copy Junior's behaviour because he is one of the few role models they have, given the scarcity of indigenous characters in YAL. This would mean, then, that *Diary* constructs a specific notion of what it means to be an indigenous teenager. With reference to *Orientalism*, Nodelman's (32), and Eckford-Prossor's (256) articles, I would like to ask: does the act of writing about and imagining indigenous or black adolescents constitute a specific non-white adolescent experience? Are non-white adolescents **made** non-white adolescents? Of course, the "extent to which literature can influence attitudes remains debatable" (Pinset, "Language" 149).

Returning to the articles, I think the metaphor of colonisation is misplaced, because it downplays the brutality of colonisation. The potential harm of children's books is by no means comparable to the suffering of colonised peoples in the past and present. Thus, in my opinion, the comparison of children's literature with colonial oppression is inappropriate and conclusions like Eckford-Prossor's statement that "we have all lived in colonized territory" (259) are too far-fetched. I also disagree with Nodelman's opinion that children's literature is an "imperialist activit[y]" (33). Clare Bradford also criticises the proposed analogy between colonised and children. She makes the interesting point that Nodelman's "use of postcolonial theory sidesteps the question of race, which is central to the binary distinctions between 'civilized' and 'primitive' on which colonialism and colonial relations were built" (7). Bradford's approach differs in so far as she reads texts produced in postcolonial settler societies including the United States to unveil the cultural legacy of colonialism and "to identify the discursive formations and the ideologies that inform them" (225). Applying postcolonial thought, Bradford analyses indigenous literary production, the representation of indigeneity, and the functions of language, place, and space in children's and young adult books. To her, texts for children

reinvoke and rehearse colonialism in a variety of ways: for instance, through narratives that engage with history in realistic or fantastic modes; through sequences involving encounters between Indigenous and non-Indigenous characters; through representations of characters of mixed ancestry; and through metaphorical and symbolic treatments of colonization (3)

Bradford's in-depth analysis of postcolonial Native American literature is highly relevant for this thesis. For example, she draws attention to the problem that (young) readers, including indigenous children, usually learn about indigenous people through stories written by non-indigenous people. Indigenous people are, thus, "generally the objects of discourse and not their subjects" and "representations of indigeneity are filtered through the perspectives of white culture" (10). Texts often include stereotypes, since dominant ideologies are frequently "accepted as normal and natural and are thus invisible" (10). For instance, the "figure of the noble savage" was used in fiction for children set in colonial America and non-white ethnicities were frequently portrayed as vanishing or historical groups ("Race" 43- 44). Books by indigenous writers are not completely free from stereotypical representations either as they "have frequently internalized colonial ideologies as they have been subjected to socializing practices that promote white superiority" (*Unsettling* 11). Internalised, hidden ideology is an example of the ambivalence of children's literature discussed earlier (Grzegorzczuk 13-15; Nodelman *Hidden* 185). Even "counter-discursive textual strategies sometimes traverse a fine line between subversion and an uneasy complicity" (Bradford 29). This is also where postcolonial criticism comes in. The way the selected YA novels respond to ideologies can be identified in a critical postcolonial reading. I agree with Bradford that a postcolonial reading of CYAL is important, because books "construct ideas and values about colonization, about postcolonial cultures, and about individual and national identities" (6). Postcolonial studies serve as a framework of analysis to deconstruct these ideas. Moreover, as YA literature contributes to the socialisation of teenagers (see also Bradford 5; Trites 142), it is relevant to explore how critical issues such as race and belonging are depicted in fiction and to ask if adolescents find themselves represented in their literature. In short, the connection between postcolonial studies and YAL is important for the purpose of this thesis, because the selected texts transport socially relevant ideas about race, stereotypes, and 'hybrid' identities, informed by the United States' colonial past, which I want to investigate with the help of postcolonial concepts and terms.

In this section, I have surveyed literature on the link between postcolonialism and CYAL. Despite the scarcity of research in this field, some relevant ideas, especially the metaphor of colonialism to describe the inferior power position of children and Bradford's thoughts on

colonial ideology in post-colonial settler society texts have been shown. Now that CYAL, postcolonial studies, and the link between the two have been explored, cultural theories will be applied to two recent YA novels and their contexts.

#### **4. *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian***

Sherman Alexie's celebrated YA debut follows the identity formation of its adolescent Native American protagonist. A sketch of the novel's plot and themes will be followed by an attempt at the book's contextualisation and a close reading of its depiction of race and identity. I begin my discussion of the novel with its context, because it links the book's themes with postcolonial studies. I further agree with Porter (40) to a certain extent that an awareness of structural realities helps to understand literature. The historical context of colonisation, then, is key to understanding Native American writing and *Diary*. I am painfully aware of the problem of approaching Native American literatures as a cultural outsider, with little background in Native American studies and limited "capacity of reading cultural and ethnic signs" (Reichl, *Ethnic* 53), as well as of the generalisations about indigenous cultures I am prone to make in my reading of the text and its contexts. I will, therefore, keep in mind Coulombe's advice to "exercise caution" (3) when approaching indigenous texts and "focus on what Native authors have chosen to share with readers textually" (Coulombe 6) instead of trying to interpret the entirety of novel's cultural backgrounds.

##### **4.1 Plot and themes**

*Diary* by Sherman Alexie and illustrated by Ellen Forney is a semi-autobiographical young adult novel about a 14-year old boy who leaves the poor Spokane Indian Reservation in search of a better life and access to education. At his new school in the close-by town of Reardan, Arnold Spirit Junior is the only Native American student. He is confronted with racist prejudice, but he also gains the acceptance of his peers, particularly as he turns out to be a talented basketball-player. Many of his fellow tribal members, especially his best friend, Rowdy, disapprove of Junior's decision to attend an all-white school and treat him as a "traitor" (79). In the coming-of-age story, the protagonist is confronted with feelings of loneliness, the wish to belong, ambivalence towards his tribe as well as non-native people, and he goes through an identity crisis. This conflict is mirrored in his comics and a dramatic basketball game between Junior's new and his former schools' teams, in which Junior, now as a member of the superior, white team, has to confront Rowdy and other American Indians from the reservation. As the story progresses, Junior faces harassment, loss and pain, but also experiences first love. Native American identity, racism, poverty, alcohol abuse, colonial stereotypes and history, but also



hope, education, family, and friendship constitute the novel's main themes, which are closely intertwined. In the end, Junior comes to terms with his multi-faceted identity.

#### **4.2 Contextualisation: Native American literature and colonial history**

A close contextual reading of Sherman Alexie's first young adult novel calls for a consideration of its literary, historical, and cultural backgrounds - ideally with special focus on the Spokane tribe. Such an in-depth survey is not possible here. However, this section aims to show how the novel relates to Native American literary traditions and colonial history. Before listing the characteristics of Native American literature, a brief note on the naming controversy is necessary. In his introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Native American Literature*, Kenneth Roemer reminds us that the term and concept of Native American Literature is problematic, because it fails to acknowledge the diversity of oral and written indigenous texts, their "cultural and regional variety" (Roemer 4), many genres and forms as well as their dynamic rather than static nature (Roemer 5). The concept of ethnical literatures can be questioned in general, since comparisons of writers across genres and forms based only on their ethnicity may be viewed as problematic and are sometimes rejected by authors. For example, in a 2005 interview (Nygren 153-154), Alexie resists the frequent comparisons between himself and Vizenor and questions the use of the label Native American literature for the purpose of criticism. Bradford, however, is convinced that indigenous texts "require different kinds of reading" ("Race" 45). They "deserve to be read in the light of the cultures in which they are produced, and with due attention to their difference from Western texts, rather than from within the assumptions of Western culture and textual practices," she believes (*Unsettling* 227). As the term Native American literature is well established in literary studies, I will also use it here. An awareness for its diversity is important, nonetheless. Another problem is whether Native American literature should be defined as all literature produced by Native Americans only, regardless of the content, or literature dealing with Native American themes, which might also be penned by non-natives - raising the problem of authenticity much debated in (postcolonial) discussions of indigenous texts (cf. Bradford 85; Roemer 19). For the purpose of this thesis, I opt for a combination of both and understand it as texts written by Native Americans which deal mainly with Native American issues.

##### **4.2.1 Native American literature**

What are the characteristics of Native American literature and how does *Diary* correspond to them? First, most texts produced by American Indians circle around the horrors of their shared, colonial history and express "post-apocalyptic worldviews, an awareness of the miracle of

survival, and hope that goes beyond survival and endurance to a sense of tribal and pan-tribal sovereignty and identity” (Roemer 11). The literatures frequently deal with communal identity, culture, memory, language, place – especially with regard to the tragic loss of land -, exploitation, forced migration, and the “near extinction phenomenon” (Roemer 12) as direct consequence of aggressive colonisation. Essentially, they revolve around the key concern of loss: traumatic loss of (home-)land, life, language and culture. “[T]he continuing effects of losses manifested in poverty, disease, substance abuse, crime, and suicide” (Roemer 12) as well as notions of (post-)colonial estrangement and alienation are featured in contemporary texts too. They generally express feelings of sorrow and pessimism. Nevertheless, the message of survival, resilience, and, ultimately, hope is also prominent in Native American writing (Roemer 12-14). As Bradford points out, “it is misleading to construct Indigenous peoples as victim populations, suffering the effects of colonization without agency or capacity for opposition,” because they “engaged in strategies of resistance and negotiation” with the colonisers (9). Sherman Alexie’s YA novel also addresses the devastating effects of colonialism including displacement, poverty, and alcohol abuse among Native Americans, but hope plays a central role in the book too. Junior does not give up his wish to survive. More parallels will be outlined in the following.

In the second half of the twentieth century, following the 1968 publication of N. Scott Momaday’s Pulitzer Prize winning novel *House Made of Dawn*, Native American literary production and mainstream public interest in it increased steadily, giving rise to what is known as ‘The Native American Renaissance’. Youth and Civil Rights movements, American Indian activism, exchanges between writers of different tribes, and financial support encouraged the publishing of many new voices, which reached new audiences (Ruppert 174). Of course, Native American literary production began long before the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century (for an extensive survey see, for example, *Handbook of Native American Literature*), with oral storytelling having been a major aspect of American Indian cultural life. However, with the success of *House Made of Dawn*, Native American writing first entered the consciousness of mainstream audiences and for the first time, a Native American author was “accepted by the literary establishment” (Bruchac 312). Before the 1970s, Native American literature was largely ignored by non-native readers, publishers, and scholars (Roemer 1). This ignorance of Native American as well as other multicultural literature highlights power mechanisms in publishing discussed above. Momaday’s “now familiar theme of the Indian who has been away from his or her people (at school, at war, in prison) and returning to his or her own people as a semi-outsider is central to” many acclaimed books like Silko’s *Ceremony* (Bruchac 313), which, interestingly, Alexie

praises as “the greatest novel in Native American literature” in the Penguin Classics edition. He also claims he learns from it. Much has changed since the 1970s, but the theme of being “caught between mainstream American life and reservation life” (Grassian 10) is still relevant in today’s writing, nonetheless. Junior is also caught between two worlds, but unlike most Native American characters, he manages to come to terms with his ‘hybrid’ self. In the novel, boundaries are loosened; opposites cease to be unalterable. Regarded as a representative of a now “second generation of a Native American literary renaissance” (Moore 297), Alexie is one of the contemporary writers who

seek to renegotiate the dualisms of modernism. They mediate the opposition between urban and rural, between Native and non-Native readers. For them, oral tradition is not opposed to alienation, community is not always racially or culturally defined, and self-definitions are not exclusively constructed of history and culture. [...] Irony is key to their literary productions (Ruppert 187)

#### **4.2.2 Literary references**

*Diary* exhibits thematical parallels to some of its well-known predecessors. The complex themes of alienation and relocation, as well as alcoholism and racism can be identified in several outstanding books from the 20<sup>th</sup> century too (Ruppert 175-181). To provide a few examples, Gerald Vizenor deals with active resistance, which he calls ‘survivance’(11), Simon J. Ortiz uses humour and writes about the “juxtaposition of Native values and modern society” (Ruppert 178), Paula Gunn Allen addresses cultural and internal conflicts, Louise Erdrich’s first-person narrations are humorous and deal with life on the reservation (Ruppert 177-181), and James Welch’s prose includes “identity struggles of individuals” (Moore 303). His novel *Fools Crow* even appears on Junior’s list of favourite books (*Diary* 177). More importantly, Sherman Alexie is not the first Native American to write juvenile fiction, either. Joseph Bruchac is a renowned children’s and YA writer (Ruppert 185), Cynthia Leitich Smith’s protagonist in her YA novel *Rain is Not My Indian Name* records questions about American Indian identity in a journal (Kertzer 64), and Janet Campbell Hale’s YA novel *The Owl’s Song* is about a “fourteen-year-old reservation Indian who moves to the city and must find a way to come to grips with racism, cultural dissolution, and death” (Ruppert 181). Craig Kee Strete, Michael Dorris, and Louise Erdrich have also published books for young readers (Bradford 49). According to Bradford, *Diary* “follows a trope common in contemporary Native American children’s literature: the process whereby a child or teenager who has lived on a reservation (‘the rez’) is introduced to mainstream schooling and the practices and values of the majority culture” (“Race” 46).

Another parallel between Alexie’s work and established Native American literature is its close connection to life writing. The semi-autobiographical novel *Diary* exhibits several overlaps

with 20<sup>th</sup> century Native American autobiographies, especially with regard to its focus on identity (cf. Wong 135). The complexity and instability of Native American identities is often the subject of contemporary texts. “The theme of trying to reconcile two worlds, Native American and Euro-American, becomes central to twentieth-century Native American fiction,” Sweet Wong (138) explains. Alexie’s novel is, to a great extent, a fictionalisation of the author’s own experiences. He even calls it an “autobiographical story” in an online article (Alexie, “Why”). His ‘hybrid’ identity as well as the “mutual alienation” and “double-consciousness” (Moore 303) Alexie experienced as a teenager is mirrored in his fiction. Similar to Junior, Sherman Alexie left the Spokane reservation to attend an all-white school in Reardan. He, too, was poor, mocked by other children on the reservation because of his enlarged skull (Alexie was born with hydrocephalus too (Grassian 2)), and abused (Alexie, “Why”). At a young age, he already appreciated “humor both as a means of deflecting the abuse from other children and also as a means of personal empowerment,” or self-defence (Grassian 2). Like Junior, Alexie was the only Native American at his new school and felt isolated. He adapted to his new surrounding and continued his education outside the reservation (Grassian 2).

Further, in *Diary*, the narrator’s conversational style is reminiscent of Native American oral traditions. Informed by storytelling practices, Native American texts display dynamic “interactions between storyteller-writers and listener-readers” (19), Brill de Ramírez states. These texts evoke an oral tradition in which the audience is present and they elicit the readers’ active engagement with the text (Brill de Ramírez 31). Alexie’s narrator arguably assumes the role of the storyteller who talks to his audience. He applies “conversive and discursive literary strategies” (Brill de Ramírez 18). By asking them questions, Junior involves the readers and calls for their participation. Capitalisation and italics are used to imitate spoken language and create the impression of a dialogue between Junior and the reader. He also imagines questions the reader might have (“now you’re probably asking yourself” (31); “I know you’re thinking” (83)) and then answers them (“okay, I’ll tell you” (9)). This way, he establishes a relationship between himself and the implied reader and manages to “draw the reader into the text” (Chambers 357-360).

Finally, Alexie shares with other American Indian writers the central message of resilience and survival, an “assertive attitude” (Moore 300) with regard to American Indian identity (Roemer 12) as well as the political agenda underlying their art. “Literature is part of the web of cultural strength that has allowed Indian peoples to demonstrate remarkable resilience over time” (Porter 40) and to Alexie, storytelling is an expression of power, agency, and survival (Moore

299). He describes his art as political (“Alexie at SPSCC”). According to his own accounts, Alexie writes books for teenagers, “to give them weapons – in the form of words and ideas – that will help them fight their monsters” (Alexie, “Why”). Moreover, *Diary* mirrors Alexie’s assertion of Native American continuance instead of erasure (Moore 297-298). Kertzer views the novel’s contemporary, realistic setting as a “rejoinder to the stereotype of the vanishing Indian” (Kertzer 56) and Perez claims “Alexie’s young adult protagonists prevail to affirm Native presence in YA and American literary history” (Perez 300). He calls Junior’s determination to survive, succeed, and even thrive “extraordinary” and compares it to Vizenor’s notion of ‘survivance’ (289). This affirmative self-representation, which characterises Alexie’s work (Cox, “Subversion” 3), serves as contrast to misrepresentation in the dominant discourse. It is also deployed by other “contemporary Native American writers whose work simultaneously deconstructs paralyzing and oppressive representations of their people, while actively constructing in print tribal and personal realities that, in continuing to be expressed, strengthen longstanding indigenous traditions of cultural affirmation” (Haladay 217). This is an example of the way literature renegotiates discursive power structures. Also, appropriating the English language, formerly the language of the oppressor, and informing a diverse, mainly non-indigenous readership about Native American lives, rights, and history writers empower themselves and their readers (Coulombe 19). Alexie compares the use of English to “using the fire to protect yourself from the fire” (Nelson 39). However, considering that English is the first language of most Native Americans today and that writing in English has several advantages such as reaching a wider audience and thus, greater success, this argument loses some of its strength (compare Reichl, *Ethnic* 43-44 on Black British authors writing in English).

What distinguishes Alexie’s work from other Native American texts, is his “celebration of individual agency” (Moore 303). In opposition to the strong focus on community common in Native American literatures, individualism is typically associated with Western literary traditions, especially the 19<sup>th</sup> century American novel. This contrast is often (e.g. Grassian 11, Roemer 13) regarded the most distinct difference between Native American and Western/American literature. *Diary*’s protagonist rejects unquestioned commitment to tribal life and leaves the reservation in search of a better future. In contrast to the majority of fictional Native American characters who seek solace and redemption in the reconnection with their tribal communities and traditions (Moore, 297; Roemer 13; Ruppert 187), Junior does not ‘come home’ (for the ‘homing’ motif, cf. Roemer 17). He determines his own way instead. The narrator’s individualism, his Anglo-American pursuit of happiness, strikes out as markedly different. According to Moore (whose article was published two years prior to the novel, but is

relevant for the present discussion, nonetheless), for Alexie, the “power to break out of one world into another [...] accentuates precisely the potency, the AGENCY [original emphasis], of individual consciousness to reach freedom” (303).

In addition, *Diary* is influenced by the Western tradition of the ‘Bildungsroman’, or ‘Entwicklungsroman’, if one considers Trites’ (9-10) differentiation between the two. *Diary* is a typical coming-of-age story, which follows the protagonist’s development from child to a more mature individual. Junior explores his multi-tribal identity and at the end of the story, his self is not only characterised by race anymore as he learns to identify with a plurality of groups. Nagin (16) also states that Junior matures as he “negotiates systems of power”. She refers to Trites’ (x) argument that in YAL, maturity is linked to lessons about power. According to Döring, the Bildungsroman is a form often used in postcolonial literature to present the “search for personal identity as a constant interplay of subjective needs and social demands” (168), as Mark Stein has shown in his study of Black British *Novels of Transformation* such as *The Buddha of Suburbia*. In *Diary*, too, Junior’s personal needs (to get a better education) and social demands (to stay on the reservation like his friends) conflict. He even says so himself: “life is a constant struggle between being an individual and being a member of the community” (*Diary* 132). Junior struggles to fit in, on the one hand, and follow his own path, on the other. I have argued above that *Diary* promotes individual agency. Community also plays a role in Junior’s character construction, however, as Coats (319) points out. She argues that despite his choice to leave the reservation, Junior still seeks connection to groups.

The book is also a typical YA novel in so far as the identity formation of a teenage protagonist is a “conventional topic” (Bradford, “Race” 49). Moreover, Bradford considers movement between places and cultures a common trope in children’s literature, especially postcolonial CYA texts (*Unsettling*, 14). She continues that “traversing the spaces between cultures” is often connected to the identity formation of indigenous characters. Junior’s journey corresponds to this process Bradford describes.

A theme *Diary* does not share with many other Native American texts is their mystical, spiritual aspect, the “sense of the interconnectedness and relationship between all things” (Porter 43). A “decidedly anti-romantic view of Native life” characterises Alexie’s fiction, Ruppert (184) claims. Myth and connectedness with nature does not play a main role in his fiction. According to Grassian, Alexie criticises the stereotypical representation of American Indians as “nature-loving noble savages” (7) and refuses to present them this way in his texts. Rather, he wants to

write about daily lives and concerns of Native Americans, Alexie once said in an interview (qtd. in Grassian 8).

What also sets Alexie apart from many canonical writers' "earnest lyricism" is his "direct comedic style and ironic attitude" (Moore 297). In his YA novel, as in most of Alexie's art, he writes about the darkest sides of his country's colonial past and its ongoing, destructive effects (Moore 297) without ever losing his admittedly rather black humour. According to Porter (60), however, humour "has a central, healing role within many aspects of Indian cultural life." "It is notoriously culturally specific," she continues, and claims "Native American literature and life are replete with" it. This claim is supported by Haladay, who speaks of a "pan-tribal practice of Native American humor as a social critique to counter [...] colonial oppression" (204). It comes as no surprise, then, that humour is common in postcolonial literature in general, as Reichl and Stein's edited volume on *Laughter and the Postcolonial* demonstrates. Furthermore, Porter's observation that humour "has always provided a valuable bridge between Native and non-Native ways of seeing the world" (60) additionally strengthens my above statement that Junior tries to interact with a non-native reader. In an interview, Alexie calls humour his green card, a temporary "passport into other people's cultures" (Nelson 43).

This section's objective was to demonstrate that *Diary* is firmly rooted in the established tradition of Native American writing, yet Alexie's voice is notably distinct from many of his predecessors and contemporaries. Since the trauma of colonialism is such a central motif in Native American literature and Sherman Alexie's oeuvre, a few parallels between Junior's accounts and historical events will be pointed out next.

#### **4.2.3 Historical references**

Alexie's first-person narrator refers to colonial oppression and its lasting effects several times throughout the book. For example, he alludes to turn-of-the-century reservation education which was dominated by army captain Richard H. Pratt's motto "Kill the Indian and save the man!" (Porter 52). In an attempt to foster assimilation and "annihilate Indian culture" (Porter 52), schools prohibited Native languages and religious practices. Children were taken from their parents and placed within non-native families (Coulombe 28; Porter 52). In the novel, Mr. P, Junior's teacher in Wellpinit, in an expression of 'white guilt', apologises for being part of a system which tried to make Native Americans give up "being Indian": their "songs and stories and language and dancing. Everything [...] We were trying to kill Indian culture". "We were

supposed to kill the Indian to save the child” (*Diary* 35). Kertzer (60-61) interprets Mr. P as a fictionalisation of Pratt himself, whom Alexie imagines apologising to American Indians.

What is more, Junior’s father’s sarcastic statement “We should give thanks that they didn’t kill all of us” (*Diary* 102) refers to the enormous loss of population Native Americans suffered in the course of colonisation. Estimates range from one million to eighteen million or more casualties (Porter 40). The USA’s First Nations also lost ninety-five per cent of their landbase and from more than five-hundred languages only approximately two-hundred are left today (Porter 40). Presently, Native Americans constitute a small minority in the US-American population. The 2010 census found that 1.7 per cent of the US American population (5.2 million) identify as American Indian or Alaska Native, 0.9 per cent or 2.9 million of which as Native only and 0.7 per cent (2.3 million) in combination with other ethnicities. Between 2000 and 2010, the American Indian and Alaska Native alone population increased by 18 per cent, from 2.5 to 2.9 million. Minority populations generally grew in this decade from 86.9 million to 111.9 million out of a total of 308.7 million citizens, which leaves 196.8 million, or 72 per cent of people living in the USA, who identify as white alone (Humes, Jones, and Ramirez 3-18). These figures indicate that despite Native Americans’ small proportion of the US-American population, it is growing and far from vanishing.

Returning to *Diary*, Junior’s observation that reservations were created as prisons for American Indians to “move onto [...] and die” (216), to “disappear” (*Diary* 216), is based on actual historical processes too. According to Porter, the first reservations were established by Puritans in the 1630s as “segregated areas where it was intended Indians would live, detribalize, and convert to Christianity” (48). In the early years of the United States, several bills and treaties legitimized the appropriation of indigenous lands to expand to the Pacific coast and fulfil what was known as ‘Manifest Destiny’. Federal policy promoted the isolation and removal of Native Americans (Coulombe 22). Tribes were ruthlessly relocated (which culminated in the Cherokee ‘Trail of Tears’) and violently forced to move on small, poor reservation lands, where different tribes must live together under terrible conditions, “unable to practise traditional modes of economic, social, and religious life” (Porter 54). They were economically dependent on governmental support due to the colonisers’ systematic destruction of natural resources and wildlife (Porter 48-53). Native Americans were thought to assimilate into mainstream American society or disappear from sight. However assimilated, American Indians were never fully integrated into society. They only gained citizenship in 1924 (Porter 53) and still “face



acute ongoing threats to the sovereignty of their remaining land base,” their environment, natural resources, and culture (Porter 40).

Another fact Junior addresses, is the great percentage of American Indians living beneath the poverty line, which negatively impacts health statistics (Porter 39-40), life expectancy, and incarceration rates (Bradford 188). Extreme poverty is still a major structural problem in Native American communities. Urban and reservation life remains characterised by “endemic disadvantage rooted firmly in the history of colonialism” (Porter 39). The narrator further mentions the newly established stereotype of the rich Indian (Porter 61) who benefits from casinos in operation on Indian reservations: “Everyone in Reardan assumed we Spokanes made lots of money because we had a casino” (*Diary* 119).

Junior’s critical view of America’s colonial history echoes through the narrative. Statements such as “We Indians really should be better liars, considering how often we’ve been lied to” (10), “ever since white people showed up and brought along their Christianity [...], Indians have gradually lost all of their tolerance” (155), and “I always think it’s funny when Indians celebrate Thanksgiving,” since “a few years later, Pilgrims were shooting Indians” (101) unveil Junior’s critical stance towards colonialism and suggest an anti-white sentiment. His postcolonial criticism of the roots of Native Americans’ misery and binary world view will be a central focus of the following section’s close reading of the novel.

### **4.3 Race and identity**

“I used to think the world was broken down by tribes,’ I said. ‘By black and white. By Indian and white. But I know that isn’t true. The world is only broken into two tribes: The people who are assholes and the people who are not’” (176). In the following, Junior’s thoughts on race and identity will be discussed.

#### **4.3.1 Race**

In his so-called ‘diary’, which does not actually follow the typical diary format (as discussed below), Junior records reflections on the troubled relationship between white and indigenous Americans, stereotypes, and racism. His entries are particularly concerned with contrasting opportunities and social difference. To him, whiteness symbolises privilege, hope, and prosperity. And the students at Reardan are not only white, they are “*translucent*” (56). Junior believes that the white students at Reardan have everything he has not and although he is “suspicious” (212) of white people at first, he wants to take part in their world (“I was going to

have a better life out in the white world” (217)). When his father says white people are no better than him, Junior feels that he is wrong: “He was a loser Indian father of a loser Indian son living in a world built for winners” (55).

Junior’s reflections on race and ethnicity are not confined to a description of the disadvantage of being a Native American in the USA. The narrator also describes Native American cultural practices and traditions such as the powwow celebration with its chicken dancers and traditional food (17), his grandmother’s wake (161), and American Indian humour (166). He explains that Spokane Indians usually spend their lives close to their birth place (89). Humorously, he also tells the readers that cutting off a man’s braids is “the worst thing you can do to an Indian guy” (22). These examples suggest that his narrative implies non-indigenous readers, a thesis which is supported by Bradford’s interpretation of the text (“Race” 46), and that he wants them to understand his world. He says so himself: “I want to talk to the world. And I want the world to pay attention to me” (6). In Reichl’s terms, Junior’s cultural explanations might function as visualisation of ethnicity with the goal of successful communication between different (white/indigenous) cultures (*Ethnic* 51-53). Junior underestimates the implied reader’s “ethnic and cultural semiotic competence” (*Ethnic* 53), because he feels the need to explain indigenous cultural signs. However, Junior does not explain everything. For instance, he never elaborates what fry bread is, which points to an implied indigenous reader who would likely be familiar with it (see also Reichl, *Ethnic* 77). Possibly, Junior also aims to educate native and non-native readers (see also Kertzer 58) and raise awareness of American Indian culture. A different postcolonial reading might find, however, that he almost describes Indigeneity as an Orientalist would describe the Orient. By explaining their traditions to the readers, Junior positions himself as well as his fellow tribal members as ‘other’. He also constructs cultural difference (Bhabha 3). Junior definitely stresses the differences between white and Native American cultures and provides the non-indigenous readers with information about his tribe he assumes they do not know. When he writes “That’s one more thing people don’t know about Indians” (136), and “white people everywhere have always believed that the government gives money to Indians” (119), he claims to know what people do and do not know about Native Americans, the exotic ‘other’. On the whole, Junior’s descriptions of Native American culture follow an ‘Us’ vs. ‘Them’ logic (e.g. “We Indians” (215) versus “those kids” (50)). This is best portrayed in a comic showing Junior and a white student both split in half (57), the white boy having “A BRIGHT FUTURE” and wearing branded clothes, and Junior facing a “BONE CRUSHING REALITY” and “A VANISHING PAST” [original emphases] and wearing cheap clothing.



Fig. 1. Forney, "White/Indian." *Diary*, 57.

Junior's cartoons also depict ethnicity, often in an ironic, mocking way, which will be elaborated below. As a side note regarding images in the novel, I would like to draw attention to the book cover, which stereotypically depicts an American Indian warrior and a 'cowboy'. Together with the title, it raises expectations about the story and adds to the book's discourse of race and identity. The significance of extra-textual features and their impact on the reading process have been analysed by Reichl (*Ethnic* 56-62).

Junior does not only characterise Native Americans as being different, he also describes them and their culture as somewhat strange. Examples include: "we're Indians, so trust me, we've seen some really weird stuff" (165); "we're Indians, and we like to make up shit about lakes, you know?" (222); "I'm still an Indian and we like to be scared. I don't know what it is about us but we love ghosts. We love monsters" (223); and "I mean, jeez, we Indians are just weird" (224). By calling Native American traditions "weird" (29; 224) and, thus, assuming they deviate from the norm, he positions Native Americans as inferior 'other' once again. In addition, he risks a naturalisation of ethnic otherness, just as colonial discourse constructed the subject as essentially 'other' (Bhabha 67). Junior's statements are also examples of his self-conscious and self-mocking humour, which will be addressed below.

Finally, Junior's use of the colonial term "Indian" is as revealing as it raises questions. Possibly, the narrator wants to "resignify" it as many American Indians do to give it a more positive meaning (Bradford 6). Or else, it would point to an internalisation of colonial terminology. Or maybe the narrator appropriates the term to subvert colonial discourse in a humorous way.

#### **4.3.2 Poverty: the intersectionality of race and class**

Poverty as a central theme in the book becomes apparent in the pivotal passage in which Junior, on his first day of high school, throws his mother's old geometry book at his teacher. The fact that he is supposed to study from dated teaching materials, because his "school and [his] tribe are so poor and sad" (31), shatters all the boy's hopes and dreams (31). This life-changing moment and a subsequent conversation with his teacher inspire Junior to become the first one to leave the reservation and attend Reardan high school to pursue better education (41-47).

Throughout the book, Junior keeps referring to his family's socio-economic circumstances. For example, right in the first chapter the reader learns that he had to have ten teeth pulled out at once, because the Indian Health Service funds dental care only once a year (2). "I am really just a poor-ass reservation kid living with his poor-ass family on the poor-ass Spokane Indian Reservation," he says about himself (7). He sometimes has to go to bed hungry (8), cannot afford new clothes ("I pretty much look half-homeless anyway" (77)), walk twenty-two miles home from school (87), and, what is worst for him, his father is forced to shoot his dog, since the family cannot afford to see a doctor (10-14). He is ashamed of being "dirt poor" (119) and worried that his new friends, especially his girlfriend, Penelope, would dismiss him as soon as they find out (124). So, he lies about how poor he actually is, he pretends to "be middle class," to "belong" (119). Junior does not blame his parents for their poverty. He says they work hard to give him "just enough" (119) money. Rather, he seems to blame structural deficiencies. "[I]t's not like my mother and father were born into wealth. It's not like they gambled away their family fortunes. My parents came from poor people who came from poor people who came from poor people, all the way back to the very first poor people," he writes (11). He believes that Native Americans living on reservations do not get the chance to realise their dreams: "We're just poor. That's all we are" (13). "It sucks to be poor, and it sucks to feel that you somehow *deserve* to be poor," he goes on. "You start believing that you're poor because you're stupid and ugly. And then you start believing that you're stupid and ugly because you're Indian. And because you're Indian you start believing you're destined to be poor" (13). Here, the intersection (Crenshaw) of race and class, being Native American and poor is striking. A postcolonial reading of the text could interpret this as quasi-Orientalist self-fulfilling prophecy.

Stereotypes as well as the dominant discourse about poor Native Americans living miserable lives on reservations become reality and Native Americans like Junior start to believe they were “destined” for a life in poverty. Poverty, thus, has historical roots and far-reaching consequences. It is endemic among his tribe. This is why, as Junior puts it eloquently, “my reservation [...] is located approximately one million miles north of Important and two billion miles west of Happy” (30). Junior views prosperity as closely connected to whiteness and poverty as tied to being Native American. For instance, it surprises him that “there is a place in the world where white people are poorer than Indians” (45) and that not all white people are successful (131).

Linked to poverty is also the theme of alcohol abuse among Spokane Native Americans, which Junior describes vividly (e.g. 54, 88, 91). For example, when Junior’s father returns from a nine-day drinking bout on which he spent all the family’s remaining money out of despair, because he could not afford Christmas presents, Junior thinks his boots “smelled like booze and fear and failure” (150-151). Most people who live on the reservation are portrayed as alcoholics. Junior considers somebody who does not drink “the rarest kind of Indian in the world” (158). He is convinced that “all Indian families are unhappy for the same exact reasons: the fricking booze” (200). They drink because they are unhappy (40; 70). Loss of hope and lack of money and perspective is what makes them unhappy. Junior writes: “We Indians have LOST EVERYTHING. We lost our native land, we lost our languages, we lost our songs and dances. We lost each other. We only knew how to lose and be lost” (173). Here, Junior’s narration takes on a distinctly postcolonial point of view. He addresses the trauma of colonisation and Native Americans’ subsequent loss of language and culture. That Native Americans still endure miserable conditions imposed on them by white people centuries ago and are unable to participate in the dominant society, could mean that they have not overcome the trauma of colonisation yet and are to some degree, still colonised. Junior criticises alcohol abuse, because to him, it means that Native Americans have given up and drink to forget their pain. For example, he says: “I cried because so many of my fellow tribal members were slowly killing themselves and I wanted them to live. I wanted them to get strong and get sober and get the hell out of the rez” (216). He wants them to take action, to end their misery and passivity. What is more, all three tragic deaths in the novel are directly linked to alcohol abuse (157; 169; 205). Junior expresses his frustration and sadness about all the violence and loss he has already encountered in his short life: “I’m fourteen years old and I’ve been to forty-two funerals. That’s really the biggest difference between Indians and white people” (199). “And you know what the worst part is? [...] About 90 percent of the deaths have been because of alcohol” (200). He

believes that Native Americans are prone to experience tragic deaths, especially deaths caused by alcohol consumption, more than white people. To him, death and suffering is typically “Indian” (203), which, again, stresses the intersection between class and race.

#### **4.3.3 “Who has the most hope?” (45): Hope and whiteness**

In contrast to misery, hope is another recurring theme. Junior associates hope with whiteness and, thus, puts white people in opposition to Native Americans, ‘othering’ (Spivak, see also Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *Concepts* 156-157) both his own as well as white people. “I don’t know if hope is white,” he says. “But I do know that hope for me is like some mythical creature” (51), thus, unreal. In a drawing (51), he portrays whiteness as a radiant, flying horse. Also his parents tell Junior “white people” have “the most hope” (45) and his teacher advises Junior to “go somewhere where other people have hope,” which is “the farther and farther you walk away from this sad, sad, sad, reservation” (43). On the reservation, prospects are poor, because of a structural lack of possibilities for the residents there. The link between education, class, and race is evident. Junior’s parents, for example “dreamed about being something other than poor, but they never got the chance to be anything because nobody paid attention to their dreams. Given the chance, my mother would have gone to college,” (11) he writes. In an act of resilience, Junior refuses to submit to this life laid out for him. Junior describes himself as “excited about life [...] excited about school” (28). He wants to learn and pursue his dreams. To him, education it is the gateway to success and a better life (46) and Reardan offers just that. Due to its range of facilities and because Junior thinks the students there are “the best”, going there is like flying “to the moon” (46). Junior imagines the students at Reardan as beautiful, wise, and “filled with hope” (50). He admires the Other in the Lacanian sense of “the great Other, in whose gaze the subject gains identity,” or “imperial centre, imperial discourse” in postcolonial studies (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *Concepts* 155)), and wishes to belong to them. “Reardan was the opposite of the rez. It was the opposite of my family. It was the opposite of me. I didn’t deserve to be there. I knew it; all of those kids knew it. Indians don’t deserve shit” (56). By contrasting white and indigenous people’s prospects this way, he defines himself against the dominant Other. The Other, Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin explain, “provides the terms in which the colonized subject gains a sense of his or her identity as somehow ‘other’, dependent; second, it becomes the ‘absolute pole of address’” (*Concepts* 155-156). This is exactly how Junior describes himself; as inferior and ‘other’ to white students. Moreover, Junior’s view that “Indians don’t deserve shit” strengthens my claim that structural deficiencies deny Native Americans opportunities for advancement. It also mirrors colonial myths.

As the story progresses, he recognises more similarities between Native American and white US-citizens. For example, he realises that white people are also tied to limitations. Just like himself, “white girls from small farm towns weren’t supposed to dream big, either” (112). Nevertheless, his opinion that white people are privileged does not change. After Reardan’s victory against Wellpinit’s basketball team, Junior, overwhelmed by shame and guilt, ponders that Reardan students have everything and Native Americans have nothing:

Okay, so maybe my white teammates had problems, serious problems, but none of their problems was life-threatening. But I looked over at the Wellpinit Redskins, at Rowdy. I knew that two or three of those Indians might not have eaten breakfast this morning. No food in the house. I knew that seven or eight of those Indians lived with drunken mothers and fathers. I knew that one of those Indians had a father who dealt crack and meth. I knew two of those Indians had fathers in prison. I knew that none of them were going to college. Not one of them (195-196)

The dichotomous themes of white versus Native American, hope versus desperation and education versus failure resonate with the story.

#### 4.3.4 Racism: “Red Versus White” (152)

Apart from social differences, Junior’s thoughts on alterity also include racism. His frequent mentioning of racist encounters shows his heightened sensitivity towards racism. For example, when he was little, his white dentist only gave him “half the Novocaine,” because he thought Native Americans “only felt half as much pain as white people did” (2). He also remembers that his father was stopped by the police “for DWI: Driving While Indian” and claims that Reardan is “filled with farmers and rednecks and racist cops who stop every Indian that drives through” (46). On his first day of school, the white students cannot believe their eyes. “They stared at me like I was Bigfoot or a UFO. What was I doing at Reardan, whose mascot was an Indian, thereby making me the only *other* Indian in town” (56), Junior remembers. Note the (original) emphasis on the word ‘other’. In one of his drawings (Fig. 2), Junior stresses the mascot’s stereotypical, racist representation of a Native American person.



Fig. 2. Forney, “Reardan’s Inspiring Mascot.” *Diary*, 56.

The fact that Reardan’s mascot is an American Indian is not only racist, but also an indication of the dominant, postcolonial society’s “privileged position” (Bradford, 64) to engage with

indigenous culture whenever and as much as they want to. This can be very superficial, for instance through using Aboriginal symbols during the “opening ceremony of the Sydney Olympics,” Bradford (64) explains with regard to an Australian context. Here, a Native American mascot unveils Reardan’s position of power and its superficial engagement with its colonial past. In addition, the school’s mascot is an example of objectification, maybe even appropriation, of American Indian identity.

Some of the boys (who Junior believes think he is “still a potential killer” (63)) also call him names like “Chief, Red skin, Squaw Boy” (63-64). The most extreme manifestation of racism Junior faces at Reardan is evident in the following ‘joke’: “Did you know that Indians are living proof that niggers fuck buffalo?” (64). According to the narrator, this is “the most racist thing” he has ever heard in his life (64). Junior is so insulted that he hits Roger, but to Junior’s surprise, instead of punching back, Roger calls him “an animal” (65). Junior’s sensitivity to racism is evident in this sequence. Another person whom Junior describes as racist is Penelope’s father, Earl. On their first encounter, Earl tells Junior to leave his daughter alone and threatens to disown her if they “make some charcoal babies” (109). The phobia of miscegenation (see Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *Concepts* 127) so present in postcolonial literature is evident in this example. Junior feels that especially “old white guys” give him “the stink eye for just being Indian” and think that he shouldn’t be attending this school (154).

Furthermore, Junior appears to have internalised some racist ideas and stereotypes about Native Americans, because he repeats them in his ‘diary’. To provide an example, as Junior notices that he is intelligent, he writes he is “not just smart for an Indian” (84) and thereby degrades his own intellect and Native Americans in general. What is more, although largely ironically, he compares himself to a “warrior” (91), imagines his sister, who left the reservation shortly after Junior, to “roa[m] the huge grassy fields of Montana” (91), believes that a “real Indian” lives in the woods (58), uses a font reminiscent of Western movies when he lists the “SPOKANE INDIAN RULES OF FISTICUFFS” (61), and claims that his tribe used to consider his vulnerable brain as “beautiful and sacred and magical” (86) and that crying is “the opposite of warrior” (75). Furthermore, he says he has “never seen an Indian look that red. So why do they call us redskins?” (84). Despite the obvious irony in Junior’s writing, his replication of colonial vocabulary and stereotypes show how present they are in his mind. On being interviewed before the basketball rematch, Junior writes: “And I was kind of suspicious that white people were really interested in seeing some Indians battle each other. I think it was sort of like watching dogfighting, you know? It made me feel exposed and primitive” (184). This example, again,



shows Junior's low self-esteem and negative self-image. It further unmasks his internalised colonial mentality, however satirising and exaggerated his narrative may be. The fact that he feels "primitive," like a dog, brings old colonial stereotypes to light. Descriptions of indigenous peoples as savage, wild and opposite of civilisation were common in colonial discourse and are frequently found in postcolonial literature (Bradford, "Race" 39). This construction of the colonised as inferior served to justify their subjection to the colonisers (Bhabha 70). Junior draws analogies between Native Americans and animals several times and he degrades himself to something less than human. In a moment of loneliness, he even calls himself "opposite of human" (83) and dehumanises himself. Only when he wins Roger's respect, he feels "almost like a human being" (72) again - as if his humanity depended on the acceptance of his white peers. Just seconds later, however, "Penelope the Beautiful" ignores him and sniffs (73), which offends Junior. Also, when he talks about his medical condition, Junior compares himself to an animal. For example, he says he had "[t]en teeth past human" (2) before he underwent painful surgery in order to be able to "eat normally, not like some slobbering vulture" (2).

Another racist, postcolonial encounter takes place when a white collector of indigenous art visits the reservation. Offended, Junior says: "Do you know how many white strangers show up on Indian reservations every year and start telling Indians how much they love them? Thousands. It's sickening. And boring" (162). When the visitor expresses his admiration for Native American craftsmanship and claims he opens his door to "Indians," Junior says sceptically: "Oh, please" (163). Junior certainly does not believe the visitor's intentions are sincere. He recognises the collector's desire for indigenous crafts hidden behind philanthropic pretence. Junior's description of the stranger in a cartoon emphasises that the man is a sham. He depicts him as wearing overpriced, 'fake' Native American clothing and jewellery. In the image, the collector also wears a "sacred leather scrotum sheath' purchased from Navajo shaman for \$1000 (actually a Kmart Naugahyde baby booty purchased by Navajo conman for \$3.99)" and "U.S. Cavalry boots' worn by Kevin Costner in *Dances With Wolves*" (162). This passage can be read in terms of the colonial gaze and appropriation of indigenous culture, in which the dominant society incorporates elements of the suppressed peoples' culture into their own (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *Concepts* 15). Junior's disapproval of white people's interest in Native Americans and their art could be further interpreted as rejection of "cultural colonialism" (Grassian 9) Native Americans are subject to. He seems to view this interest as imperial usurpation. After all, curiosity and appropriation of American Indians means "further erasure and dispossession," as Moore (301) explains. Collectors like the visitor make "Indians feel like insects pinned to a display board" (163), Junior narrates. In Said's terms this means

Junior refuses to be scrutinised, categorised, and put on display, as Orientalists would study Orientals.

Racist clichés are not only directed at Native Americans. Prejudice and stereotypes also characterise Junior's view of non-natives. At Reardan, he falls in love with a white girl called Penelope, who he thinks is just perfect and who he likes to “*stare* at” (113). To describe and arguably satirize (Kertzer 54) his lust for her, he uses a rather racist and sexist metaphor: “she was all white on white on white, like the most perfect kind of vanilla dessert cake you’ve ever seen. I wanted to be her chocolate topping” (*Diary* 114). In this passage, the narrator compares Penelope to something edible, a nice dessert he wishes to consume, and he thereby objectifies the girl. Penelope is Junior's object of desire. Junior keeps wondering how he can “make a beautiful white girl fall in love with” him (81) and he asks his friends Rowdy and Gordy for advice. Rowdy says he is “sick of Indian guys who treat white women like bowling trophies” (115) and Gordy answers that Junior is “a racist asshole like everybody else” (116), because he cares more about privileged white girls than others. The fact that Junior highlights Penelope's skin colour this way and believes that white girls are different from non-white girls, reveal that he can be racist, too. Other Native Americans are shown to hold racist views about white people as well. Rowdy, for instance, does not approve of Junior's decision to attend a white school and calls him “white lover” (53), Eugene worries if Junior will be okay, because “[t]here's a lot of white people” (71) there, and on the reservation, it is common knowledge, Junior explains, that “[y]ou must always pick fights with the sons and/or daughters of any white people who live anywhere on the reservation” (62). “Indians can be just as judgmental and hateful as any white person,” Junior realises (155). For the readers, this may be disturbing, since they are likely to empathise with the narrator. However, such moments of “cognitive dissonance” or confusion can be a fruitful part of a learning process that ideally leads to transcultural and “intersubjective understanding” (Reichl, “Doing” 111). I can only speculate about the purpose of the portrayal of Junior as racially prejudiced. It stresses his binary world-view, the divide between the two cultures, Junior's ambivalent feelings for the dominant society, and makes it more understandable why Junior struggles with his ‘hybrid’ identity. It also adds depth to the character and makes him more believable. Moving between societies so inflicted by racism, why should this mentality not affect him? one might ask. Maybe the book wants to show that societies are prejudiced against each other unless they open up to dialogue, until “you let people in your life” (129). Junior's opinion of white people changes in the course of the story and he accepts his being part of it. The reader may recognise the omnipresence of racism, understand Junior's world better, and, above all, reflect his or her own position while reading the novel.

### 4.3.5 Identity

Junior's search for his identity is clearly a dominant theme in *Diary*, in particular with regard to his wish to belong. He identifies as American Indian, but only as "Part-Time Indian" (title), because he also tries to integrate with the local community in Reardan. "I was half Indian in one place and half white in the other. It was like being Indian was my job, but it was only a part-time job" (118). His consideration of being "Indian" as a "part-time job" again highlights his struggle to come to terms with his 'hybrid' identity and the feeling of unbelonging to either community. "Travelling between Reardan and Wellpinit" (*Diary* 119), he is caught "in-between" them (Bhabha 38). His torn identity is also expressed in his names. On the reservation, everybody calls him Junior and at Reardan high school, his name is Arnold: "It's Junior and Arnold. I'm both" (60). This makes him feel "like two different people inside one body," "like a magician slicing myself in half, with Junior living on the north side of Spokane River and Arnold living on the south" (61). Since he explains that "every other *Indian*" (60) calls him Junior, he seems to prefer this name, and names potentially signify identification with ethnic groups (Reichl, *Ethnic* 72), I also use it in my analysis.

The 'hybridity' of Junior's identity also involves his sense of belonging to neither community. At his new school, Junior is an outsider. The only Native American apart from the school mascot (56), he is an exotic newcomer, a "stranger in a strange land" (81). When he first arrives, all students stare at him "like [he] was bad weather" (59) and they think his accent is "funny" (61), which makes him not "say another word for six days" (61). He is intimidated by his new peer group. "I felt like somebody had shoved me into a rocket ship and blasted me to a new planet. I was a freaky alien" (66). His new classmates also make fun of Junior. For example, when he introduces himself, they laugh at him ("I had no idea Junior was a weird name. It's a common name on my rez, on any rez" (60)). What is even worse for Junior is that most students ignore him ("Those white kids did not talk to me. They barely looked at me" (83)). Even as he becomes a basketball star and compensates his socio-economic and ethnic background with this talent, he remains an outsider in "racist Reardan" (56). "I would always be an outsider. And no matter how good I was, I would always be an Indian" (181), Junior writes. "I looked and talked and dreamed and walked differently than everybody else" (110). The "fixity" in the construction of himself as 'other' (Bhabha 66) is striking. It may point to an "internalisation of the self as an 'other'," which, according to Fanon, the colonised were forced into (McLeod, *Beginning* 20). Moreover, Junior believes that his new friends only seek his company, because he is "mysterious" and "new" (*Diary* 110) and that Penelope dates him "ONLY because" he is a Native American boy. "She wanted to get a little smudged. And I was the smudge" (110),

Junior says self-deprecatingly. This example can also be read with reference to Bhabha, who says that stereotyping “incorporates a contradictory mixture of fascination and distaste,” to borrow Bradford’s words (78). Junior thinks Penelope is interested in and repelled by him at the same time. Calling himself “smudge” also makes Junior not only an ‘other,’ but an inferior ‘other,’ a view also evident in this example: “I woke up on the reservation as an Indian, and somewhere on the road to Reardan, I became something less than Indian. And once I arrived at Reardan, I became something less than less than Indian” (83).

After leaving the reservation, Junior also feels as if he did not belong to his tribal community anymore either. Many tribal members resent him for leaving. They call him names and slam doors in his face (79), harass him, spit on him, and call him “traitor” (79) as well as “apple”: “red on the outside and white on the inside” (132). Some people “think you *become* white if you try to make your life better, if you become successful,” (131). Simultaneously, Junior believes that he has betrayed his tribe and he is convinced that there is no way for him to return to his former school and his former life (55). Only few people, like his grandmother, appreciate his brave move to go to a white school. To give another example, again rather ironically, Junior thinks he is not a “real Indian” (58). On the reservation, he is an outsider also due to his medical condition. He was born with hydrocephalus, “water on the brain,” or “brain grease,” as Junior calls it (1) degradingly. As a consequence, when he was a child, he suffered from seizures, severe speech impediments as well as limited eye-sight (2-4). Children on the reservation have always made fun of Junior’s brain disorder, physiognomy, stutter and lisp. They have humiliated, and physically harassed him (3-4). “Everybody on the rez calls me a retard about twice a day” (4). Such depictions of himself highlight his imagined powerlessness. That Junior describes himself as “weirdo” (1) in the very beginning of the novel immediately fosters the impression of his otherness.

As the story unfolds, Junior realises he is not just a stranger, but also part of both communities. As an outsider and insider at the same time, he begins to see the cultures in a different light and he notices flaws and virtues about them. Junior’s antipathy and prejudice against white people decreases throughout the story as he integrates into his new environment and is accepted by his schoolmates, who even stand up for him (85; 175). He becomes a popular basketball player, and he and Penelope are a “semi-hot item” (122). “I was important to them. I mattered” (212), Junior realises, stunned, given their initial mutual suspicion. “If you let people in your life a little bit, they can be pretty damn amazing,” (129) he writes. Having said that, Junior states that it is not true that he has “completely fallen in love with white people” and that he does not “see

anything good in Indians” (152). He is “still part of the rez” (160), part of the tribal community: “We lived and died together” (166). He loves his family (153) and praises the beauty of the reservation (219), be it hopeless and deprived of its cultural heritage as it is. After his grandmother’s death, bullies on the reservation stop harassing him, because he is in too much pain already. “I wasn’t suddenly popular, of course. But I wasn’t a villain anymore” (160). In the end, when Rowdy finally forgives him, the “Indian” part of his ‘hybrid’ identity is restored. Rowdy compares Junior to an “old-time nomad” who keeps “moving all over the world in search of food and water and grazing land” (230). By calling him the only nomadic “Indian” on the reservation, Rowdy acknowledges that Junior is more “Indian” than most American Indians there. Ultimately, Junior realises that he does not have to be either Spokane Native American or a member of Reardan’s basketball team. He can be both, he can belong to different “tribes” (217), as he calls them. This epiphany helps him resolve his identity crisis and come to terms with his multi-tribal self. As the concept of ‘hybridity’ suggests, subjectivity is not stable or one-dimensional. It is fluid, non-binary, and constantly negotiated through performance (McLeod, *Beginning* 218-219). Junior seems to realise this at the end of the book.

Junior’s identity conflict is further mirrored in two emotional basketball games between Junior’s former and new schools’ teams, the Wellpinit Redskins and the Reardan Indians (note the colonial names). The games can be read as a metaphor for Junior’s personal crisis as well as for the gulf between Native Americans and white Americans, personified by the players. Junior has to play against his fellow tribal members, his former schoolmates, whom he left behind on the reservation. Now, he is part of the white team and he has to face the Spokanes’, especially Rowdy’s, anger. His closest friend has momentarily become his “worst enemy” (53). When Junior’s team arrives in Wellpinit for the first game, their bus is showered with snowballs filled with rocks, the crowd shouts “Ar-nold sucks” (143), calling Junior by his “Reardan name” (143), and they turn their backs on him as he runs into the court (143). As violence erupts, the “tribal cops had to pull twenty or thirty adult Spokanes off the court before any of them assaulted a teenage white kid” (146) and the referees, “two white dudes from Spokane,” are “absolutely terrified of the wild Indians in the crowd” (147). The evocation of the colonial stereotype of the wild, savage Indian in this sequence is striking. Junior has to be taken to hospital with a concussion and Wellpinit wins. In the rematch, Junior desperately wants to beat Rowdy. However, he also worries about his role as “some kind of crusading warrior” (182) a victory against Wellpinit would entail. A cartoon portrays Junior as both an angel and a devil, wondering who he is (“Who AM I???” 182). In an interview before the game, he says he needs to prove that he will never give up, not just in basketball, which stresses the character’s

resilience. Junior plays an excellent game and Reardan wins. In the description of their triumph, Junior uses colonial rhetoric as he compares the game to colonial war against North American First Nations. “Jeez, I felt like one of those Indian scouts who led the U.S. Cavalry against other Indians” (182); “We had killed the Redskins. Yep, we had humiliated them. We were dancing around the gym, laughing and screaming and chanting” (194). Junior depicts himself as traitor; as Native American who betrays his people and gives the colonisers an advantage over them in the battle. At the same time, he behaves in a stereotypical Native American manner, chanting and dancing around the gym. Soon, Junior realises how much this game has meant to his fellow tribal members, Rowdy most of all, and feels ashamed for his behaviour (198).

#### 4.4 Coping strategies

To come to terms with his fluid identity and deal with racism, Junior applies various coping strategies. Keeping a ‘diary’ is one of the most obvious ones. *Diary* does not follow typical generic conventions such as dates of entry and salutations, its episodic style still justifies the categorisation of the books as diary, nonetheless. Junior uses his ‘diary’ to tell an unspecified implied reader about his life and his problems. He even addresses the reader directly. It can be argued that by asking rhetorical questions such as “Do you know the worst thing about being poor?” (8) he wants to interact with the reader and share his experiences. In addition, Junior arguably wants the readers to empathise with him when he asks for their consent (“Charming, huh?” (21); “Ain’t that weird?” (205)). His conversational, informal style arguably attracts young readers and evokes authenticity. For example, he frequently uses words like “Heck” (4), “jeez” (4), and “Yep” (4) as well as youth slang such as “Well, duh, yeah” (183), and the filler “like” (30). Moreover, Junior emphasises that his story is true, probably to gain the reader’s trust (“trust me” (10); “I swear to you” (13)). Whether the title of his *Absolutely True Diary* is also supposed to emphasise his truth claim or not, remains open for speculation. The opposite, namely an ironic way of saying the diary is not true whatsoever, could also be the case. This would imply that the first-person homodiegetic, or autodiegetic, narrator (Genette) is unreliable. Maybe the title simply indicates that the book is a work of fiction. Kertzer’s hypothesis is that the title’s insistence on truth “exemplifies Alexie’s deliberately imperfect mimicry” (59) of YAL conventions and canon, a notion she bases on Bhabha’s concept of colonial mimicry. Kertzer thinks the title critiques other (YA) novels’ ostensible truthfulness, especially those “that masquerade as autobiographical truth” (61) in diary format.

Next to writing, drawing comics is another important coping strategy. Junior draws, because he wants to reach out to the world and believes that everybody understands pictures (5-6). “I feel

important with a pen in my hand,” (6) he writes. To Junior, cartoons function as means of empowerment and gateway to success. They are “the only real chance to escape the reservation” (5-6). Further, he uses the cartoons (art by Ellen Forney) to express his feelings. They are often self-mocking (5), but also filled with pain (160), and help him deal with his grief (171). Junior draws cartoons to “understand the world”, “to make fun of the world. To make fun of people” (95) and give vent to his anger. He and Rowdy also use comic books to escape reality (23). Moreover, the images appear to be sellotaped to the pages in the book, which adds to the illusion of *Diary* as authentic diary. The cartoons further contribute non-verbal elements to the story and, thus, fulfil a homodiegetic function. According to Reichl (“Doing” 110) illustrations also “facilitate the reading process” and “motivational power of the narrative” and create immediacy.

Above all, humour helps Junior cope with racism and being a “*hormonal*” (25) teenager. Junior’s sense of humour allows him to transgress boundaries, to cope with the most tragic events as well as comic situations. It serves as comic relief in a sad narrative. “[S]ure, Indians were drunk and sad and displaced and crazy and mean, but, dang, we knew how to laugh” (166), he writes. To use Zusak’s words: “when a person reads *Diary*, they’re sure to laugh in the following ways: Lightly Excitedly Mournfully Raucously Knowingly Loudly Softly Tearfully Surprisingly Lovingly Angrily Admiringly.” Junior jokes about his medical condition, about Native American identity, white people, and God (“a good piece of chicken can make anybody believe in the existence of God” (8)). The protagonist ridicules his own disproportionate physique: “I looked like a capital L” (3); “I also had a stutter and a lisp. Or maybe I should say I had a st-st-st-st-stutter and a lisssssssthtthththp” (4); “If those Andruss brothers had punched a hole in the aquarium of my skull, I might have flooded the entire powwow” (21). In a humorous, almost ‘grotesque’ (Bakhtin; see also Baldick) caricature of himself, titled “Me in all my glory” (5), he portrays himself as a cross-eyed, lisping boy with big glasses, crooked, skinny legs and arms, a large head, and odd-looking teeth (5). He depicts himself as a ‘freak’ (cf. McGillis, “Humour” 267), as ‘other’. “I was a freaky alien” (66), he even writes about himself.

The narrative follows a long tradition of using the body as “a source of humour” in literature for young readers, be it verbal or visual. “Children’s humour depends largely on the body” and references to extraordinary size and exaggeration are common in humorous children’s literature, McGillis (“Humour” 258, 258-267) explains. Junior’s humour is obsessed with the body and sexuality (e.g. 21;26; 97). It could be argued that Junior’s humorous treatment of his

sexuality and bodily functions is meant to give him an authentic adolescent voice, to make the teenager reader identify with him. According to McGillis (“Humour” 261), this bodily, scatological kind of humour – which Cross (26) calls “comic grotesque” – is attractive to young readers, because it openly addresses taboo subjects. To provide an example, Junior states that even if the reader thinks he should not talk about masturbation in public, he is going to talk about it anyway “because EVERYBODY does it. And EVERYBODY likes it” (26). He, thus, involves the readers and makes them accomplices. In his tragi-comical ‘diary’, Junior also mocks Native Americans and their traditions. He caricatures them in a ‘carnavalesque’ (Bakhtin, see also Baldick) manner in some of his cartoons (for example as wearing feathers on their heads and a loincloth (Fig.3) and he jokes about their culture:

Now, in the old days, Indians used to be forgiving of any kind of eccentricity. In fact, weird people were often celebrated. Epileptics were often shamans because people just assumed that God gave seizure-visions to the lucky ones. Gay people were seen as magical, too. [...] gay people, being both male and female, were seen as both warriors and caregivers. Gay people could do anything. They were like Swiss Army knives! (155)



Fig. 3. Forney, “AAAUUAGH.” *Diary*, 142. Fig. 4. Forney, “Chicken Dancers.” *Diary*, 19.

He also jokes that he is “carrying the burden of [his] race” and “going to get a bad back from it” (43). Moreover, as his fellow tribal members turn their backs on him during the opening of the first basketball game, he cannot help laughing at the thought that had they been this organised before, he might not have left the reservation in the first place (144). In this passage, he handles his people’s protest and humiliation with cynical humour. His gallows humour is also apparent in his cartoon “Burning Love,” which shows his sister and her husband dying in a fire (213), and his angry response to his sister’s funeral: “How do we honor the drunken death of a young married couple? Hey, let’s get drunk!” (212). Humour, gallows and black humour in particular, functions a means to talk about grave topics and offers relief (McGillis, “Humour” 262). According to Cross (53-54), “cynical, sarcastic first-person narration[s],” especially diaries, may “fulfi[l] a carnivalesque, psychological ‘release’ function,” meaning that the



“funny and the fearful can exist at the same time” (196). A description of authentic emotions also works as a bridge to the reader (Moore 299). Humour can transcend boundaries and enhance identification. However, Kertzer cautions that the comedy in Alexie’s celebrated but controversial novel is “risky” (66), because it is uncertain if the reader laughs at the satirical deconstruction of the stereotypes the cartoons invoke, or at the stereotype, which would make Indians objects that are laughed at (66).

Lastly, Junior uses the basketball court as an arena wherein he acts out his inner conflict. He desperately wants to win against the Wellpinit Redskins and prove that he will never give up hope. To him, basketball is a source of confidence. He wants to live up to the high expectations set upon him by himself, his coach, and his family (180).

In the end, Junior succeeds in resolving his identity crisis by realising that it can be multi-faceted. He stops concentrating on race as the main factor and creates a new identity consisting of many elements (217). He concludes that he might be lonely, but “not alone in [his] loneliness”: “There were millions of other Americans who had left their birthplaces in search of a dream. I realized that, sure, I was a Spokane Indian. I belonged to that tribe. But I also belonged to the tribe of American immigrants. And to the tribe of basketball players. And to the tribe of bookworms. And the tribe of cartoonists” (217). And many more...

## **5. *The Hate U Give***

The second book to be analysed in this thesis is also a contemporary, realistic YA novel which is set in the United States. Its female African American protagonist shares many experiences with Junior, especially with regard to racism and their ‘hybrid’ identities, in spite of the stories’ diverging contexts. The following section provides the context for the story, explores the depiction of race and identity in *The Hate U Give* and identifies coping strategies.

### **5.1 Plot and themes**

Angie Thomas’s debut YA novel is about racism and police brutality in the United States. It portrays turbulent months in the life of Starr Carter, the sixteen-year old protagonist, who witnesses the fatal, racially motivated shooting of her childhood friend Khalil. As the word spreads that Khalil was unarmed, riots break out in Garden Heights, the fictional neighbourhood Starr’s family lives in. The police (half-heartedly) investigate the “incident” (97), national media cover the case, and even a grand jury summon Starr to give her account, however the officer is not convicted. Starr worries that her witness account could endanger her family and

herself, but she eventually speaks out against injustice – on live TV and before the district attorney – and she even participates in a demonstration against the decision, which, again, escalates into a riot. The protestors demand justice for Khalil and an end to police violence against black citizens. In the course of the story, Starr also struggles to come to terms with her ‘hybrid’ identity. She lives in a poor, black neighbourhood and attends an affluent, white school, in both of which she receives support and faces racism. In the end, Starr reconciles the “two worlds” (357) with each other; she finds her voice and identity. She engages in activism to fight against injustice and show that black lives matter too. Thomas’s realistic YA fiction is clearly inspired by the Black Lives Matter movement. Published in 2017, *Hate* also offers a timely portrayal of youth culture, life in a poor, violence-ridden neighbourhood, and, above all, racial inequality in the United States.

## **5.2 Contextualisation: African American literature and colonial history**

Similar to the concept of Native American literature, the term African American literature needs to be deconstructed before a brief overview of its development may follow. As with ethnical literatures in general, a separate treatment of African American literary production from American literature is problematic. First, there is the danger of over-simplification and generalisation of diverse cultural backgrounds, various forms of artistic expression, and individual authors. Secondly, it is questionable in how far African American literature differs from literature produced by Americans with European, Native American or other ancestry and whether there are clearly distinguishable characteristics to the texts at all (see also Warren 730). Thirdly, there is the danger of misinterpretation when texts written by African Americans are read only in the light of ethnical literary traditions like orality. Finally, traditions and canons with their tendency to create master narratives must be questioned as a whole, because they often exclude certain groups. The “creation of the fiction of tradition is a matter of power” (Washington xvii-xviii). Women writers, for example, are less visible than men, Washington (xvii) noted in 1987. This deficiency may be in the process of being rectified, as relatively recent publications such as *The Cambridge Companion to African American Women’s Literature* and a new edition of *New Black Feminist Criticism: 1985-2000* suggest. I specifically address women writers as underrepresented group here, because Angie Thomas is a black, female author. For the purpose of this thesis, I recognise the “contested” (Johnson 223) term African American literature foremost as an analytic category, used by literary critics to narrow down the massive body of work produced in the United States as well as by black writers who seek to position their work within this realm of literature. I understand it as literature by African Americans which typically, yet not exclusively, deals with themes surrounding black

experiences in the United States and includes African American characters (cf. Bishop 228). The following section provides a brief overview of central tropes and historical developments in African American writing, especially YA fiction. This will be followed by a discussion of how Thomas's novel *Hate* responds to them. Due to the lack of space it can take up in this thesis, the present contextualisation will only touch upon some of the field's salient features. For a detailed survey, see, for example, *The Cambridge History of African American Literature*, *A History of Afro-American Literature*, and *The Oxford Companion to African American Literature*, all of which I have consulted for the present thesis.

### **5.2.1 African American literature**

African American literature's origins can be located in Africa, because enslaved people shipped over the Atlantic did not lose memories of their cultures and languages in the 'Middle Passage', as Graham and Ward (2-3) argue. Especially oral traditions continued to inform African American literary production in the colonies now known as United States. Blyden, too, treats the slave trade and European expansion as crucial starting point in his historical overview. He dates the actual beginnings of African American literature to the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, however, when poems written in English by literate black slaves first appeared (Blyden 1-10). 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century anti-slavery, abolitionist narratives set the tone for future literary production. Social, cultural, and political themes of resistance against discrimination, questions of identity, empowerment, and emancipation concerned literature of the Black Diaspora. Slavery was abolished in the 13<sup>th</sup> amendment to the constitution, civil rights as well as male franchise (equal enfranchisement of men and women was only achieved as late as 1920 (Encyclopaedia Britannica)) and reforms bettered the situation for African Americans. Discrimination did not end, however, and neither did the writers and intellectuals' demand for equity. Self-representation, education, solidarity, and promotion of a positive image of black Americans were some of the agendas of black writers at the time. Increasing literacy among black men and women, migration to cities, and the establishment of an "independent black press" (Graham and Ward 10) fostered this enterprise. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, a "specific African American modernism" with its "collective declaration of identity and social cohesion" (10) brought wider attention to the discourse. From the 1920s until the 1950s, African American literature increasingly attracted public acceptance and curiosity, which also led to a growing "commercialization and commodification of African American expressive culture" (11). The Harlem, or New Negro Renaissance, was a prolific time of African American writing. But also the Chicago Renaissance and its turn to social realism marked a productive phase in this period. The Civil Rights movement and its call for equality and an end to segregation found expression

in literature, as did the Black Power and Feminist movements. In 1950, the first African American writer won a Pulitzer Prize (Gwendolyn Brooks for *Annie Allen*) and African American literature was established in the mainstream. Despite increasing demand for African American art, federal programs for social advancement, and the institutionalisation of Black Studies, discrimination and racial violence prevailed. The 1960s saw the emergence of radical, political, pro-black literature of the Black Arts and Black Aesthetic Movements. African American writers' productivity continued in the remainder of the 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century. In 1993, Toni Morrison was the first female African American writer to win the Nobel Prize for Literature. Authors celebrated the aesthetic and social functions of art as well as various modes of expression, including performance. Topic-wise, the literatures addressed issues of class, race, gender, power, culture, history and change. (Graham and Ward 7-16). Slave narratives, life-writing and revisionist historical fiction are among the best-known genres (Graham 5).

In YA literature, (fictionalised) biographies of slave writers, civil rights figures, and sports persons, folklore (Anatol 624-625) as well as contemporary, or urban realism (Johnson 220) constitute popular genres. African American YAL developed alongside its 'adult' counterpart, with which it shares its marginal position in the canon of American literature, its social and cultural context (Bishop 229) and its connection to social movements against institutionalised racism. It emerged in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, took shape in the 1920s during the Harlem Renaissance, as the magazine *Brownies' Book* was established as source of inspiration for the black youth, showing them that "being 'colored' is a normal and beautiful thing" (Fauset qtd in Johnson 211), and became popular in the 1960s and 70s. African American literary production and visibility increased in the field of CYAL, previously dominated by white writers. Uplift and the promotion of a firm sense of self are still some of its main purposes (Anatol 621-629). Unfortunately, no recent history of the past decade is available.

To sum up, despite my reservations against the focus on a single, constructed literary tradition (see also Graham and Ward 2-3), it can be argued that African American (YA) literature, similar to Native American literature, is generally concerned with the struggle for freedom and equality, empowerment, and racism; it is characterised by its social and political criticism. The "shared historical experience" of slavery and oppression is important to consider in a discussion of African American novels, because the past "remains vibrant in the collective mind of black America" (Greene 2-3). This overview is included here, because *Hate* addresses historical developments, prominent political figures and movements, and because by creating a protagonist who becomes involved in activism and calling her "Li'l Black Panther" (435),

Thomas positions her writing in a tradition of political, educative, pro-black literature outlined above. Moreover, as postcolonial criticism explores past and present oppression and mechanisms of power, the contexts from which the novel emerged as well as their depiction in the novel require investigation.

### 5.2.2 Literary references

*Hate* reflects the African American novel's "ongoing dialogue about race and identity" as well as its "ideological and a social purpose, affirming the need to reflect lived reality across class and gender lines [...] deepening our sense of who and what it means to be black in a postmodern, postcolonial world" (Graham 6-7). Representation is a crucial, "ongoing issue" (Johnson 212) in this context, especially self-representation. Books for young readers frequently fail to represent black children's lived realities adequately. For example, racist descriptions dominated 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century children's books about African Americans (e.g. *The Story of Little Black Sambo*). In typical colonial fashion, they caricatured black characters and pictured them as a savage, ridiculous, undifferentiated, and inferior group (Anatol 630; Bishop 225). Contemporary African American YAL, including *Hate*, arguably provides better informed, "more realistic" (Bishop 227), and more dignified depictions of black teenagers. It counteracts the prevalent "myth of white superiority" (McCann 233), passed down to generations of readers in the past two centuries, which is expertly examined at book-length by McCann. According to Anatol, African American CYA texts "call to a specifically black reading audience – those children who need to see themselves portrayed in a positive manner – encouraging racial pride and strong self-esteem, making their experiences real and valid on the printed page, and/or providing coping mechanisms for their experiences as 'minorities'" (622). *Hate* offers such positive representations of African Americans as well as coping strategies. Its increasingly self-confident black protagonist may act as literary role model. Thomas's promotion of a positive self-image, education, coping strategies, and activism also parallels the *Brownies' Book's* and much of post-60s African American literature's objectives (Bishop 228-30).

Moreover, the book depicts a strong, supportive black community, reminiscent, to some extent, of Négritude intellectuals' call for black unity (McLeod, *Beginning* 77). As much as Starr paints a sinister picture of Garden Heights as poor and dangerous place, she also draws attention to its positive sides: "People around here don't have much, but they help each other as best as they can" (328). For example, the community collect money to support Ms. Rosalie, who cannot afford to pay for Khalil's funeral, Mr. Reuben "gives kids free meals if they bring in their report

cards” and stay out of trouble (46), the rioters make sure not to destroy “black-owned businesses” (346), help rebuild the destroyed shops, and let Starr’s family know they have “got [their] back” (e.g. 442). Maverick calls fellow residents “our brothers and sisters” (346) and there is great support for Starr on ‘Black Twitter’. Through the eyes of the narrator, the reader can glimpse into her world and learns that the people there are not just “hashtags” (64) and criminals, but friendly neighbours.

Another parallel is the novel’s attention to the intersectionality of class, race, and gender (Crenshaw). Discussing intersectionality in African American literature, it seems impossible to avoid the term ‘double consciousness’ coined by Du Bois, by which he describes the conflicting feeling of “two-ness” (5), being a black man and an American, and “this sense of looking at one’s self through the eyes of others” (5). This perhaps now dated (Gilroy (152)) notion reminds of Lacan’s Other, Fanon’s ideas expressed in *Black Masks, White Skin*, Bhabha’s notion of ‘hybridity’, and the practice of ‘othering’, all of which link it to postcolonialism. Du Bois’s concept has been elaborated by Black Feminist thinkers, who argue disadvantage is related to race **and** gender. They have come up with the terms ‘double jeopardy’ (Bale) and ‘multiple jeopardy’ (King) to draw attention to “multiplicative relationships” (King 297) between racism, sexism, and classism (see also Patterson). Similarly, according to Johnson, CYAL by and about black women writers has been “triply marginalized” (210) for a long time. A lower-class, black, female teenager, the protagonist in *Hate* can be said to be a multiply jeopardised character. This does not mean that she is powerless, however. In the course of the story, Starr gains confidence and protests against discrimination. In the end, she promises to “never give up” and continue fighting for social change. “Others are fighting too [...] People are realizing and shouting and marching and demanding. They’re not forgetting” (*Hate* 443-444). Agency, resilience, and hope characterise *Hate* as well as other African American YA novels.

*Hate*’s political message and educational purpose is also typical of young adult literature, especially of African American YAL (cf. Anatol 621-624). According to Anatol, “social and political activism in children’s literature [...] can sometimes supersede that found in writing for African American adults” (644). This is due to the idea that confronting young, susceptible readers with anti-racist stories benefits the envisioned goal of social change, Anatol explains (621). African American CYA books, therefore, frequently address social issues. Famous examples of YA ‘classics’ about race and identity are the Newbery medal-winning *M.C. Higgins, the Great* by Virginia Hamilton, *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* by Mildred D. Taylor as well as Walter Dean Myers’ *Monster. After Tupac and D Foster* by Jacqueline Woodson,

*Dear Martin* by Nic Stone, and *All American Boys* by Jason Reynolds and Brendan Kiely are more recent titles that are comparable to *Hate*. Well-known adult writers (e.g. Langston Hughes, Toni Morrison, Alice Childress, Rosa Guy, Gwendolyn Brooks, and Alice Walker) have written for a younger audience too (cf. Anatol 636-642; Brooks and McNair 17-21; Johnson).

Furthermore, it could be claimed that the narrative's informal, conversational style is reminiscent of African American literature's oral tradition (cf. Anatol 625). According to Harris (451), "written narratives influenced by the oral tradition frequently employ textual audiences that replicate the function of historical audiences. Or texts may posit themselves as narratives for which the reading audience is equated to listeners." Starr also interacts with textual audiences and her readers. Dialogues characterise the book's narrative mode, the first-person narrator tells her story to an implied reader whom she addresses as "you" (349) and asks rhetorical questions ("you know what?" (433); "See?" (212)). Additionally, colloquialisms ("scary as fuck" (79); "kinda" (116)) and conversational speech (as in "you know" (155)) foster the impression of orality and immediacy the narrative creates. Starr narrows the distance between herself and the readers (compare Reichl, *Ethnic* 183). The narrative is fast-paced and uses present tense as narrative time, which often overlaps with narrated time. This technique creates suspense, but also immediacy. Thomas arguably pays tribute to the storytelling tradition when her narrator is about to end her story with the words "Once upon a time there was [...] Fairy tale? No. But I'm not giving up on a better ending" (442-443).

Lastly, *Hate* exhibits characteristics of the 'Bildungsroman'. In the course of the story, the narrator becomes more and more independent from her protective parents. Starr grows as a character, develops a stronger sense of self and finds her voice, as will be analysed in more detail below. The themes of coming-of-age and emancipation are prevalent in YAL in general, as adolescence is a "period of transition" (Cart 25) - Cadden even claims YAL "evolved out of the novel tradition of the *Bildungsroman*" (310) -, in African American literature (Raynaud 106; Anatol 636), and in postcolonial discourse. Bhabha and Spivak view identity as "a discursive product" that can be "remade and remodelled" (McLeod, *Beginning* 218). Starr remodels her identity too, I would like to suggest.

### **5.2.3 Historical references**

Fatal shootings of young, African American men and women (including Oscar Grant) by the police and The Black Lives Matter Movement serve as the most obvious contemporary

inspirations for the novel, as Angie Thomas confirms in several interviews (e.g. *Angie*; Walker). The narrator mentions names of real victims of racial violence (e.g. Emmett Till (249-250)) and on the last page, she claims it is them who her fight for justice is for (433). The Black Lives Matter movement is mirrored in the fictional organisation “Just Us For Justice,” Starr’s repeated insistence that Khalil’s life mattered (e.g. 412), and her use of hashtags on social media to protest racial violence.

Starr mentions the country’s colonial past and the institution of slavery which, her father finds, still reverberates in the cultural memory of African Americans: “Daddy once told me there’s a rage passed on to every black man from his ancestors, born the moment they couldn’t stop the slave masters from hurting their families” (196). The protagonist is also reminded of slavery and colonialism as Officer Cruise’s father claims his son wanted to “make a difference in Garden Heights”: “Funny, slave masters thought they were making a difference in black people’s lives too. Saving them from their ‘wild African ways.’ Same shit, different century” (245-246). Furthermore, Uncle Carlos compared his helpfulness to Uncle Tom (323), the figure of a “submissive black man” (Byerman and Wallinger 179). Finally, Starr recites the slave rebellion of 1831 and the Black Panthers’ empowerment ideas in a conversation with her father (168-169).

Frequent references to activists like Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, and Huey Newton as well as to the Black Power Movement, the Black Panthers, and the Nation of Islam (e.g. 31; 168; 321) can be found in the novel. Maverick displays pictures of the afore mentioned persons in his shop (39; 439) and a picture of Malcolm X is placed on the wall next to Black Jesus in the family’s house (30). Maverick “follows the Black Panthers’ Ten-Point Program” (31) practically religiously; The Carters even pray underneath a framed poster of it (67). He introduced this ideology to Starr at an early age: “I learned to recite the Black Panthers’ Ten-Point Program the same way other kids learn the Pledge of Allegiance,” (320) Starr explains. Maverick makes Starr recite it, particularly the demand for self-determination and an end of police brutality, as well as Malcolm X (“And what did brother Malcolm say is our objective? [...] ‘Complete freedom, justice, and equality,’ I say, ‘by any means necessary.’” (321)). Furthermore, residents of Garden Heights hold their “fists high for black power” (137) to express their support. Political activism is the most pronounced connection between *Hate* and African American literature, apart from the fact that it was written by a black author. The novel’s critique of power structures and the protagonist’s subversiveness further establish a link to postcolonialism.



Now that some major literary and historical references have been explored, a close reading of the depiction of race and identity in *Hate* will follow. Special focus will be on the construction of difference, ‘othering’, performativity of race and identity, intersectionality of race and class, ‘hybridity’, racism, representation, and authenticity.

### 5.3 Race and Identity

#### 5.3.1 Race: “There’s Them and then there’s Us” (343)

In the novel, race is depicted as marker of (collective) identity and cultural difference. For instance, Starr perceives herself as ‘other’ from her peers at the predominantly white private school Williamson Prep and identifies with the black community in Garden Heights instead. This “binary logic” (Bhabha 3) of black versus white dominates Starr’s worldview. The “fixity” (Bhabha 66) of difference in her identity construction is striking. She believes differences are insurmountable and unchanging. For example, she says “[p]art of me feels like I can’t exist around people like [Chris]” (301). Starr positions “people like him” as opposite to herself, presumably with regard to race and class. According to Bhabha, the construction of binary “identities of difference [...] Black/White, Self/Other” (3) is common in postcolonial discourse. Difference certainly dominates the protagonist’s identity construction as well. In addition, Starr uses race to determine group membership. She categorises others as “people like us” (59) or “them” (289) and, thus, essentialises blackness as well as whiteness. The narrator further applies this dichotomy in a political sense. She claims that THUG LIFE “is about Us, with a capital U; everybody who looks like us, feels like us and is experiencing this pain with us” (171). *Hate* criticises the way underprivileged people (“Black people, minorities, poor people. Everybody at the bottom in society [...] the oppressed” (168)) are treated. “Yeah we’re the ones who get the short end of the stick, but we’re the ones they fear the most” (168). In this example, Starr’s binary worldview is evident once more. It also indicates that, being “feared,” the oppressed are not powerless. Moreover, the narrative suggests oppressed minorities need to support each other and unite against white people, who “have been sticking together forever” (359). Thus, it reflects the postcolonial motif of the oppressed versus the oppressor. Starr and Maya, a Chinese American schoolmate who has also experienced racism decide to form a “minority alliance” (252).

Starr seems to associate whiteness with oppressiveness. Therefore, the fact that Chris is white develops into a growing concern for her. He is part of the oppressive ruling class. Following a flashback in which Starr pictures the “*cop as white as Chris*” (83) pointing his gun at her, she

“suddenly really, *really* realize[s] that Chris is white. Just like One-Fifteen” (105-106). She keeps asking herself whether she is betraying her brothers, father “and every other black guy in my life [...] by having a white boyfriend” (106), and whether she is betraying herself (“am I betraying who I am by dating him?” (106)). Since Khalil’s death, Starr has been paying more attention to race than before, she claims. In another example, Starr wonders if her headmaster knows “all the students by name, or just the ones who are black like him? I hate that I think about stuff like that now” (115), she says.

Moreover, Starr views skin colours as straightforward markers of race and treats it as a central aspect in her portrayals of persons around her. In her characterisations, she employs a whole spectrum of shades ranging from dark brown to white “and everything in between” (306). Colour is the first thing she mentions when she describes somebody’s appearance for the first time. To give some examples, Starr says Kenya has “got flawless dark-brown skin” (5), she meets a “big, light-skinned girl” (8), Khalil moves through the crowd “like he’s a brown-skinned Moses” (11), and “a white guy on guitar” (123) leads prayer at their “diverse church”. Starr immediately notices that the police officer who kills Khalil is “white” (22) and she describes her own skin colour as follows: “it’s as if God mixed my parents’ skin tones in a bucket to get my medium-brown complexion” (31). Focussing on complexions this much, Starr is in danger of confusing race with colour.

*Hate* also highlights the performativity of race, however. It is performed through clothing, hairstyles and the consumption of music and food. For example, DeVante calls Chris a “wigga” for wearing “J’s” and claims they are shoes worn by black people: “White boys wear converse and Vans, not J’s unless they trying to be black” (235). “I didn’t know shoes determined somebody’s race” (235), Starr replies ironically. However, she also uses clothes and music to express her identity, as will be discussed later. Furthermore, at Seven’s birthday party “basically, all the black people - sing the Stevie Wonder version of ‘Happy Birthday’” and white guests like Chris “look lost [...] These cultural differences are crazy sometimes,” (368) Starr narrates. Chris may not know this song, but he knows the lyrics to the song “Fuck Tha Police” by NWA. For this reason, and because he says he does not eat green bean casserole, Seven and DeVante call him “black” (“He’s black! He’s black!” (398)). Seven and DeVante eventually accept Chris as one of them. However, they do not accept him regardless of his skin colour; they accept him despite it and respect him for blending in with them. “Man, you ain’t white. You light-skinned,” DeVante says. To “test to see if he really is black,” they ask if Macaroni and Cheese is a full meal, or side dish (398). It turns out Chris does not know “real

macaroni” (399), and, therefore loses some of his status. “I don’t understand white people. Breadcrumbs on macaroni,” DeVante says, sounding “seriously offended” (399-400). These examples demonstrate that race is constructed and performed rather than given and that food, a “carrier of cultural difference” (Reichl, *Ethnic* 168), contributes to the construction of (ethnic) identity (cf. Reichl, *Ethnic* 78)

Obviously, *Hate* is replete with stereotypes about black and white people, their cultures and habits, as the above examples have shown. Moreover, generalisations about social groups are common in Starr’s narrative. For instance, she says that “white-kid goofing off is a category of its own” (388) and purports to know what white people think (e.g. “[w]hite people assume all black people are experts on trends” (294); “white people are crazy for their dogs” (116). Curiously, then, while Starr and her friends ridicule “white people”, they are shocked when Chris wants to ask “a question about black people” (400). They are reluctant at first, apparently uncomfortable with discussing black clichés with a white person, but eventually agree to answer his question. What Chris wants to know is why “black people give their kids odd names” (401). He thinks they are “not normal” (401). Seven replies: “What makes his name or our names any less normal than yours? Who or what defines ‘normal’ to you? If my pops were here he’d say you’ve fallen into the trap of the white standard” (401). Chris apologises and agrees that normal was not the right choice of word. He opts for “uncommon” instead. DeVante responds that his name is normal and, indeed, quite common (“I know ‘bout three other DeVantes in the neighbourhood” (401)). “It’s about perspective [...] Plus, most of the names white people think are unusual actually have meanings in various African languages,” (401) Seven further explains and Starr adds that “some white people give their kids ‘uncommon’ names too [...] That’s not limited to black people” (402). In this conversation about culture and normativity, Chris, and arguably also the implied reader, learn to reflect on his idea of what is normal and what is not. For this reason, I believe that the promotion of transcultural learning which takes place in this exchange is one of the educational functions of this YA novel.

### **5.3.2 Racism**

The most evident case of racism is the book’s central plot line: a “black boy is dead because a white cop killed him” (51) and the responsible police officer is not indicted (“Khalil’s death wasn’t horrible enough to be considered a crime” (388)). Starr explains that racist assumptions led Officer Cruise to pull the trigger. He “assumed that we were up to no good. Because we’re black and because of where we live” (290). According to McLeod, Said and Bhabha argue that “colonialism is informed by a series of assumptions which aim to legitimate its view of other

lands and peoples” (*Beginning* 52). In *Hate*, Officer Cruise’s assumptions legitimise the killing of the unarmed, suspected drug-dealer Khalil. As Maverick phrases it: “Khalil was black enough” (217) to get shot. That Cruise is not found guilty further points to racial discrimination in the United States’ justice system and the dominant society’s indifference, or lack of respect for black lives (“They don’t give a fuck about us” (390); White lives “always matte[r] more! ‘That’s the problem!’” (248)). Moreover, the novel shows that police brutality against black citizens is a widespread structural problem. When Starr was twelve years old, her parents instructed her “what to do if a cop stopped [her]” (20) The fact that her parents feel the need to instruct their daughter at this age “to be smart around them” (23), the police, exemplifies how present systematic oppression is in their lives. This is also evident in another passage in which police officers humiliate Maverick. They search him, lying face down on the ground, and call him “boy” (194). The police represent hegemonic power over residents of Garden Heights.

Furthermore, Starr encounters racism at Williamson, especially in the character of Hailey, who provokes with racist remarks. She asks Maya if Chinese people have cat for Thanksgiving (251) and teases Starr about fried chicken during a basketball game (111). Regardless of the fact that they had fried chicken for lunch and were joking about having overeaten right before the game, Hailey’s comment is offensive to Starr (“That fried chicken comment felt racist to me” (243)). These examples also indicate Starr’s heightened sensitivity towards racism. Hailey rejects the accusation of her being racist and refuses to apologise. Her responses range from “You can say something racist and not be a racist” (112) and “It doesn’t make me racist. I’m not letting you guys guilt trip me like this. What’s next? You want me to apologize because my ancestors were slave masters or something stupid?” (340) to “If anything, she should apologize for calling me racist last week” (243). Hailey’s statements are indicative of her general, and maybe society’s, refusal to see her own mistakes and apologise for them. The “way she can turn an argument around and make herself the victim” (243) is a common colonial strategy to defend one’s superior position and blame the oppressed for the way they are treated. A similar strategy is employed by the police when they rationalise Officer Cruise’s actions and present the killing as if it was the victim’s own fault, because he might have sold narcotics in the past. Are they “[i]nvestigating or justifying?” (102) Starr wonders.

At Williamson, Starr’s schoolmates sometimes treat her as “the official representative of the black race” whom they owe “an explanation” (186). They also expect her and Ryan, the other black student in her class, to be a couple “[b]ecause apparently when it’s two of us, we have to be on some Noah’s Ark type shit and pair up to preserve the blackness of our grade” (73). Starr

and Ryan also joke about this assumption (297) and mockingly call each other “Black Girlfriend” and “Black Boyfriend”. This is a subversive move, because they show the other students how ridiculous and their assumptions and groundless racial generalisations are. Furthermore, the varying degree to which students are willing to engage with ‘black culture’ is worth noting. Starr explains that at school, she is “cool by default because [she is] one of the only black kids there” (11). However, she notes: “Funny how that works with white kids though. It’s dope to be black until it’s hard to be black” (11). Starr’s peers appreciate, copy and maybe appropriate aspects of ‘black culture’ they like (for example hip hop dance), yet choose to ignore the struggles of African Americans. They do not want to be bothered with awareness-raising campaigns about racial violence and police brutality, which Hailey degrades as “black stuff” (250). Similarly, to Starr’s discontent, the students protest the murder of Khalil only to skip class (182-187). They do not genuinely care about Khalil and readily dismiss him as a “thug who deserved to die” (388). In a way, this protest could be read as appropriation too, since the students take up the black community’s protest for their own purpose, and, subsequently, devalue it. This selective endorsement of elements of African American experiences is a form of hegemonic power as well as a mechanism of oppression.

*Hate* does not only depict racist discrimination of African Americans. Racism against white people can be identified too. In Garden Heights, children call Starr’s younger brother “‘white boy’ ‘cause he goes to Williamson” (88), Kenya ridicules “li’l lame white-kid suburb parties” (9) and criticises Starr for attending “white-people school” (7), Seven “just wants to date black girls” (86), DeVante says “Chris’s massive video game collection makes up for his whiteness” (284), and some of the neighbours eye Chris suspiciously when they see him in Garden Heights with Starr. In terms of mutual racism, Starr’s relationship with Chris is key. The couple get “the ‘why is he dating *her*’ stare that usually comes from rich white girls” (83), but also Maverick’s first reaction upon meeting Chris is not at all benevolent. “The hell Starr? [...] You dating a white boy?” (229), he says. He wonders what she sees “in that white boy” and if she has “got a problem with black boys” (270). DeVante, too, reacts disrespectfully: “‘Boyfriend,’ he says with a slight laugh, and looks at me. ‘I should’ve known *you’d* have a white boy’” (230). Starr has kept their relationship a secret from Maverick for a long time, knowing her father would not approve of it (42). He often “rants about how Halle Berry ‘act like she can’t get with brothers anymore’ and how messed up that is. I mean, anytime he finds out a black person is with a white person, suddenly something’s wrong with them” (42).

However, not everyone in Starr's closer social environment is against the match (42). Her brother, mother, grandmother, and uncle even defend Chris against Maverick's attacks (Lisa tells Maverick to "get over it [...] He's white! [...] White, white, white!" (230)). Not all white characters are portrayed as racist either. For instance, a schoolmate comments on the protest with the words "White people do stupid shit sometimes" (186). Most importantly, Chris objects to the categorisation of people into black and white (376) and is sensitive to racism. For example, as all the protestors "yell out the lyrics" to "Fuck Tha Police," Chris "goes silent every time Cube says 'nigga.' As he should," (394) Starr notes, and he realises news reporters present him as "token" (415) white adolescent in the 'black' protest. Chris mentions "white guilt" ("I crack up. My white boyfriend talking about white guilt" (231)) and wants to apologise "on behalf of white people everywhere" (375) for the injustice of Khalil's case. Chris's respectful interaction with and interest in African Americans arguably exemplifies the novel's educational purpose. He embodies an open-minded white person, who wants to get to know Starr's world. His character might even function as a role model for a white reader. In the following dialogue, for example, Starr explains to Chris – and the reader - that racism is not exclusive to black or white people

'That's why DeVante was looking at you that way. You're white.'

'Is this one of those black things I won't understand?'

'Okay, babe, real talk? If you were somebody else I'd side-eye the shit out of you for calling it that.'

'Calling it what? A black thing?'

'Yeah.'

'But isn't that what it is?'

'Not really,' I say. 'It's not like this kinda stuff is exclusive to black people, you know? The reasoning may be different, but that's about it. Your parents don't have a problem with us dating?'

'I wouldn't call it a problem,' Chris says, 'but we did talk about it.'

'So, it's not just a black thing then, huh?'

'Point made.' (230- 231)

Chris learns to question his assumptions about race and learns to reflect on racism. To give another example, Starr explains to the reader: "I used to tell him he was so pale he looked like a marshmallow. He hated that I compared him to food. I told him that's what he got for calling me caramel. It shut him up" (79). Both characters oppose racist objectification when they experience it themselves. The way I read *Hate*, it seems to suggest that interaction and the will to get to know each other helps to bridge divides and overcome prejudice. While racist views are institutionalised in black and white communities, they can be overcome on a personal level, at least. Kenya's, DeVante's, and Maverick's first prejudice against Chris dissolves when they get to know him better and vice versa. Nonetheless, racism does not vanish completely. Despite

instances in which Starr appears to acknowledge the ubiquity of racial prejudice, she never reflects critically on racism in the black community. She does not acknowledge that people dear to her can be racist, too. Nor does she reflect on her own prejudices and seems to regard them as justified. Due to her lack of critical reflection on anti-white racism, it is up to the alert reader to question Starr's as well as his or her own position.

### **5.3.3 “Sometimes it’s hard to believe Garden Heights and Riverton Hills share the same sky” (255): Class, poverty, and life in the ‘ghetto’**

*Hate*'s depiction of class serves to signify ‘otherness’, especially Starr's difference from her Williamson friends, which is constitutive of Starr's identity. Dichotomies between the privileged and underprivileged, rich and poor, black and white are stressed, which underpins the narrative's ‘us’ versus ‘them’ logic discussed above as well as the intersection of said categories.

These dichotomies are particularly striking in Starr's contrasting descriptions of her own neighbourhood, inhabited almost exclusively by lower class African American families (46), and the suburbs, where her upper-middle class friends and Uncle Carlos's family live. In the novel, place stands for class, race, and identity. “I used to think the sun shone brighter out here in Uncle Carlos's neighborhood” (154), Starr narrates tellingly. Here, also the discrepancy between middle class and lower-class African Americans is visible. Her aunt, for instance, comes from a “good family [...] Real-life Huxtables” (157). The prosperous neighbourhood of Riverton Hills is described as peaceful, lively and yet quiet (154-155). As Lisa's new occupation as nurse manager makes it possible for the family to move to a new home in a ‘better’, i.e. middle-class neighbourhood later in the story, Starr immediately notices open doors and unattended bicycles. “Nobody's worried about their stuff getting stolen in the middle of the day [...] obviously people feel safe” (306). Again, Starr notices that it is “quiet”; no “wall-rattling music and gunshots” (310). Garden Heights, in contrast, is not a safe place. Break-ins, robberies, theft, drug dealing, gang violence and domestic violence occur on a regular basis (e.g. 30; 145; 212). For example, a “bulletproof partition separates the customers from the cashier” at a barbeque restaurant across the street of Maverick's shop (45). Two gangs, the Garden Disciples and King Lords terrorise the neighbourhood (17). Maverick used to be a gang member too. He even served a prison sentence and he still has a reputation in the neighbourhood (“Everybody knows you don't mess with my dad, Big Mav” (6)). At the age of ten, Starr saw her best friend being shot dead in a “drive-by” (301). Starr is now used to the sounds of sirens and gunshots (16; 50). When they occur, the Carters usually retreat to a “room without exterior

walls” (137). The sound of gunshots distinguishes Garden Heights from the city centre, and Starr from “downtown people” (329). “I wonder if they ever hear the gunshots and shit in my neighborhood” (329). They also distinguish her from her Williamson friends who are not allowed to “spend the night in ‘the ghetto’ or do not want to, because “gunshots scared [them]” (36). Although Starr describes Garden Heights as dangerous, run-down neighbourhood (379), she is offended when she sees it on TV:

I tense as footage of my neighborhood, my home, is shown. It’s like they picked the worst parts – the drug addicts roaming the streets, the broken-down Cedar Grove projects, gangbangers slashing signs, bodies on the sidewalk with white sheets over them. What about Mrs. Rooks and her cakes? Or Mr. Lewis and his haircuts? Mr. Reuben? The clinic? My family? Me? (245)

Representation is crucial to consider here. Starr objects to the presentation of Garden Heights as “a neighborhood notorious for gangs and drug dealers” on television, i.e. in dominant discourse, and defends self-representation, which also is a central issue in postcolonial literature (Innes 4). Likewise, Starr does not want her Williamson friends to call Garden Heights “the ghetto”. “I can call Garden Heights the ghetto all I want. Nobody else can” (139). The miserable circumstances in the “ghetto” in contrast to downtown and the suburbs further strike out as indicators of the power imbalance between the communities.

Furthermore, class is also represented indirectly through references to commodities. Frequent comparisons between the sizes of Starr’s and her friends’ houses (e.g. 35; 240) and descriptions their luxurious interior emphasise Starr’s preoccupation with wealth, class, and status. She is ashamed of her socio-economic background. For example, Chris occupies a “suite” on the “third floor of his parents’ mansion [...] he has an entire floor as big as my house and hired help that looks like me” (81). Again, Starr notices the connectedness of race and class and, as a consequence, her own ‘otherness’. The fact that Chris’s family employs African American help and a butler reminds of the country’s past and positions Chris within the dominant, ruling class. In the poverty-ridden neighbourhood Garden Heights, wealth is only acquired through drug dealing. King’s house, for instance, is the “definition of ‘hood rich’” (381) and Starr can immediately tell Khalil is involved in drug-dealing by the look of his expensive new shoes and jewellery he wears to the party (12). Starr’s frequent references to possessions indicate their value to her as status symbols (84; 242; 374). Unlike her friends, the “Young, Rich Brats” (295), she has to work to afford new sneakers and does not take new shoes for granted (5; 71). Another example that shows how clothing acts as an indication of status, Lisa makes her family dress up for the interview with a national newspaper, because she does not want “the news people to think we’re ‘hood rats’” (282). Abundant references to (junk) food further add to the



representation of class as well as the distinction between the ‘hood’ and the suburbs in *Hate* (e.g. 230; 302). One example worth mentioning is Maverick’s surprise to see Carlos pour hot sauce over his meal. “I would’ve thought you were too refined for some hot sauce on your eggs,” (326) he says, and Carlos merely replies he grew up in this neighbourhood. The men, thus, associates hot sauce with class.

The narrative frequently presents class as interconnected with race and both categories are central to Starr’s identity construction. For example, concerns about race and class intersect as Starr believes she and Chris should not be together. The reasons she lists are her father’s past as a “gangbanger” (375), the fact that her house is smaller than Chris’s, her childhood in “the projects” (376), where her family used to squeeze into a rat-infested one-bedroom apartment (301-302), and the colour of her skin. She worries about how people look at them and is convinced that Chris should be with someone like Hailey, she goes on. “[Y]ou know. Blond. Rich. White” (376). In another passage, the intersectionality of race and class is visible, too:

tell me what’s going on!’  
‘You’re white, okay?’ I yell. ‘You’re white!’  
Silence.  
‘I’m white? [...] What the fuck’s that got to do with anything?’  
‘Everything! You’re white, I’m black. You’re rich, I’m not.’ (161)

Opposites and perceived differences characterise the narrator’s world-view.

The novel also expresses social criticism as it draws attention to social inequity. In a key sequence in which Maverick and Starr discuss the meaning of THUG LIFE, Maverick asks Starr what the “hate” is “they” are giving little infants today. Her first response is “Racism?” but Maverick wants Starr to elaborate why so many people in their neighbourhood get involved in criminality. “They need money,” Starr answers (169).

Right. Lack of opportunities,’ Daddy says. ‘Corporate America don’t bring jobs to our communities, and they damn sure ain’t quick to hire us. Then, shit, even if you do have a high school diploma, so many of the schools in our neighborhoods don’t prepare us well enough [...] Our schools don’t get the resources to equip you like Williamson does. It’s easier to find crack than it is to find a good school around here (169)

Maverick uses drug dealing as an example to explain “the hate they’re giving us, a system designed against us” (170). Drugs are “flown into our communities” and they are “destroying” them, he goes on. What he says is that the “system” purposefully injects drugs into African American communities in order to suppress them. He believes the suffering will only end if the oppressed speak out (171). The fact that so many desperate young people feel as if they had no other choice than selling drugs and turn to gangs for shelter and food (237- 238) demonstrates

their lack of prospects. This lack of prospects and criminality makes Garden Heights a “poisonous” (52) neighbourhood. Those who can afford it, leave. Maverick refuses to leave for a long time, because to him, this means turning his back on the community. He believes that Garden Heights is “real” and the suburbs are “fake” and he wants to change things and fight the system in Garden Heights and not run away (180; 232). Maverick thinks that living in the suburbs would make him “less black” (309) and he seems to refuse integration into the dominant society. Inauthenticity of the black middle class is a much-discussed issue in the authenticity debate, according to Japtok and Jenkins. They also claim Malcolm X, Maverick’s idol, held anti-integrationist views too (27-31). However, Maverick agrees to move later in the story (*Hate* 276).

### **5.3.4 Identity: ‘hybridity’, authenticity, and intertextuality**

#### **5.3.4.1. ‘Hybridity’**

The distance between the protagonist’s home in Garden Heights and the “bougie private school” (35) she attends is not only expressed geographically (Williamson is located about forty-five minutes away from her neighbourhood), but also socially, as the discussion of class has shown. Starr adapts to the different surroundings by creating two “version[s]” (3) of herself. “Williamson is one world and Garden Heights is another, and I have to keep them separate” (36), she says. However, she also experiences an identity conflict in this process of moving between the two. Her ‘hybrid’ self becomes evident when Starr explains that “[b]eing two different people is so exhausting. I’ve taught myself to speak with two different voices and only say certain things around certain people” (301). At Williamson, she suppresses the use of slang in order not to reveal where she comes from and sound “ghetto”:

Williamson Starr doesn’t use slang – if a rapper would say it, she doesn’t say it, even if her white friends do. Slang makes them cool. Slang makes her ‘hood.’ Williamson Starr holds her tongue when people piss her off so nobody will think she’s the ‘angry black girl.’ Williamson Starr is approachable. No stank-eyes, side-eyes, none of that. Williamson Starr is nonconfrontational. Basically, Williamson Starr doesn’t give anyone a reason to call her ghetto. I can’t stand myself for doing it, but I do it anyway (71)

This passage stresses the power of language with regard to identity. At Williamson, she uses different vocabulary, a different sociolect even, than in Garden Heights to fit in (e.g. “‘*Eww*,’ I say, instead of my usual ‘ill’” (74)). The passage further reveals Starr’s objections to her split self and shows her awareness of the intersection of race and gender as well as African American stereotypes she tries not to conform to. This concern comes up again later in the story, when

Starr asks: “What’s worse than being the Angry Black Girl? The *Weak* Black Girl” (115). “Triply marginalized” (Johnson 210) because of being a black female teenager, Starr refuses to give in to oppressive power structures.

Not only at school does the protagonist transform into “Williamson Starr” (71). At the police station, she also switches code: “My voice is changing already. It always happens around ‘other’ people, whether I’m at Williamson or not. I don’t talk like me or sound like me. I choose every word carefully and make sure I pronounce them well. I can never, ever let anyone think I’m ghetto” (95). This quote further shows the dichotomy between herself and “other” people, so dominant in Starr’s worldview - and (post)colonial thought. She adjusts her tone and register when she talks to Detective Gomez. For example, her replies are hyper-formal (e.g. “for recreational purposes” (97)), and she self-corrects immediately when the word “Nah” slips out of her mouth: “*Dammit. Proper English* [...] ‘I mean, no, ma’am” (98). Code-switching has sociolinguistic as well as postcolonial relevance as it shows how the ‘hybrid’ character moves between social spheres and adapts to them. It also stresses the importance of language in her identity construction (see also Coats 323).

The fact that Starr thinks she cannot be herself at Williamson highlights her feeling of unbelonging. After Khalil’s death, Starr’s feeling of alienation intensifies (84). In a passage at school right after spring break, Starr’s initial cheerfulness upon seeing her friends again (85) is shattered as they complain about their vacations – trips to the Bahamas, Harry Potter world, and Taipei – Starr is perplexed: “bam. That normal feeling? Gone. I suddenly remember how different I am from most of the kids here” (76). Instead of visiting exotic destinations, Starr had to stay “in the hood” and witness the killing of her friend (76-77). As she leaves the school building, she thinks: “Spring has decided to go through an identity crisis and get chilly on me” (86). This thought may mirror her own conflict and mixed feelings about her friends. It could be a playful way of addressing one of the novel’s main themes. It could also simply be a comment on the weather. In any case, the wording is significant. The narrator has carefully chosen the words “identity crisis” and it is likely that this is not entirely coincidental.

As her “two worlds collid[e]” (357) at Seven’s graduation and birthday party, Starr focuses on language again: “I never know which Starr I should be. I can use some slang, but not too much slang, some attitude, but not too much attitude, so I’m not a ‘sassy black girl.’ I have to watch what I say and how I say it, but I can’t sound ‘white.’” (357). Here, again, Starr is concerned about appropriate language, race, and clichés. She neither wants to sound “ghetto”, nor “white”.

Language mirrors her 'hybrid' self and continues to be an important marker of culture and identity to her. It denotes belonging to specific social groups. At home, she uses vocabulary like "d-boy" (147), "G persona" (11), "stank-eye" (7), and "ho" (261) as well as expressions such as "throw shade" (297), to be "dope" (293), and "everybody and their momma" (4). Slang and vernacular use – including copula and genitive 's omission, past and future tense markers like been and gon', and words like y'all, which are typical of the ethnolect/sociolect (cf. Green; Lanehart) - is common in Garden Heights (e.g. "she claim she trying" (13)). Starr only uses zero copula three times, namely when she feels confident as a black activist, talking to her father and Kenya, and in a fight with Hailey (56; 183; 366). Otherwise, her narrative is rendered in standard American English. Starr also uses youth slang comprising words like "wedgie" (453), to give somebody "dap" (428), "fresh" (14), "fly" (205), to have "game" (406), and "kicks" (258) as well as swear words ("jackwad" (84); "I flip him off" (14)). Her informal speech makes her an authentic adolescent character. It narrows the distance to ingroup readers who identify with the narrator. It could further be argued that her use of African American Vernacular English and youth slang subverts the English of the white, upper-middle class she positions herself as opposite of. Indeed, Reichl states that nonstandard language use has an "identificatory function" (*Ethnic* 108). It is used to express a character's stance on the implied cultures, for example to distance him/herself from standard varieties associated with white people (*Ethnic* 75; 110). Thus, "nonstandard forms provide another layer of characterisation, of identification with or dissociation from particular ethnic groups" (*Ethnic* 111). In *Hate*, vernacular speakers identify with their socio-economical and ethnical surrounding in Garden Heights and distance themselves from white, upper class 'other'.

In her neighbourhood, the protagonist sometimes feels as if she did not belong there either. In the opening lines of the story, Starr says: "I'm not even sure I *belong* at this party" (3), which immediately creates the reader expectation that this novel will be about belonging (for a discussion on the relevance of beginnings see Reichl, *Ethnic* 67). "I'm invisible. I feel like that a lot around here" (10), Starr goes on. Kenya, her only remaining friend in Garden Heights since her other two best friends were killed, accuses Starr of acting as if she was "too good for a Garden Party" (11) and says she does not know anybody there, because she goes to "that school" (4). It is indeed difficult for Starr to find friends in her neighbourhood. I read Starr's sense of not **really** belonging to Williamson or Garden Heights as a sign of being caught in a "neither/nor state" (Bradford 68), the "flip-side" of 'hybridity' Bradford ("Race" 46) cautions against. However, this changes as Starr feels increasingly confident in her black community. For instance, Starr complains several times (e.g. 4; 8-9; 146) that in Garden Heights, everybody

calls her “Big Mav’s daughter who works in the store”. They do not know her name. Towards the end of the book, however, as the word spreads that Starr is the witness, they start noticing her and call Starr by her real name. This also reflects Starr’s identity formation. She transforms from an “invisible” girl to a well-known and respected activist during the months following Khalil’s death. The morning after the riots, Starr claims: “last night has me thinking about all this so differently, about me differently” (436). She feels empowered and is less nervous during encounters with the police now (437).

#### **5.3.4.2 Authenticity and intertextuality**

In the novel, there are numerous references to popular culture, (rap) music, dance, clothing, hairstyle, basketball, food, films and TV shows, through which Starr expresses her identity. They establish Starr’s milieu, her cultural and social surrounding. References to current trends and youth culture further portray Starr as an authentic, contemporary teenager, which arguably makes her relatable for adolescent readers, and adds depth to the character.

Starr uses clothing, especially footwear, to distance herself from her peers at Williamson Prep, where students wear clothes stereotypically associated with white upper class (e.g. “khakis and polos” (70)). Like her role model Will from *The Fresh Prince*, she “hate[s] dressing like everybody else [...] I can’t wear my uniform inside out, but I can make sure my sneakers are always dope and my backpack are always matches them,” (71) she says. Starr identifies with *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*. To her, it is “like seeing parts of my life on screen. I can even relate to the theme song [...] I just wish I could be myself at Williamson like Will was himself in Bel-Air,” (35) she goes on, once again addressing her ‘hybrid’ identity. What is more, their shared interest in the show helps Starr and Chris bond. “Chris gets *The Fresh Prince*, which helps him get me” (83). Possibly, references to the show are also meant to help the readers “get” her. Multiple references to TV shows (“*Extreme Makeover: Starr Edition*” (5)), actors and actresses (e.g. Bernie Mac (233)), films (*Harry Potter* and *Star Wars* (e.g. 207)), famous people (e.g. Oprah (291)), sports persons (e.g. Muhammed Ali (254); Michael Jordan (242)), the NWA (78), social media (e.g. 204) - with a pronounced focus on “Black Twitter” (292) - and the use of emojis (213), selfies (187), memes (189), and electronic devices (e.g. iPad (69)) add to the portrayal of Starr as authentic, modern teenager. Since most of the artists mentioned in the book are African American, this could indicate an intentional attempt at specifically representing a black teenager’s experience.

Music is also prominent in *Hate*. Tupac Shakur's acronym The Hate U Give Little Infants Fucks Everyone acts as leitmotif in the story (17; 167-169) and it informs the novel's title. Furthermore, N.W.A's "Fuck Tha Police," which Starr and her friends rap along during the protest, also has a clear message. Starr frequently identifies with the music she listens to (13). Interestingly, Starr listens to, or talks about different artists depending on her interlocuters. With Maya and Hailey, she talks about Taylor Swift, the Jonas Brothers, and High School Musical (10; 75; 107; 265) and in Garden Heights she listens to music by black artists, especially R&B singers and rappers like Tupac Shakur, Kanye West, Kendrick Lamar, Marvin Gaye, J. Cole, and Drake (18; 37; 86; 207). This example once more unveils her 'hybrid' self and the way she separates her "two worlds".

Dancing further stresses the differences between Garden Heights and Williamson. For example, at Seven's party, Starr's family and her friends dance to hip-hop music and Chris tries to keep up (360). This suggests that Chris, the only white boy at the party and a mediocre dancer, struggles to fit in and it reinforces the stereotype of black people being better dancers. At prom, Starr finds that a Williamson party and a Garden Heights party are "two very different things. At Big D's party, people Nae-Naed, Hit the Quan, twerked and stuff. At prom, I honestly don't know what the hell some of them are doing. Lots of jumping and fist pumping and attempts at twerking. It's not bad. Just different. Way different" (293). Likewise, at Williamson, she is "cool by default because I'm black. I can go out there and do a silly dance move I made up, and everyone will think it's the new thing [...] In Garden Heights, I learn how to be dope by watching. At Williamson, I put learned dopeness on display. I'm not even *that* dope, but these white kids think I am" (293-294). This example emphasises Starr's dichotomisation between black and white, private school and ghetto, in short: race and class. Furthermore, dance and hip hop add to the portrayal of Starr as a realistic teenager. Current trends and dance moves (359-361) make the book appear up-to date. Using hip hop to evoke authenticity is a common strategy in contemporary African American literature, Japtok and Jenkins (2) note. In *Authentic Blackness/ "Real" Blackness*, they claim hip hop "assumes an almost dominant role in discussions of contemporary blackness" and youth culture (2). They also question the concept of authenticity and point to its constructedness in cultural production. *Hate* constructs blackness also by means of reproducing (internalised) stereotypes associated with hip hop culture, including dance, cannabis consumption (4), enthusiasm for the "West siiiiiide" (406), basketball (310), and gang violence ("Can't have a party without somebody getting shot" (16)). The portrayal of King as ruthless gangster ("Two tears are tattooed under his left eye. Two lives he's taken." (47)), and Maverick's outfits (he sometimes wears a "wifebeater" that shows the

many tattoos on his arms (148)) are more stereotypical indicators of life in “the ghetto”. Blackness is also constructed through the use of African American Vernacular, which is generally common in African American literature (cf. Anatol 644; Green 164-199; Johnson 220). Also, the use of the word “nigga” (190; 345; 397) by residents of Garden Heights as signifier of ‘real blackness’ is a practice common in popular culture and gangsta rap (Japtok and Jenkins 31-38). The “icons” of the “nigger” and thug as authentic, anti-establishment blacks (Japtok and Jenkins 31) can also be found in *Hate* (“Niggas tired of taking shit” (397)).

A final point I would like to make is that the music and celebrities mentioned in the book are likely to be known to a mainstream audience, not just cultural insiders, which allows conclusions about the implied reader. Things the implied readers would not understand, such as the workings of “gangbanging” (322), including codes used in drug-dealing (12; 380), are explained to them. This strategy is comparable to “cultural translation,” which Reichl (*Ethnic* 96-101) analyses in her study of ethnic semiosis in Black British literature. Here, social milieu rather than ethnicity is translated. This way, insiders and outsiders can understand Starr’s world. Moreover, translation of “cultural specifics” evokes authenticity (Reichl, *Ethnic* 100), which is further created through utterances such as “I swear” (12; 442), “I can’t lie” (146; 412) and the filler “like” (e.g. 202), which is typical for a young American English speaker.

#### **5.4 Coping strategies**

The way I read *Hate*, it is about the protagonist’s struggle to find her voice and the process of learning to speak her opinion. Starr copes with her inner conflict as well as experiences of racism and injustice by learning to speak out against wrongs – a strategy highly reminiscent of Black Power, Civil Rights, and Feminist movements, and, of course, postcolonialism. Starr develops as a character from a well-protected, reserved, and torn person to a self-conscious activist. She transforms from passive to active, from an insecure, ‘hybrid’ girl to a determined, black woman. At first, she is “too afraid to speak” (35), because she is anxious about what people would do to her family if they found out she was the witness and what teachers and friends at Williamson would think of her if they knew she was in the car with Khalil (“what will that make me? The thug ghetto girl with the drug dealer?” (113)). Thus, for a long time, she denies that she is the witness, even denies she knew Khalil. As the story progresses, she becomes stronger. She does not want to be called “Poor Thing” (268), or “Starr the charity case who lives in the ghetto” (300), she stops hiding, and her voice becomes louder. She gradually loses her fear. Encouraged by people close to her (e.g. 171) and always eager to win Kenya’s approval (“she kinda pushed me to do it” (206)), Starr reveals more and more about Khalil’s

death and her identity. Starr blogs about the Khalil she knew (204) and decides to give an interview, because she is infuriated by Officer Cruise's father's depiction of his son as the real victim and refuses to let him be the only one to present his point of view (218). In postcolonial terms, she wants to counter his narrative and revise it. She joins the rioters ("I scream as loud as I can, fist high in the air" (408-409)), and eventually speaks before the crowd, after Ms. Ofrah from Just Us For Justice reminds Starr that her voice is her "biggest weapon" she can use to "fight the system" (410). What follows is the story's climax and temporary completion of Starr's identity formation. Standing on top of a car, bullhorn in her hands, she finally reveals her identity in public. She speaks out: "My name is Starr. I'm the one who saw what happened to Khalil,' I say into the bullhorn. 'And it wasn't right.'" (411). Starr even turns to the police: "I'm sick of this! Just like y'all think all of us are bad because of some people, we think the same about y'all. Until you give us a reason to think otherwise, we'll keep protesting" (412). She even picks up a tin filled with tear gas and throws it back at the police. These actions are Starr's ultimate protest and her most successful coping strategy. The next day, her picture is on the front page of a national newspaper. "The headline reads 'The Witness Fights Back'" (435) - which reminds of the film *The Empire Strikes Back* and the foundational work of postcolonial criticism *The Empire Writes Back*. Her parents call her "Li'l Black Panther" (435), a direct reference to Black Power activism and a possible way of affirming her black identity. On the final page, Starr is portrayed as active, strong character, who is determined to fight for justice: "I'll never forget. I'll never give up. I'll never be quiet. I promise" (444).

I view this transformation and the decision to speak her first successful coping strategy. Before Khalil's death, she also applied strategies to deal with racism. They were characterised by avoidance. She always tried to keep her "worlds separate" (36). As the story unfolds, Starr seems to realise this strategy is not entirely successful and that she needs to stop being ashamed of who she is and where she comes from. She invites Chris, Maya, **and** Kenya to Seven's birthday party and, thus, allows for her worlds to meet (358). At the end of the novel, Starr admits to Kenya that she used to be ashamed of Garden Heights, but does not feel this way anymore: "she's right. I was ashamed of Garden Heights and everything in it. It seems stupid now though. I can't change where I come from or what I've been through, so why should I be ashamed of what makes me, me? That's like being ashamed of myself. Nah. Fuck that. 'Maybe I was ashamed,' I admit. 'But I am not anymore'" (441). In this conversation with Kenya, Starr finally comes to terms with herself. Kenya helps Starr restore her 'black identity'. Throughout the book, Kenya was the one who made Starr feel guilty for staying quiet about the events of the night of Khalil's murder and urged her to act. For example, she calls Starr a "coward" (198)



and accuses her of having “dropped [Khalil] for them bougie-ass kids” (198)). Now, finally, she acknowledges Starr’s efforts and welcomes her back as her friend.

Similarly, another important strategy is giving into Chris’s pleading to let him into her life (“You gotta let me in” (300)). Chris accepts her for who she is and with him she can be herself (“I don’t have to decide which Starr I have to be with him. He likes both” (83)). He supports his girlfriend to be herself - also at Williamson -, for instance by calling her “Fresh Princess” (83). Starr finally opens up to Chris and tells him all about her childhood in Garden Heights, her family’s socio-economic circumstances, and Natasha and Khalil’s murder (301). Prior to this conversation, Starr has kept these aspects of her life from him (83), thinking she could not “share that part of [her] here” (300), because she did not trust him enough. “I didn’t want you to just see me as the girl from the ghetto” (300), she tells him. Chris rejects her concerns about race and status and wants to get to know her better (e.g. 376). Chris’s steadfastness and support help Starr reveal her inner conflict and find herself. She gains confidence and stops performing “Williamson Starr” in front of him. One more passage is worth mentioning: when Chris and Maverick meet for the first time, Starr shows courage as she calls Chris her boyfriend. She compares the “boldness” it takes to tell her “militant black daddy about [her] white boyfriend” to standing up for Khalil (229). In this passage, Starr is in the process of finding her voice and learning to speak out for the people who matter to her, which is essential for her development as a character.

Further, Starr rids herself of abusive friendships and racist persons like Hailey, a once close friend with whom Starr is divided over the central issue of racial violence. “Something’s changed between us [...] Maybe *I’ve* changed” (77-78), Starr reflects. Her friendship with Hailey is crucial for her personal development, as Hailey unintentionally fosters Starr’s identity formation. Starr soon realises that Hailey has racist views and blames herself for letting her tell racist jokes in the past: “Did I always laugh because I thought I had to? That’s the problem. We let people say stuff, and they say it so much it becomes okay to them and normal for us. What’s the point of having a voice if you’re gonna be silent in those moments you shouldn’t be?” (252) Starr’s realisation goes hand in hand with her personal development. At one point, Starr realises she is “done following Hailey” (185). Their conflict even escalates into a fight, as Hailey refuses to apologise for making racist jokes and says “The cop probably did everyone a favor. One less drug dealer” (341). Starr punches her in the face. This once again exemplifies Starr’s heightened sensitivity towards racism. Eventually, Starr accepts that it is not worth having Hailey as a friend anymore. “I can let go” (433), Starr says, and this also means she lets go of part of her

Williamson self. Letting Hailey “have her way” used to be “part of being Williamson Starr” (75). She lets go of her oppressive, dominant friend and bonds with Maya instead.

Finally, identification with famous African American artists and activists helps Starr strengthen her ‘black identity’. She is particularly inspired by Tupac Shakur’s concept of THUG LIFE (205). For instance, the “first thing” she puts in her new room is a poster of the rapper exposing the tattoo on his stomach (432) and she claims to understand his message now. Her identification with and imitation of *The Fresh Prince* helps her display what, or who she wants to be like. Imagined relations to pop stars like Beyoncé, “Cousin Bey” (296), and the wish that Oprah is her “fairy godmother” (291) further inspire her identity creation.

To sum up, Starr loses fear and learns to use her voice and speak out. She stops surrounding herself with racist people, stops hiding her roots, and she allows for her two worlds to connect. These strategies are successful in so far as they provide a resolution for Starr’s identity conflict. In the end, Starr foregrounds her ‘black identity’ and has the courage to be “normal Starr” (84). How Starr’s coping strategies and experiences relate to Junior’s, will be examined in the following section.

## **6. *Diary* and *Hate* compared and contrasted**

Having analysed *Diary* and *Hate* individually, I will now focus on their similarities and differences. At a first glance, the novels seem to have little in common; one is about an American Indian boy who leaves the reservation, and the other about an African American girl’s fight against police brutality. However, there are more thematic and structural parallels than one might suspect.

First of all, both first-person narrators are members of ethnic minorities who live in poor, marginalised communities (the “rez”/ the “hood”) and attend predominantly white private schools. As they move back and forth between different social and cultural spheres, they experience a feeling of alienation and a wish to belong. Junior and Starr are complex characters who go through arguably similar identity crises and try to come to terms with their ‘hybrid’ selves. Both narrators accept their identities in the end. Clearly, the protagonists’ character developments resemble the coming-of-age theme of the traditional ‘Bildungsroman’. They are also typically YAL (Engels and Kory 55) as are their struggles with institutions in society (Trites x-8). Secondly, the stories’ settings are comparable. Both take place in residential areas and at schools which are located outside their local neighbourhoods. The settings are also typical of the genre of the school story, which the two YA novels conform to. According to

Bradford (159), in “many children’s texts, school settings constitute a liminal space where differences of class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and race are played out”. This is also the case in the novels discussed here. Thirdly, the storylines are similar. An introduction of the protagonists and their local communities is followed by a presentation of a problem, the school settings, and the identity conflicts they experience there. Junior and Starr have to deal with racism at their respective schools, typically in the person of one antagonist (Roger/Hailey) but they also find new friends and even first love there (Penelope/Chris). The characters are treated as traitors in their local communities for attending private schools and they experience the loss of loved ones. Moreover, both of them open up to their white friends at prom, which they think is one of the best nights of their lives (*Diary* 122; *Hate* 305). There, they reveal their poor backgrounds and are surprised about the acceptance and support they encounter. The novels, thus, employ similar plot devices. Structure-wise, the basketball game in *Diary* resembles the climactic riot in *Hate*, in which dominant and underprivileged groups face each other. Both characters realise who they really are and where they belong in the course of these events. With the support of their friends and families, the protagonists find ways to cope with their crises. In the end, both characters talk to their best friends (Rowdy/Kenya), who also live on the Spokane Reservation, or rather in Garden Heights, and belong to the same ethnic minorities as Junior and Starr. They reaffirm their friendships, which ultimately helps the protagonists to consolidate their identities. A positive, determined, yes, hopeful outlook on the future characterises the endings of both stories.

Fourthly, the novels explore issues related to race and class. The main characters perceive themselves as different from their peers at school in terms of their socio-economic circumstances as well as their ethnicity and portray themselves as essentially ‘other’. Intersectionality plays a vital role in the novels and has been a key concept in my analysis. Furthermore, Junior and Starr construct their ethnical identities in relation to whiteness (cf. Bradford, “Race” 48). They also perform race. For example, Junior ironically compares himself to a warrior (*Diary* 141) and Starr acts the role of “Fresh Princess” (*Hate* 83), with her love for hip hop culture. Pop cultural references frequently add to the narrators’ construction and performance of race and ethnicity, and intertextuality also emphasises their authenticity. Obviously, the texts are also replete with racist clichés, stereotypes (like both characters’ fondness of basketball and fried chicken), and internalised racism. Interestingly, both novels present racism as prevalent in white **and** black/indigenous groups. Another parallel are Junior’s and Starr’s ambivalent attitudes towards their ethnic communities. At first, both narrators feel ashamed of their roots and are hesitant about telling their new friends about them. However,

Starr and Junior eventually realise that letting people in their lives improves their relationships (*Diary* 129; *Hate* 301). The protagonists appear to increasingly value their communities, despite all their problems, as the following quotations show: “I mean, yeah, Indians are screwed up, but we’re really close to each other” (*Diary* 153); “It’s this strange, dysfunctional-as-hell family, but it’s still a family. More than I realized until recently” (*Hate* 328-329).

Above all, the point which is most relevant for the purpose of this thesis is that both protagonists operate within oppressive systems and reflect on power mechanisms in their societies. *Diary* and *Hate* portray racial discrimination as well as systematic oppression of minorities in the USA, an emphasis which also links Native American to African American literature studies (cf. Bradford 8). In the selected texts, Native Americans and African Americans are shown to have fewer opportunities than the protagonists’ white, upper-middle class friends, especially with regard to social mobility. The depicted power imbalance between the ruling class and minorities can be regarded as a consequence of colonialism and its relationship between coloniser and the colonised. The narrators even refer to colonialism and the institution of slavery directly and suggest a continuity of racial discrimination (e.g. *Diary* 101; *Hate* 196). The effects of colonialism are still present in the United States today, both texts seem to show. Furthermore, in postcolonial terms, the protagonists represent voices from the periphery - poor, black/indigenous, and, in Starr’s case, female adolescents - who are rarely heard in mainstream (YA) literature. Starr and Junior are marginalised, but resilient, nonetheless. They become stronger in the course of the stories; they are determined to fight oppression and live a better life. Empowerment, agency, and emancipation are, thus, central to the stories. Additionally, *Diary* and *Hate* both present education as important stepping stone to a brighter future. The narrators attend schools outside their neighbourhoods to access better education. Their parents need to work hard to afford Junior and Starr the chance to attend Rearden/Williamson (*Diary* 119; *Hate* 301). The fact that good education lies in the hands of the wealthy, white elite again highlights structural disparity between rich and poor, black and white. Bradford comes to a similar conclusion when she states that schools are “deeply implicated in the political and cultural systems they serve, so that relations of power generally favour majority culture” (159). At their respective schools, Native American and African American cultures are only of minor concern to the majority culture. They are only touched upon superficially, as in the Reardan’s school mascot and the students’ protest at Williamson. Junior and Starr experience how “white people usurp Native [and black] culture largely for their own selfish purposes” (Grassian 14).

Lastly, both texts serve specific educational purposes, which I would like to comment on in more detail, because this controversial issue is so central to CYAL criticism. Diverse fiction has the potential to challenge normative views and dominant representations of race by providing self-representations and ‘insider’ perspectives. In the selected novels, the narrators offer the readers (who are largely constructed as cultural outsiders) a glimpse into their worlds and introduce them to their communities. They guide them through the narratives as well as their experiences and, thus, mediate transcultural learning. To give an example, white characters like Chris believe some of the other characters’ names are uncommon, not normal, but they – and the reader – soon learn that Junior and DeVante are not uncommon at all (*Diary* 60; *Hate* 401). In these as well as many other passages, the books deconstruct the notion of white normativity. Also by presenting prejudices against white people alongside stereotypes about black/indigenous people, the novels tackle the issue of normativity. This way, they “defamiliaris[e]” (Reichl, “Reading” 221) racism and dismantle stereotypes. White audiences may be surprised, maybe even shocked, to find themselves being essentialised and ‘othered’ in similar ways minorities are usually represented. This unsettling moment provides valuable opportunities for self-reflection. As Engles and Kory point out, whiteness is a “cultural norm in the United States” and, thus, “unmarked” (56). Through engaging with texts such as *Diary* and *Hate*, white readers may question the “perceived normality of whiteness” (Engles and Kory 55) and realise that stereotypes do not necessarily reflect realities. On the other hand, it is problematic that *Diary* and *Hate* even include racist stereotypes, because they risk perpetuation. The empathic reader may readily identify with Junior and Starr and accept, or even absorb their world-views, which are characterised by dichotomies (black and white, rich and poor etc.) and racism. Kertzer and Szeghi even raise concerns about teaching *Diary*. Nonetheless, I agree with Reichl, that “a young adult novel that refers to cultural identity positions which one would assume might cause problems to the teenage reader, should not be discarded as ‘too difficult’. Rather, this perceived difficulty should be regarded as an opening for a dialogue about cultures and identities” (“Doing” 111). I regard *Diary* and *Hate* as valuable resources for transcultural learning, as they may stimulate the reader’s “empathic understanding” (Reichl, “Doing” 110) and reflection on the constructedness of identity. The first-person narratives as well as Forney’s illustrations “enhance the sense of immediacy,” allowing readers to gain insights into the fictional characters’ inner selves and possibly even relate to them. According to Reichl (“Doing” 111), this kind of “intersubjective understanding” as aids a (transcultural) learning process. Moreover, the novels have a lot to offer to an ‘insider’ readership: they represent children of colour in YAL, the importance of which cannot be overestimated (Anatol 622;

Bishop 226; Brooks and McNair 21; Metzger, Box, and Blasingame 57). The novels provide literary role models and coping strategies, they empower their audience, and promote “uplift” and “pride,” catchwords in Native American and African American literary discourse. In Bradford’s terms, diverse texts “offer indigenous children experiences of narrative **subjectivity** [original emphasis] while enabling non-indigenous children to engage with cultural difference” (“Race” 45). Empathy across cultural divisions strikes out as central goal of diverse YA texts. Angie Thomas also hopes her novel will

give a voice to every kid who feels the same way I do. As we witness injustice, prejudice, and racism rear their ugly heads again in this political climate both in the US and abroad, I think it’s even more important to let young people know that they aren’t alone in their frustration, fear, anger, and sadness. [...] But my ultimate hope is that every single person who reads *The Hate U Give* walks away from it understanding those feelings and sharing them in some way (*Collector’s Edition*, Author’s note)

It has become clear by now that *Diary* and *Hate* share more than the label ‘multicultural’. Clearly, there are also several significant differences between them, contextual differences being the most obvious ones. The greatest contrast – apart from ethnical and gender differences between the protagonists – is that Junior accepts his fluid, multi-faceted identity and Starr consolidates her ‘black identity’ instead. In other words: Junior embraces his ‘hybrid’ self and Starr reinforces her constructed “identit[y] of difference” (Bhabha 3). More than Junior, Starr defines her ethnic identity in relation, even in opposition to whiteness (cf. Engles and Kory 55). Due to her focus on difference, the ‘hybridity’ of Starr’s identity is depicted more negatively than Junior’s. She never feels she can be herself at Williamson, which means that she never fully accepts this part of her identity. Since identity is constructed and constantly in flux, the “fixity” of those differences Starr focuses on must be questioned (Bhabha 2; 37). Junior’s acceptance of multiple, changeable identities, then, suggests that he realises the complexity of identity (cf. Gilroy 152-153), which makes him a more complex character than Starr. What is more, Junior is more critically aware of his community’s problems such as alcohol abuse, their passivity and hopelessness (*Diary* 216). Starr criticizes her community only rarely. Sometimes she condemns drug dealing (*Hate* 12), addicted mothers neglecting their children (91) and “stupid territory wars [...] over streets nobody owns” (17), however, like her father, she appears to blame an unjust system for their misery (170). There is one instance in which the novel does criticize gang violence in Garden Heights. “Other races aren’t killing us nearly as much as we’re killing ourselves” (53), Carlos, a police officer himself, says in a heated discussion with Maverick in which he also challenges his black versus white mindset (51-53). Another difference is that Starr fights to change the system and Junior does not. He learns to operate within the given circumstances. Finally, the narrators’ coping strategies differ. Junior uses

humour, diary writing and his cartoons to express his emotions and experiences, whereas Starr speaks to the public and allows for her two worlds to meet. Both characters are successful in their own ways to come to terms with their identities.

## **7. Conclusion**

As the previous section has shown, there are several parallels between *Hate* and *Diary*, despite their divergent backgrounds. They have in common a focus on the identity formation of their adolescent first-person narrators, a critique of power structures in the present-day United States, which are arguably attributed to the country's colonial legacy, and they present the perspectives of members of ethnic minorities whose voices are seldomly heard in mainstream (YA) literature. In postcolonial terms, the novels can be said to "write back" to the dominant discourse. Although the protagonists are doubly, or rather triply marginalised (Johnson 210), being (female) teenagers of colour, they are not powerless. Ambition and resilience characterise their mindsets and both novels end with a message of hope. Junior and Starr, thus, move between the poles of powerlessness and power. They are discriminated, yet they fight discrimination. This is exactly what links African American literature to Native American literature, postcolonialism, and YAL in general. This struggle against oppression and goal of self-determination constitute the common denominators between all these fields, which I have aimed to merge in this thesis.

In a close reading of the selected novels in sections 5 and 4, I have, thus, focused on these factors of discrimination (mainly in the form of racism), resistance (coping strategies), and identity. In my analyses, I have considered race as a central aspect of the narrators' identity constructions and argued that it is a means of identification with and a way to express 'otherness' from specific social groups. In addition, I have paid particular attention to the intersectionality of race and class and their relevance to the protagonists' identity formation processes. All these categories (race, class, and identity) are fluid and constantly negotiated. They are constructed and performed. Furthermore, I have explored texts' depictions of racism, stereotypes, antiracism, and empowerment. I have pointed out historical as well as literary references and identified some of the characters' coping strategies. Keywords in my interpretations of the novels have been identity, 'othering', 'hybridity', representation, a sense of belonging, oppression, intersectionality, resilience, agency, internalised racism, subalternity, subversion, authenticity, and power. Power also connects my reading of the texts and their contexts to postcolonial studies, which I have outlined in section 3. The question of power is also one of the most hotly-debated issues in CYAL studies, as I have aimed to show in section

2. As writers, publishers, and consumers, adults are in a more powerful position than young readers. Some (e.g. McGillis, “Postcolonialism” 7; Nodelman, “Other”) even compare children to colonised subjects and writing for them to a colonial endeavour, a position I have called into question. Children and adolescents may not be colonised, but they are certainly disadvantaged, because they have limited access to the power politics of publishing. Only with their consumer behaviour and via social media they can express their (dis-)satisfaction with the books available for them. A tension between children and adults, between readers and writers, thus, undeniably exists within the realm of CYAL. The study of adolescent literature – similar to children’s books – can provide the readers with information about this relationship as well as adult’s ambivalent perceptions of adolescence at different periods, which is mirrored in their work (Hunt, “Instruction” 14). Power is further evident in the social function of YAL. Literature for young readers is used as a “tool of socialization” (Trites 54), as a vehicle for the transmission of ideologies and values. Books may also resist dominant ideologies, however. They can be subversive, as some (e.g. Reynolds) have argued, as they may question prevalent power structures. This ambivalence (Bradford 24; Nodelman, *Hidden* 184) of CYA fiction towards the dominant discourse, its potential to challenge, but also to perpetuate norms, or as Grzegorzczuk phrases it, its state of “straddling the border between subversion and an uneasy complicity” (125), is a central argument in CYAL criticism and in this thesis. The selected novels, too, reject racist representations of ethnic minorities, and yet, they include stereotypes. Power mechanisms are also at work in YA publishing and marketing. Diverse literatures remain scarce in the field of YAL, which emerged as soon as teenagers were discovered as a potential market, as I have shown in my historical overview. What is more, publishers usually determine if a book is labelled teen or children’s literature, which complicates the distinction between the fields, a problem I have addressed in the first section of this thesis.

I have read the selected YA novels mainly through the lenses of postcolonial discourse and children’s literature criticism. My analysis also incorporates elements from other critical approaches such as critical race theory (e.g. Panlay), black feminist criticism (e.g. Crenshaw), and critical multicultural approach (e.g. Botelho and Rudman), because they, too, are concerned with socio-political contexts and challenge various forms of oppression. As Nikolajeva (*Power* 7) points out, various theories dealing with suppressed groups (e.g. feminist and queer theory, postcolonial theory, and CYAL criticism) share a critique of normativity and their “examination of power positions”. Overlaps between the fields are, therefore, not surprising. Additionally, postcolonial and CYAL criticism are multidisciplinary by definition (McGillis, “Criticism” 14-25; McLeod, *Beginning* 2). Of course, there may be other equally, or maybe even better suited



theories to approach the selected novels with, which might disclose aspects I have overlooked or decided to ignore in order not to exceed the scope of this thesis. Furthermore, comparisons between postcolonial, African American, and Native American studies have also received criticism (cf. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *Post-colonial* 4-6) due to each fields' distinctiveness. Clearly, thus, there are many limitations to my project. My reading of the selected novels is highly subjective, as I can only speculate on their meanings and purposes. *Diary* and *Hate* are very recent publications which have, so far, only attracted little to no (in the case of *Hate*) scholarly attention at all. This means that there are only few publications I could compare my interpretations with. In addition, the texts might elicit different responses in other readers (Bottigheimer 122). This also brings me to my next point: reader response criticism might contribute interesting findings to the study of the selected texts and diverse YAL in general. Further research could build on Trites' work on the construction of adolescence and investigate, although not without some difficulty, the effects of YA novels on teenage readers and their socially constitutive functions. It could even be theorised if (non-white) adolescents are **made** (non-white) adolescents through YAL, as I have suggested above. There is a general lack of theory and postcolonial criticism of YAL (cf. Bradford 7; Grzegorzczuk 125), a situation which needs to be remedied. Moreover, it would be interesting to explore how racism is portrayed in contemporary adolescent literature by members of other ethnic minorities and white authors and to focus on other aspects (e.g. gender) in the selected novels.

I believe a postcolonial analysis of the representation of power, race and identity in YAL is important, because through the act of reading, adolescents encounter and negotiate values and norms, which they may incorporate into their developing world views. Reichl (*Ethnic* 42) views texts as "contact zones," where cultures interact with each other. Similarly, Bradford (54) states that reading "involves a dialogue between readers and texts." I think this dialogue, or contact, may encourage empathic transcultural learning. Literature enables readers to glimpse into the worlds of others. They encounter realities different from their own and adopt new perspectives, which may broaden their minds. My hope is that an engagement with books like *Diary* and *Hate* contributes to a reduction of prejudice against minority cultures and encourages reflection about cultural norms. Moreover, as the books represent voices which are rarely heard in mainstream YAL, American Indian and African American adolescents find themselves represented in literature. This form of identification may boost self-confidence and question white normativity. Unfortunately, the United States' cultural diversity is inadequately reflected in YAL. There is an urgent need to represent growing ethnic minority populations (Humes, Jones, and Ramirez) in literature for young readers. Besides YAL's function in the process of

socialisation and as a vehicle for cross-cultural contact, it is also political. Like Grzegorzcyk (4), I believe that postcolonial YAL may “encourage readers to interrogate mechanisms and effects of oppression and injustice and reflect on the status quo of race and class relations, imagine alternative realities, social processes and to think beyond the binary ‘us’ versus ‘them’ logic.” Reading postcolonial YAL is, therefore, a political act. I am convinced that a postcolonial reading of contemporary YA texts is relevant, because, although the term postcolonialism appears to suggest otherwise, colonialism is not a phenomenon of the past. The trauma of historical colonialism and its consequences are still present in our world today, where neo-colonialism as well as social, political, juridical and economic inequalities prevail (McLeod, “Introduction” 4; Döring 6). A postcolonial reading of race and racism in YAL may, for instance, reveal a “colonial mentality that often surfaces as racism” (McGillis, “Postcolonialism” 13). Books like *Diary* and *Hate* pay attention to and subvert the remnants of colonial discourse. I hope that multicultural books which feature self-representations of minority groups ultimately work against racism, contribute to social change, and aid decolonisation processes in the United States (see also Bradford 227). Decolonisation also takes place in people’s minds as soon as internalised, naturalised values and colonial world views are no longer accepted (cf. McLeod, *Beginning* 180). This reminds me of Sherman Alexie’s repeated claim (e.g. Nygren 152) that a specific line by poet Adrian Louis inspired his writing career. It reads: "Adrian, I'm in the reservation of my mind!" To leave this mental reservation is to decolonise the mind (Ngugi qtd. in McLeod, *Beginning* 22), I would like to suggest. Reading books like *Diary* may, then, empower discriminated young readers and offer learning opportunities for majority group members. Maybe one day, colonial thought will belong to the past.

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## 9. Appendix

### Abstract (English)

This thesis deals with the representation of the categories power, race, and identity in two contemporary young adult novels. Applying postcolonial discourse, it explores depictions of power relations and identity formation processes in Sherman Alexie's *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* and *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas. It also investigates underlying ideologies, norms, and power politics, especially with regard to the ambivalent role of adults, in YA literature more generally. A close contextual reading of the selected texts particularly focuses on the protagonists' identity constructions and the centrality of race as marker of difference and identification with social groups. It further points out references to the United States' colonial legacy and ongoing structural social inequalities, the intersectionality of race and class as well as the non-white, adolescent protagonists' marginalised positions in US American society. Moreover, the textual analysis highlights coping strategies the narrators apply as they are faced with racism and discrimination. A central argument of this thesis is that the narrators display resilience, hope, and agency despite their underprivileged social backgrounds. They are not powerless. This thesis additionally identifies several parallels between the books, including the identity crises both narrators experience – and, ultimately, resolve – as they move between different social spheres. Finally, this thesis claims the selected novels “write back” to dominant, mainstream young adult literature, in which minority cultures are vastly underrepresented. They give voices to marginalised groups and offer readers opportunities for identification as well as transcultural learning.

Key words: young adult literature/ postcolonialism/ power, race, and identity/ diversity/ USA/ Native American literature/ African American literature/ transcultural learning

### Abstract (German)

Diese Diplomarbeit befasst sich mit der Darstellung von Macht, Ethnizität und Identität in zwei zeitgenössischen Texten englischsprachiger Jugendliteratur. Anhand angewandten postkolonialen Diskurses werden Machtstrukturen sowie Identitätsbildungen der Hauptcharaktere in *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* von Sherman Alexie und *The Hate U Give* von Angie Thomas untersucht. Unterschwellige Ideologien, Normen und Macht, besonders auch mit Hinblick auf die ambivalente Rolle von Erwachsenen in der Jugendliteratur generell, werden ebenso ermittelt. Spezielles Augenmerk liegt bei dem ‚close reading‘ der beiden Texte auf den Identitätskonstruktionen der beiden Erzählpersonen und der Bedeutung von Ethnizität als Kennzeichen der Abgrenzung beziehungsweise Identifikation mit bestimmten sozialen Gruppen. Des Weiteren werden kontextuelle Bezüge zum kolonialen Erbe der Vereinigten Staaten, gegenwärtige strukturelle soziale Ungleichheiten sowie die Intersektionalität von Ethnizität und Gesellschaftsschicht herausgearbeitet. Diese Diplomarbeit identifiziert zudem einige Parallelen zwischen den Romanen, wie die Identitätskrisen, welche die ProtagonistInnen durchlaufen – und schlussendlich überwinden –, da sie sich zwischen unterschiedlichen sozialen Sphären bewegen. Außerdem zeigt die Textanalyse einige Bewältigungsstrategien auf, welche die Protagonistin/ der Protagonist anwenden, um mit Rassismus und Diskriminierung umzugehen. Eine zentrale Aussage dieser Diplomarbeit ist, dass die Erzählpersonen trotz ihrer unterprivilegierten sozialen Herkunft eine gewisse Resilienz, Hoffnung und Handlungsfähigkeit (Agency) aufweisen. Sie sind nicht machtlos. Schließlich stellt diese Diplomarbeit die Behauptung auf, dass die untersuchten Bücher dem dominanten Mainstream der Jugendliteratur kontern, in welchem Minderheiten deutlich unterrepräsentiert sind. Sie geben marginalisierten Bevölkerungsgruppen eine Stimme, bieten LeserInnen Möglichkeiten der Identifikation und fördern transkulturelles Lernen.

Schlagwörter: Jugendliteratur/ Postkolonialismus/ Macht, Ethnizität und Identität/ Diversität/ USA/ Native American literature/ African American literature/ transkulturelles Lernen