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„Problematic Portrayals of Native Americans/First Nations in Native American Crime Novels; Sherman Alexie’s *Indian Killer*, Thomas King’s *Dreadful Water* and Stephen Graham Jones’ *All the Beautiful Sinners*”

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1. Introduction

This diploma thesis deals with Native American crime novels by Native American authors and focuses on the representation of Native Americans in them. Reading the crime novels has shown that all the novels do not move away from stereotypes of Native Americans such as being primitive and wild; they are abundantly integrated in the novels and are an essential part of them. While Sherman Alexie and Thomas King use satire and humor to bring these stereotypes and the perception of Native Americans/First Nations by the rest of the American population, especially Caucasians, closer to the reader, Stephen Graham Jones sticks to a more serious and darker style than the other two. However, he also does not move away from filling his novels with political incorrectness and he also incorporates a humoristic and problematic representation of Native Americans as Alexie and King do it. Even though their writing styles, the plots and characters differ, they all have a common theme, which is pointing out the misrepresentation and problematic portrayal of Native Americans in the 20th and 21st century by using this incorrect representations themselves and criticizing it at the same time. The main focus of this thesis is to find out what effect their approach has and how the use of the crime novel genre and humor supports their critique. Additionally, I try to find out what the authors want to achieve by sticking to the stereotypes instead of moving away from them.

To get a general idea about Native American crime novels and Native detectives, chapter 2 “The Native American Crime Novel and Native Detectives” starts with an introduction to the beginning of crime novels and discusses what ingredients make a crime novel a crime novel. The next subchapters are focusing on the differences on classical and Native crime novels and the authors’ choice of this genre to not just entertain the reader and make their living but also criticize the current situation of Native Americans. The main themes that I discuss are differences in crime solving, character development and killings. Jones is the only one that really sticks to a certain crime novel pattern, whereas the other two, Alexie and King, rather change the genre to get their message across. In addition to pointing out the differences, the other focus is put on finding out why these changes to classical crime novels were made and what the authors try to achieve by making the novels more Native American. The method that I use to find this out, is comparing and contrasting the three crime novels to each other and providing historical explanations, such as the enslavement by the Spaniards or the intention of other European settlers to drive out the wildness of the First Nations, with examples of the secondary literature.

Chapter 3 focuses purely on the representation of Native Americans in the crime novels and leaves out comparisons to other crime novels. It starts with a remark on the maltreatment of Native Americans and how the authors deal with it in their novels. Then I compare the three authors and discuss how differently they integrate this topic in their stories. All of them mention the problematic portrayals of Native Americans but they differ in how they introduce the reader to this topic. In subchapter 3.3 I focus on the words “cowboy” and “Indian” because they appear in all novels and are very often used to demonstrate an old power structure and superiority that is still going on in the 21st century. Lastly in chapter 3, I address the issue that many First Nations struggle with: their identity as they are neither granted to be Americans nor Natives. Most Natives are caught in an identity crisis and it does not matter how hard they try to become more Native or American, they always fail to become one or the other. Political correctness in the 21st century is a significant topic that has reached various classes of society and plays a crucial role in the Western world. Reading terms like “Indian” (Alexie 18), “Indian from here” (18), “chief” (Jones 14), “red-ass Indian” (14) and many other analogous terms reveal that political correctness has not reached many people in the West when it comes to Native Americans. Another one of the objectives of this paper is to find out why this is the case.

The last chapter demonstrates that Native Americans are still not accepted by the American society and the authors in the novels try to demonstrate that by using the crime genre as a medium to convey this message. They do this to provoke and subtly convey the message to the reader that it is ridiculous how Native Americans are still perceived in America’s society and that a change is more than due. However, no author states explicitly how the relationship between non-Natives and Native Americans can be improved. They only try to imply it by putting Native American characters into the focus and they are very often uttering criticism by describing their inner thoughts. All authors make use of the inner monologue and this is the way they use to make the readers aware of how the characters really feel. Especially when they are called “chief”, “red-ass Indian” or worse terms, the authors try to make it clear what this actually does to Native Americans and how it destroys them internally. This is also one of the reasons why the crime genre is a very successful choice for voicing these problems. All novels do not just demonstrate and include real killings and physical unrighteousness that is done to Native Americans but also emotional destruction that white people commit. This emotional destruction often leads to problems like alcohol abuse, psychological issues and poverty. Due to the problematic portrayal of First Nations in North America but also in many other parts of the world, especially the developed countries, many Native Americans have to suffer

throughout their whole life and Alexie, King and Jones criticize especially this situation through exaggeration.

2. The Native American Crime Novel and Native Detectives

2.1 The Commencement of the Crime Novel

Leonard Cassuto states that the beginning of the crime novel were the novels of Edgar Allan Poe. Everything started between 1841 and 1844 with Poe's Parisian detective Auguste Dupin (Cassuto 291). Dupin has a sidekick and he resembles Dr Watson of the Sherlock Holmes novels (291). For Poe the main ingredient was "human reason" (291). "Puzzle solving and code breaking offered him a chance to argue for hidden harmony in the world, a harmony which Poe prized in all its artistic forms (such as poetic meter)" (291). A crime novel cannot exist without ratiocination (291). However, this "hidden harmony" and ratiocination are not as visible as in classical crime novels. In fact, Native American crime novels appear to be more chaotic and unstructured and this might be done intentionally to focus on the unstable situation of First Nations. Nevertheless, other authors, even from Europe, tried to use Poe's main ingredient and to improve the crime novel (293). Some of these authors were Emile Gaboriau, Wilkie Collins and in the US Anna Katherine Green tried to continue what Poe started (293). She became famous for drawing-room detective novels and even Arthur Conan Doyle honored Poe by taking the inspiration for Sherlock Holmes from detective Dupin (293). Cassuto points out that these crime novels all contain puzzled cases that need to be solved but they actually also "[...] seek to represent the national social condition, with all its warts and flaws" (295). "Warts and flaws" appear to be the keywords as this is also what Alexie, King and Jones try to show. The only difference is that it is not the national social condition that is depicted in their novels, it is the conditions of the First Nations in North America. Considering all these features of the crime novel, all three authors had valid reasons to make the crime novel their medium of resistance and critique. It reaches the masses and confronts them with the stereotypes Native Americans have to deal with every day. Crime novels give an insight into the darkest corners of people's minds: they shock the reader, evoke emotions of anger and angst, and entertain as well.

All authors use some of the crime novel features above but they also make an alternative genre out of it, the Native American crime novel genre. King, for example, does not have a Sherlock

Holmes in his crime novel. He has Thumps DreadfulWater who is considered to be an observational genius by the other characters but also as somebody chaotic, unreliable and lazy. These are all features that do not fit with Sherlock Holmes. Alexie does not really have a detective, he only has a crime novel author, Wilson, who worked as a police officer and wants to know as much as possible about the case of the Indian killer to finish his novel. The reader has to take over and try to solve the case as all the characters in the novel try to handle the case but they are not very successful in that.

In Jones' novel, there are real detectives and police officers who try to catch the murderous Tin Man. He is the only one of them who tries to put all the ingredients of the classical crime novel into *All the Beautiful Sinners*. He has Jim Doe, Creed and other policemen, alleged perpetrators, various victims, scientific help and shootings. *All the Beautiful Sinners* has all the features of “[t]he pulp fiction of the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s and the *film noir* which spun out of it made the corrupt city with its million stories of depravity and degradation a modern cliché [...]” (MacDonald and MacDonald, *Ethnic* 47). All the places Jim Doe visits on the search for the Tin Man are dark and gloomy. By giving the Tin Man his name, Jones also mystifies the murderer and gives him the benefits of anonymity, just as Alexie does with the Indian killer. The murderer becomes something like a special figure, mysterious and scary but at the same time tangible and not just an anonymous murderer one cannot attach features to.

Tin Man is also an intertextual word from *The Wizard of Oz*. One of the characters is called Tin Man and he wants to ask the Wizard of Oz for a heart to be able to feel. Some people might use heartless to define a murderer but in the context of Native Americans it also adds a different meaning. Native Americans were often and are still seen as heartless and unemotional beings because of their different culture and behavior. Furthermore, they were and are still perceived as unclean and nasty (Treuer 12). Cutting out a person's heart is also seen as a Native American ritual, which the Indian killer in Alexie's novel does, and, therefore, the Tin Man's name is not just a name but already a riddle that is also a particular feature of crime novels. Cutting out hearts and removing body parts was indeed a practice that Native Americans were known for and some tribes were even cannibalistic but there was a weighty reason why these rumors were attached to all Native Americans. “[...] [T]hey [(Spaniards)] most often used cannibalism to legitimize their raids. Scholars have argued that early Spaniards had perverse incentives to exaggerate, sensationalize, and even fabricate stories of man-eating Indians [...]” (Resendés 42) Nonetheless, “[...] cannibalism was real in some quarters of the Caribbean and elsewhere

in the New World” (42). This is also where it becomes very problematic. First Nations are all thrown into the same category and many settlers have not differentiated between different tribes and different cultures.

By throwing all Native Americans into the same category, a very big problem occurs, namely suppression of identity. It is a typical flaw people encounter in the everyday life when stereotypes about other peoples are used. Certain negative features of individuals or a certain group are transferred to masses, often nations and even continents, like Africa or Asia. Instead of treating every tribe in North America like an individual tribe, European settlers have perceived all Native Americans as one people, which was a mistake that still has effects even now. Today, there are 700.000 Native Americans who live close or on reservations, 1.75 million Indians in the U.S. who are counted as Indians and 7 million who claim that they have Native American ancestors (Champagne 7). The numbers reveal that it is very hard to determine who is Native American or how much they are Native American and all of this started when the white settlers mentally put all Native Americans into the same kind of tribe without thinking what effects it might have in the future. As it can be perceived in all three texts and many examples in the secondary literature, Native Americans are always referred to as “Indians” or other terms but rarely with their tribal names.

The identity of many Natives Americans was stolen when the first settlers set foot on North American land as they were all immediately only perceived as savages. Joshua David Bellin quotes Wilson Lumpkin who “[...] termed the Cherokees’ domain a ‘land of confusion’ that, he hoped, would be ‘converted’ from ‘a savage wilderness’ into ‘the peaceful abodes of an enterprising and industrious population’” (qtd. in Bellin 26). It is not just the Cherokees or their land that have been viewed like this, all First Nations have had to endure this categorization of being savages since the first encounter with Europeans. Most settlers never wanted Native Americans to have a future of their own and most Natives are still struggling to have one. Duane Champagne writes that determining what a Native American is, “[...] is a very contemporary issue, negotiated in the context of current cultural, economic, and institutional relations” (11). All three authors include this identity struggle in their books. It is also very visible in the naming of the characters. For instance, Stephen Graham Jones names one of his protagonists “Jim Doe”, which is very similar to “John Doe”, a name that is used for unidentified male dead bodies. Furthermore, it also reflects the already discussed issue of putting all Native Americans into the same kind of people.

Sherman Alexie uses John, which is also one part of the name John Doe. It is striking that Alexie and Jones do not make it too obvious by not using the full names but they still use names of unidentified dead male bodies. They leave out one part, especially Alexie does it by only using the first name to refer to John. By doing that Alexie already points out that John is going through an identity struggle. It is exactly what John goes through. He is a Native American of Navajo decent, at least this is what he thinks, who was abandoned by his mother and raised by Caucasians. He struggles with himself throughout the whole novel and the question arises many times if he might be the killer or not. In addition, the reader is also confronted with John and his suicidal thoughts and it very often appears only to be a question of time when John is going to commit suicide.

2.2 The Crime Novel as the Perfect Medium for Native American Issues

Even though on first sight these three Native American traditions and detective novels do not share many features, they have actually been intertwined for ages. The genres of the dime novels of the 1860s were “captivity and seduction narratives; stories of scouts, white settlers, and Indian fighting; mysteries of the city [...]” (Streeby 586). Dime novels were aimed at the masses and “they helped to shape [...] the detective story [...]” (587). Thus, even at the beginning of crime novels, Native American stories and crime stories shared the same medium. Therefore, it is not a surprise that there are more and more crime novels that include Native American detectives, territories and worldviews. Even Shelly Streeby points out that “[m]ysteries of the city and frontier/imperial adventure were not entirely separate genres” (590). Thus, the introduction of Native Americans in crime novels started with the emergence of the crime novel itself. It is obvious why this is the case: Native Americans have always appeared, as it can be perceived in the discussion of the three novels throughout the paper, to be mysterious, dark, different, and dangerous, which makes them the perfect theme for crime novels. Nonetheless, there are also science fiction novels that are extremely integrated into American culture or comics but the crime novel appeared to be the better choice for Alexie, Jones and King.

In addition to the emergence of the crime novel and the parallel integration of Native Americans into them, McCann, Streeby and Cassuto offer various explanations of why the crime novel is such a significant development in American culture. Sean McCann writes:

“Since the dawn of commercial mass culture in the United States nearly two hundred years ago, stories of crime and violence have been the most prominent face of popular

entertainment, and they have been consistently understood not only to depict, but also to elicit, dangerous forces of appetite, desire, violence, and fear.” (800) McCann does not directly refer to the crime novel but he mentions the ingredients of it and why Americans favor it. Crime novels deal with the darkest features of people and they evoke certain emotions that people might only experience in real life when something bad is about to happen to them. Controversially, McCann’s description does not appear to praise the crime stories as something good, he rather regards them as something negative. He also does not stop here, he even refers to crime novels as “seductive powers of commercial entertainment” (800) but also states that they “sometimes illuminate the manipulative [...] nature of capitalistic society” (800). In addition, he also adds that the American crime novel is crucial because it demonstrates where real literature actually begins (800). The idea of “real literature” can also be applied to Native American crime novels and the crime novel part can be perceived as a shell, whereas the Native American elements could be seen as the actual literature.

Cassuto, in contrast to McCann, commences his chapter “The American Novel of Mystery, Crime, and Detection” in *A Companion to the American Novel* differently. He does not define crime stories as something not culturally relevant and pure mass culture. Rather he claims that “[...] detective fiction [...] is as old as storytelling itself” (291) and gives the example of Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex* with Oedipus as the detective. Nevertheless, he immediately adds that the genre as we know it today actually started in the nineteenth century and continues with Edgar Allan Poe (291). However, taking this into consideration, gives another reason for choosing the crime novel genre as a medium for bringing First Nation stories to the masses. It is an old story form and Native Americans are the oldest part of American history; thus, it is very convenient to use the crime novel to convey Native American issues.

Streeby writes exactly about the actual beginning of crime novels and she also mentions an African American author, Philip Warne, who made the detective not the main crime solver but one of many (596). This is actually something that can be observed in *Indian Killer* because there is no real detective and everybody tries to solve the crime, including the reader. Furthermore, Warne does not just change the genre a bit, he also adds a critique. He states through his novel that “poor people are the victims of rich men’s abilities to manipulate the law” (596). Thus, even at that time the crime novel genre was not only supposed to entertain but also to challenge the reader, criticize the society and deal with the darkest traits of human nature. Taking this into consideration, the crime novel actually appears as a very good medium to voice problematic issues. That is why King, Alexie and Jones do utter problems that exist

between Native Americans and other ethnicities. Warne's statement about poor people becoming victims of rich men can be transferred to the problems of Native Americans. Many tribes have to suffer because of not belonging to the privileged and wealthy part of the society and this makes them a target for violence and becoming victims. This issue is also discussed in further detail in subchapter 4.1 and 4.2.

Stoecklein points out that "[...] a genre with mass appeal, popularity, and accessibility provides Native American authors a platform to debunk some of the existing misconceptions" (24). The novels should have this as their main objective, but instead of clearing up the misconceptions, they support them and introduce them by their characters. These misconceptions or stereotypes of Native Americans as monstrous, primitive and unintellectual human beings are prevalent because of their abundance in reality. Still, there are various ways the authors use to fight them. Alexie introduces various characters and through them he includes critique and demonstrates against the stereotypes. John in *Indian Killer* is filled with rage and anger. He cannot stand that people perceive him as the dangerous, gloomy and a big Indian. He almost explodes and this explosion is very likely Alexie's way of demonstrating the rage of all other Native Americans accumulated in one person. Then there is Marie who tries to fight for Native Americans on an intellectual level.

However, none of them succeeds. They both somehow fail and only the Indian killer has some kind of success. He kills certain people and takes revenge but it is never clear if a Native American is the killer because it always appears to be possible that a white person is conducting the killings. King even uttered that he is not really fond of all these stereotypes but that there is no way around them (qtd. in Andrews and Walton 106). This rage that one can spot easily is then often expressed in murders and crimes. For instance, this is what John feels when he uses his hammer at work on a construction site: "In that last frozen moment, in that brief instant before the hammer struck again its explosion of flame, John knew exactly what to do with his life. John needed to kill a white man" (Alexie 25). The omniscient narrator also explains that "John felt the rage he didn't like to feel" (41). All these crime novels are not just there to entertain or point out unjust treatments of Native Americans. It is also a kind of revenge novel because it is supposed to utter all this pain that has been done to Native Americans. This is especially perceivable in Alexie's *Indian Killer* with John's pain and Marie's rebellious behavior. Jones and King do not mention the pain so explicitly but they still include many accounts of physical and verbal abuse.

King and Jones try to fight these misconceptions of Native Americans with humor and reason. For example, Thumps DreadfulWater is another kind of detective. He is funny and tries to solve the case without admitting that he is privately investigating this case for his lover. He pretends to just be the photographer of the crime scene and secretly observes everything.

“[...] Thumps combines the hard-boiled detective’s perspective with that of a Native man whose passion for photography is overtly double-edged because he recognizes the tangible differences and disturbing similarities between recording evidence and creating art, especially given the historical exploitation of Aborigines by white photographers such as Edward Curtis in their efforts to record a ‘dying race.’” (Andrews and Walton 118)

Andrews and Walton write that he is a tough detective and they also include that he has the perspective of a Native American. This perspective gives him the insight of knowing the differences and similarities of “recording evidence and creating art” (118). Edward Curtis, according to Andrews and Walton, did not know that and exploited First Nations by taking pictures of them, whereas Thumps different perspective makes him observe and take pictures differently. It also gives him an advantage compared to the other investigators. Thumps also acts very tough as if nothing can disturb him but by really caring about this case, especially because his lover’s son is involved in it, he also demonstrates compassion and that he does care about finding the murderer.

Thumps’ thorough observation skills give the reader the opportunity to recognize things, they would not be able to see with a non-Native detective and King uses Thumps intentionally for that. “He [(King)] draws attention to the links between race and class in his detective novels, suggesting that with urban development – and the forced migration and assimilation of Native people into cities – racial conflicts may have changed but they have not disappeared” (118). He always points out Native American stereotypes in a funny way and he tries to make the reader aware of these things by pointing them out in a humorous manner but King has to rely on the cooperation of the reader. The reader has to get the witty jokes and comprehend that King actually wanted to be sarcastic rather than using these jokes to make the reader enjoy the book more.

Jones style is a bit different as he uses a darker style and conveys problematic portrayals mainly through the Native American police officers Jim Doe and Creed. Creed is serious, whereas Jim Doe is similar to King’s Thumps DreadfulWater. Jones also plays with stereotypes and makes the Native American protagonists react sarcastically or angrily towards discriminating

comments. In the following example, Jim Doe and another investigator of the Tin Man case, Cody, joke about the fact that they did not even know Indians existed before the case:

“‘They weren’t hard to find,’ he said. Cody nodded. ‘. . . he’ll be the only white guy in there?’ he said. Jim Doe smiled. ‘Ever been to a pow-wow?’ he asked Cody. ‘I didn’t even know there were Indians anymore until last month,’ Cody said. Jim Doe smiled, led. ‘Me neither,’ he said.” (Jones 421)

This passage demonstrates that even Jones includes humor in his novel and they are both acting surprised that First Nations are actually still in the US. It is also funny because Jim Doe is Blackfeet and even he says that he did not know that “Indians” still exist. As humoristic as this situation is, it demonstrates Jones’ sarcasm as many tribes have been wiped out and the reader also learns by reading the three novels that many people in the US walk around without knowing that Native Americans are actually still there.

Alexie, on the other hand, “because of the somber and occasionally disturbing subject matter of [...] [his] [text] [...] downplay[s] the humor and wit that so often characterize[s] not only Native writing (including that of Thomas King) but also hard-boiled detective tradition” (Andrews and Walton 106). It is not the case that *Indian Killer* is not sarcastic, especially because it is a satire but John’s identity conflict and many instances like racism, discrimination and white supremacy undermine the humor and exaggerations. For instance, Native Americans are often seen as a threat for no reason and Alexie does not want to downplay that: “‘I’m not going on some reservation,’ Aaron had said. ‘You don’t know what those Indians might do. Hell, they already killed one white guy. And you better not go either. What would Dad say if he knew you were going up there?’” (Alexie 105). All these themes are too close to reality and that’s why they don’t work as humoristic expressions, nevertheless; *Indian Killer* can and should be regarded as a crime novel, just not as a classical one.

2.3 Elements of the Typical Crime Novel in Native American Crime Novels

Alexie includes a satirical but also a very dark style, which is the main crime novel characteristic in *Indian Killer* and it is mainly demonstrated through the protagonist John. Marie is represented as a fighter but even her arguments with the professor are dark and destructive. Then there is also the Indian killer, who is portrayed as very evil, uncanny and mysterious. Just by the brief description of the characters, the features of the mystery and crime novel are already integrated, even though there are more elements in the *Indian Killer* that make it a crime novel than the character traits. For instance, Alexie switches the character with every chapter and

creates different vantage points, which is very typical for detective novels since Philip Warne introduced it (Streeby 596). He also creates doubt when it comes to finding the murderer because John is suspicious from the beginning of the novel but towards the end, there is the assumption that Marie might be the killer. In contrast to the classical crime novel, the identity of the killer is not revealed but all the other ingredients for a crime novel are integrated. Even Jennifer Andrews and Priscilla L. Walton point out that Alexie “overtly alters the hard-boiled detective formula by dividing the role of the investigator among several characters” (105). These would be the characters John, Marie, the former police officer, Wilson, and Truck Schulz. Alexie also includes an “investigation that is ‘intuitive and coincidental rather than rational and goal oriented,’ ‘placing the immediate crimes within a larger historical framework of injustice,’ and refusing to provide a ‘neat ending’” (Fristln and Gymnich qtd. in Andrews and Walton 105). Thus, Alexie moves away from the ratiocination that came with Poe’s legacy and this demonstrates that Alexie’s *Indian Killer* might not be the crime novel per sé. Compared to King’s and Jones’ novel it isn’t but it has elements of a crime novel and works differently than the other two. Andrews and Walton also point out that “[...] Alexie concludes with a chapter that denies any clear solution to the crime at hand precisely because to do so would undermine a much more complex legacy of Native genocide in North America” (105). The other books have a clearer ending, even though the criminal mind that was responsible for Takeshi’s death in *DreadfulWater* manages to vanish in a helicopter and the crime remains partly unsolved at the end.

Hence, even King’s novel does not have a clear ending, which might also mean that King wants to point out that there is no ending to crimes on Native Americans because they never ended and are still going on. Furthermore, the former crimes that have been conducted on First Nations are still troubling them.

“Many of us [Native Americans] have lived bitter and difficult lives, and we have brought the ghost of our modern afterlife inside ourselves, where it sits judging us, shaping us, putting its fingers over our eyes so that all we can see, all we can feel, is that we were once great people but are great no more, and that we are no longer capable of greatness.” (Treuer 15)

As David Treuer points it out, the crimes have been so disastrous that all the efforts that the US government might try to improve the situation of Native Americans is meaningless as it will never bring back the greatness of many Native American tribes.

Another crucial point that King focuses on in *DreadfulWater* is that many Native Americans have badly paid jobs and histories of incarcerations, which very often also makes them perfect

scapegoats for all kinds of crimes. Thumps points them out and he very often subtly comments on the precarious circumstances many Native Americans have to grow up and live in. First Nations often never get the chance to receive higher education and become more than working class. A perfect passage that demonstrates exactly where the professional life for many Native Americans starts and ends, is actually given in Alexie's *Indian Killer*: "The cameras flashed. John was finished with high school and would never attend college. He walked offstage and stepped onto the fortieth floor of an unfinished office building in downtown Seattle" (Alexie 22). King does not do it like Alexie as he only states such facts as side comments. Thus, his critique is never explicitly uttered but rather thrown at the reader by describing certain characters and their environment they live in.

In addition to King's hidden anger about the temporary situation of many Native Americans, he also includes hints to the reasons for this status quo, which is the unbalanced power dynamic. For instance, a white Casino owner who vanishes in a helicopter in front of Thumps' eyes at the end, demonstrates a certain power structure. It is a reminder of how European settlers came and considered themselves to be superior over Native Americans with their guns, ships and knowledge. Nevertheless, it is very hard to tell why King leaves a kind of open ending. It is not really open as they find the murderer but the whole crime is still not solved because the murderer's accomplice is not caught. It might be just suspense because King wants the reader to buy other DreadfulWater novels but it is also a critique, which is further analyzed in the rest of the paper.

2.4 Native American Detectives and Killers

If we leave out Alexie's novel and just look at the themes in the novels of the other two writers, they both have real detectives. King's *DreadfulWater* does have one and Stephen Graham Jones' *All the Beautiful Sinners* has one as well. In *Indian Killer* there is a detective that actually turned to writing crime novels but he is not at the center of attention and the reader is introduced to him later on in the novel. Thus, it cannot be said that there is not a detective but it is not the typical detective one would expect. He is rather there to fulfill the features of the genre than to fulfill his purpose. A real crime novel detective is "hard-boiled", "lack[s] [...] affect" and is emotionally detached from the world (Cassuto 297). Moreover, he is not sentimental (297). Andrews and Walton describe an American detective as follows: "Typically the American hard-boiled detective is a white heterosexual man who is unattached to class and turns his street

savvy into a legitimate full-time profession, though often not a very lucrative one” (103). However, Thumps DreadfulWater does not really fulfill these criteria. He is very sentimental, not really hard-boiled and very chaotic. He is also clumsy and very unorganized. Additionally, he is referred to as being lazy and this is something that is usually not the typical detective. “[Nevertheless,] DreadfulWater may be self-conscious and uncertain at times – but he represents a promising set of alterna(rra)tives for Native peoples and the potential for Aboriginal justice, one case at a time” (Andrews and Walton 121). He does not want the reality of whites and Native Americans to blur, he rather tries to clarify that even Native Americans are familiar with the laws of physics and chemistry and are not unaware of them. King ridicules white misconceptions of Native Americans as uneducated and refusing scientific facts and he tries to demonstrate why these misconceptions are what they are, false imaginations and rumor that became stereotypes of Native Americans. However, Thumps does somehow appear to be “detached from the world” (Cassuto 297) and, therefore, also fits the description of a “real” detective partly.

Jones’ detective, Jim Doe, contrarily to the other two detectives in the other two novels, fits Cassuto’s description meticulously. He has been through a lot in his life, goes through a lot as a Native American and appears to have trouble living a normal life. What all three detectives of all three novels have in common is that they live alone, are not married and do not have children and detachment from the everyday life is also one of their commonalities. “While formula fiction – like the hard-boiled detective story – is often seen as reinforcing ‘conservative modes of expression’ by giving readers a consistent narrative structure with familiar characters, plot, and outcome, it is these same elements that Priscilla Walton and Manina Jones argue make it an important site for ‘renegotiating social value[s]’” (qtd. in Andrews and Walton 103). This also explains why the detective figure is very crucial for Native American crime novels. Their sole presence is already a critique and helps the authors point out many critical issues that are problematic in the lives of many First Nations. Alexie manages it without a real detective but King and Jones use them and they manage to fight stereotypes and misrepresentations but they also evoke them. Other characters refer to these detectives in derogatory ways and do not accept their status as detectives.

The opposite of the detective, the serial killer, also contains typical features. “He is the ultimate *isolato*, the ultimate antifamily man” (Cassuto 304). This feature is almost common knowledge and, therefore, John in *Indian Killer* is considered by the reader to be the murderer because he

exactly fits the stereotypes of a crime novel serial killer. “The contemporary serial killer story results from the braiding together of the domestic detective and the monstrous murderer into a narrative that insistently contrasts them” (304). In *DreadfulWater* the female CEO is the killer’s accomplice and she does not have a family and is very odd and strange. Nonetheless, there is also the attractiveness that especially Thumps realizes and likes. He does not let his feelings come in the way of solving the case. Jones’ Tin Man fits Cassuto’s description and is portrayed as a very weird, secretive, scary and an odd figure: “The Tin Man smiled, took an umbrella from the stand. Opened it. Closed it. Looked down the length of it” (Jones 219).

Paradoxically, all Native Americans in all three novels also share the features of a typical killer from a white’s perspective. They look different, behave differently, have another relation to nature and have odd character traits. For instance, Marie in *Indian Killer* is aggressive, John has a mental disease and the killer is always portrayed as dark and monstrous. Thumps in *DreadfulWater* is also mysterious but does not pose any kind of threat but Jim Doe in Jones’ novel very often gets in situations where people are threatened by him. It is as if Native Americans are criminals without committing a crime. The stigmatization that murderers or generally criminals have is almost the exact one that Native Americans have to endure. They have trouble of being accepted by the society, often grow up and live outside of the society in reservations and it often does not matter how much they try, they are always the Native Americans that were discovered by the European settlers in the 16th century. All this time that has passed and throughout all the American history, the First Nations have never been considered to be equal to Europeans. Cultural differences were perceived as being undeveloped and primitive.

2.5 The Crime Novel as a Voice for Contemporary Native American Maltreatment

Cassuto points out another reason why the authors chose the crime novel as their medium to convey their struggles: “[...] [S]tudy[ing] crime literature is to study the way that Americans think not only about crime and government, but also – and especially – the way they think about family, community, and domesticity” (304-305). This quote illuminates why all three authors use the genre of the crime novel to convey their message about Native Americans. They can reach masses, they can criticize American society because the genre itself, as aforementioned, does so and they can fulfill the genre expectations by interchanging the genre features with Native American stereotypes: mysterious, uncanny, primitive. Of course, these interchanged

genre features are only perceived as such by the white audience, which is undoubtedly the main target of these novels as Native American culture is mostly only implicitly included in the stories. Nevertheless, not explicitly mentioning some issues has only been done to not overwhelm the audience but to point out the crucial Native American features. Furthermore, by not throwing everything Native American onto the reader, the authors try to evoke unconscious reactions and they probably try to convey the message that only white thinking leads to the mystification of the Native American and not the Native American itself mystifies. Native Americans are just there like everybody else but what people make of them puts them into a certain category.

Even though Native Americans and crime novels have been intertwined, the Native American detective's popularity is a rather new phenomenon (Taylor 102). Rhonda Harris Taylor points out that the first one who introduced Native American detectives in a crime novel, was Tony Hillerman (102). This novel was called *The Blessing Way* and it included a Navajo detective, called Lieutenant Joe Leaphorn (102). Nonetheless, MacDonald, MacDonald, and Sheridan state that Hillerman "[...] did not invent the figure of the Indian detective, nor does he now still hold a monopoly on such fiction" (*Shaman*, 2). However, MacDonald, MacDonald, and Sheridan point out that he still had a big influence because he "[...] resituate[ed] the detective, allowing others to spin out the diverse roles and possibilities of the new setting" (2). Thus, Hillerman did not invent the detective per sé but he popularized him and changed the classical conventions of the crime novel.

Although what Hillerman did was enormous and changed the crime novel drastically, the Native American crime novels were "[...] another manifestation of an old American theme: the Indian as a marginal figure on the border of civilization, a guide, [...] or a companion into a darker and freer world and sometimes a mentor [...] who teaches secret wisdom" (2). These features are especially visible in King's *Dreadful Water* with Moses Blood, who takes on the role of the mentor. Still, King also fights this problematic representation of the Native American as a "marginal figure" (2), even with Moses Blood, by ridiculing the imaginations that traditional Indians have superpowers and get their knowledge from a supernatural source. This is also the new Native American representation MacDonald, MacDonald, and Sheridan refer to (3). They even mention that in contemporary Native American novels, there are detectives that could be "[...] a native princess with a flair of fashion, a lesbian pushing feminist theories and attitudes, or a computer whiz using high-tech means to skirt the law and assist the weak [...]" (3). Moses

Blood is one of those mentioned, namely a computer geek and Thumps even has an inner monologue where he is surprised how somebody as traditional as Moses Blood knows so much about computers. Moses Blood is not the detective but he helps Thumps and this element of a Native American who is an expert in a modern day invention, is what MacDonald, MacDonald, and Sheridan mean when they write about “today’s Indian detective” (3). They also add that these Native Americans also fight against governments and big companies, which is exactly an element that King has included in his novel (3). Thumps finds out that the CEO of a software company worked together with a casino owner to put themselves in a position where they can outplay the other casinos in the area. In the end, Thumps catches the casino owner but she points a gun at him and flies away in a helicopter, which is also a demonstration of the unequal power structure between Native characters and whites and this is analyzed later in more detail.

2.6 The Purposes of the Native American Crime Novel

One of the main purposes of these Native American crime novels is spreading Native American culture, traditions and unjust issues by including stereotypes and humor. All three authors include a tremendous amount of stereotypes. The stereotypes help to bring to mind something that many people know of Native Americans and it is often the only thing non-Native people know about them. The first thing that they do, is entertain the non-Native audience. Frances Washburn points out that “American Indian literature can and should provide pleasurable reading experiences and offer a gateway for Native and non-Native people to understand the very issues that need to be exposed to wider public view, discussed, and resolved” (qtd. in Stoecklein 9). Additionally, the popularity of the crime genre is a very good choice because through the popularity detective novels “are considered familiar, accessible, and unthreatening by readers who might be resistant to other texts” (Klein qtd. in Stoecklein 10). Thus, crime novels as a genre are very convenient and enlighten through entertainment.

The topic of Native Americans is still very controversial and polarizing in modern-day America. By sticking to a genre that has been very Caucasian American for a long time, Alexie, King and Jones manage to make a controversial topic capable to be received by masses. Even though many might not even realize what these novels are really about, when they just focus on the crime part, they will unconsciously learn a lot about Native American culture, traditions and the way they behave. The first appearance of the killer in *All the Beautiful Sinners* demonstrates, for instance, how white police officers deal with Native Americans: “The Indian was a longhair

in faded jeans, a blue sleeveless flannel shirt open at the chest, a concert T-shirt underneath. Def Leppard. It figured. ‘You want to be careful now,’ Gentry said. ‘This isn’t Nebraska.’ The Indian just stood there.” (Jones 18) Additionally, they will learn about the interconnections of “land, language, ceremony, and sacred history” because these are parts of Native American literature (Stoecklein 130). In most cases, they will learn that Native Americans are just like all the other characters and are only seen as Native Americans by the non-Native characters. Some might find out that there are differences but they are not there because Native Americans are primitive, they are there because Native Americans have their own culture. This is also one of the main themes that one can perceive in the novels.

All authors want to emphasize that Native Americans live their lives like everybody else but they also want to introduce the readers to Native American culture. By doing this they also demonstrate that it is often a misinterpretation of American culture that leads to the thinking that Native Americans are primitive or not capable of living with Western values. Nevertheless, even though many characters like John or Thumps act like every other American, it appears that just their appearance already classifies them as something different, as the other. Alexie, King and Jones try to subtly fight these misinterpretations and reintroduce a different image of Native Americans but they try to achieve this through irony and sarcasm, which might also lead into a different direction. If many non-Native people think like that, then it might also happen that a reader takes these stereotypes as the norm and does not even question them. Considering that many things concerning Native Americans have not changed, leads to the conclusion that even this way of filling their novels with stereotypes might be a wrong approach or hardly brings any changes.

Another purpose of choosing this genre, is the portrayal of the life of Native Americans that is very often a crime novel itself. Crime rates about crimes conducted on Native Americans are always higher than on other ethnicities (Rao, Hodal, and Carter). Moreover, Native American women are always more likely to be raped and killed (Rao, Hodal, and Carter). Therefore, the crime novel genre proves to be very useful because it offers a familiar matrix that can be filled with different characters and plots. The three crime novels differ but they all include the typical ingredients: monstrous murder, wrongly accused and racist comments. Through the racist issues and the name calling, even King’s novel *DreadfulWater* includes a dark style that is not visible in the content or the descriptive language that King uses. It is rather visible in the dialogues between the characters that the crime novel also includes the genre typical gloominess and

mysteriousness. In *Indian Killer* and *All the Beautiful Sinners* the crime rates are thematized and are dealt with as they appear in reality. Rating these two crime novels in their content of crime novel features, *All the Beautiful Sinners* would be the winner. Jones includes a very post-modern and alternative writing style, especially in comparison to the other two authors but he also sticks to the crime novel conventions more than the others do. He includes forensic evidence, monstrous descriptions of the murderer, panicking, clashes between detectives and shootings. However, with his gloomy style he also evokes suspense and actually dives more into a thriller than into a crime novel. From time to time, darkness overweighs everything else and the story is filled with trauma and crimes, which is also an implicit way to represent the lives of many Native Americans.

2.7 From Classical Ratiocination to Native American Puzzle Solving

John in Alexie's *Indian Killer* sometimes wishes to have Native American powers to deal with his daily problems. One time he wishes for the wind to blow away his foreman. What one can observe in John's wish is the urge to be more, to have a certain kind of power and this is also a theme that is not just integrated in Native American novels but also in crime novels in general. The theme of the detective with the almost supernatural ability to solve cases and to access his mind like nobody else does, is ubiquitous in more or less every American crime novel. Cassuto writes about the beginning of the American crime novel and also mentions the "uncanny powers of observation and deduction" (291) of Edgar Allan Poe's detective Dupin. The term "uncanny powers" is prevalent in the three novels that are being discussed in this paper as it appears to be a feature of both detectives and Native Americans. In addition, it cannot just be a coincidence that all three authors chose the genre of the crime novel to be their medium of giving their thoughts and ideas a concrete form.

King, for instance, gives Thumps also certain abilities that are typical for detectives but also Native Americans. When Thumps looks for someone and finds a fireplace, he does something that the average citizen would very likely not do or be able to do. "Thumps ran a hand through the fire, rubbed the soft ashes between his fingers, and smelled them. There was no mistaking the scent. Sage." (King 158) This passage is one that is very stereotypical for crime novels but also for Native American behavior, at least from an outsider's perspective. Thumps uses abilities the average person does not have and finds a trace in the ash. Furthermore, the readers get to know that he only knows that because he has attended so many powwows, where sage

has been used. Hence, it is nothing supernatural that Thumps does here, he uses his gained knowledge through experience. In fact, it is “[i]ntellectual detection – that is, ratiocination in the tradition of Poe – [...] everything else hangs off it [...]” (Cassuto 293). In addition, King lets the reader enter Thumps mind and Thumps also points out in his thoughts that “[t]he cliché of an Indian gliding through a forest, alive to the vagaries of turned stones, broken branches, and scents on the wind, only happened in movies and television” (King 150). Thus, King tries to use stereotypes all the time but he also tries to undermine them by always pointing out that some things only happen in movies and are clichés.

King’s crime novel appears to not be as controversial as the other two but King usually wants the reader to read between the lines. For instance, Thumps DreadfulWater is not just a name that King came up with. His name actually makes fun of the “tough-talking detective” (Andrews and Walton 108). “‘Thumps’ refers to both horse hiccups and getting badly beaten in a game or competition, and DreadfulWater is a well-known Cherokee family name” (108). Thus, just the name is already filled with history and culture but this is not everything.

“Thumps also playfully recalls the Disney character of Thumper, a lively and well-meaning bunny who sometimes puts his foot in his mouth, at least figuratively, which is not surprising given Thumps’s own occasional slip-ups and the manner in which he falls into *the role of detective without intending to become one.*” (108; emphasis added) King’s writing is characterized by a simple sentence structure and one does not give one a hard time to comprehend his writing. However, it is very often the little things in King’s writing that make parts of his crime novel a riddle itself. He plays a lot with names and typical stereotypes that Native Americans are often confronted with.

It appears that King also wants to make clear that things that Native Americans can do are not supernatural but just knowledge that is shared with from generation to generation. For instance, Thumps visits Moses Blood, one of his friends who lives on the Buffalo Mountain reservation and who is also described as being a very traditional Native American, and he tells Thumps about an encounter with an ethnographer. The ethnographer thinks that Moses can see the future and Moses says that he does so all the time but it is immediately obvious that the ethnographer comprehends something completely different when he talks about the future than Moses. In the end Moses says, “‘For a White guy [...] he wasn’t too bright” (King 165). Thus, King wants the reader to understand that Native Americans, being traditional or not, are not stupid and do not contain any supernatural powers. In fact, he reverses the power dynamic so that from the Native American perspective, it is the white man who is intellectually inferior to the Native

Americans, who in this quote are portrayed as logical and following common sense. He also makes clear that this kind of thinking is not the thinking people have about Native Americans but it appears throughout the novels that all the efforts do not work and that stereotypes are unavoidable. Moses is a perfect character because he contains many traits whites associate with Native Americans, like his spirituality and his way of life but he is also a computer geek. King uses Moses Blood as the perfect example of a Native American who combines Western and Indigenous traditions.

They are especially unavoidable because Native American traditions and the language itself are perceived by most people from a Western and/or Christian point of view, which signifies that a person with such a mindset cannot perceive a Native American tradition in its entirety. The reasons for that are simply explained. A hypothesis, “[t]he Sapir–Whorf hypothesis, also known as the linguistic relativity hypothesis, refers to the proposal that the particular language one speaks influences the way one thinks about reality” (Lucy, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/>). Thus, every language has its rules and world views, using this mindset that enables us our worldview and trying to comprehend a different worldview does not work. It does not work because already having a worldview always puts the way we see our surroundings or everything we have around us into the same context. Trying to view Native American values with such a default mindset cannot work because we try to project our view of values onto Native American values. By doing this, we immediately get a completely different picture of Native Americans into our heads. This is the perspective of the other. It also means that this paper might never really dive into the real matter because as a white male European the real picture will always be inaccessible for me, as I have already a default mindset in my mind. Only by questioning my mindset and values, I can partly perceive the real Native American problems but a whole picture will never be possible. Still, a lot is revealed to the white reader because Alexie, Jones and King use a white American perspective to write their prose. Moreover, they use a genre that is very American and that appeals to masses.

Going back to the white ethnographer and his perception of Native Americans, it is clear that the ethnographer thinks that he is cleverer than other white people because he pretends to understand and value Native Americans. Nevertheless, it also reveals that he does not understand Native Americans at all. Moreover, many still believe that Native Americans are not educated or refuse education but Moses Blood and many other Native characters prove the exact opposite. Marie from the *Indian Killer* is another perfect example whose character is

discussed in detail in section 4.2. Nonetheless, the different ways of life and connection to nature still appear to be primitive, instead of another way of learning and approach to understand one's environment. They appear to be primitive, especially because of the aforementioned default mindset that does not allow any other world view or values. To fight these misconceptions, all three authors chose Native American detectives or detective-like figures because "[...] [they] are ideally situated by long tradition to foreground the many injustices plaguing the Indian communities" (MacDonald, MacDonald, and Sheridan 6). The next subchapter dives deeper into the matter of why it needs a Native author to convey these misrepresentations and misconceptions of Native Americans.

2.8 The Significance of a Native Author

"The challenge of portraying a racial or ethnic minority detective figure, as the MacDonalds point out by categorizing various kinds of mystery writers who do undertake such revisions to the genre, is that the results are often "preachy" or simply fail to adequately represent an "Other" culture (qtd. in Andrews and Walton 105). Even though Tony Hillerman was in a way a pioneer because he introduced the Native American detective, Maureen T. Reddy criticizes him. She points out that it is undeniable that he was crucial to making Native American mysteries popular but his ethnographies are not accurate enough and it is very obvious that he is an outsider (qtd. in Andrews and Walton 105). Furthermore, Reddy writes that the way he displays Native Americans is almost "'mildly exotic [...] [by] [m]aking American Indians the objects of attention' and thus is deeply conservative in its aims" (qtd. in Andrews and Walton 105). This gives just a glimpse of why it is definitely more authentic to have Native American authors who write about their traditions and culture. However, all three authors play with stereotypes because they are a ubiquitous part of a Native American's life and are thus very authentic as well. Tony Hillerman would have never been able to do the same as he does not experience the pain that all three authors had and have to endure themselves. It still does not make him an incompetent author but reading stories of people who had to suffer from the same ethnic group the author comes from lacks credibility.

Hillerman never had to endure any stereotype or name calling and can therefore never really give an accurate account of a First Nation story. King is a very good example of being an authentic author because in his non-fiction book *The Inconvenient Indian* he includes various accounts of stereotypes and misbehavior that he had to go through himself. Just this fact that

Hillerman is not able to experience the daily struggle of being a Native American makes him less authentic than a Native author. Nevertheless, Hillerman had many essential elements in his novels that made them work and, therefore, he is definitely somebody who made Native American crime novels a crucial subgenre of the crime novels. He could have never written an authentic piece of a Native American crime novel, but even making it as authentic as possible, it would have always been the perspective of the more privileged ethnic group.

An essential ingredient of the modern Native American crime novel that Hillerman's novels do not have, is the Native American detective as "[...] an important player in [...] foreground[ing] the many injustices plaguing Indian communities" (MacDonald, MacDonald, and Sheridan 6). For instance, King lets Thumps not just observe the crime relevant evidence but also the problematic issues and struggles of Native Americans. He mentions Cooley, his brother, Stanley, Ora Mae and his girlfriend. They all have certain kinds of struggles that the majority of the white characters do not have, like being incarcerated, unemployed and in a resistance group, the "Red Hawks". In Jones' and Alexie's novels problematic issues are thematized but not by the detectives. Other characters do that and try to fight for Native Americans. Especially in Alexie's *Indian Killer* there are voices like Marie that take over the role of being the resistance and the critical voice and in King's *DreadfulWater* Thumps as the observer comments on all issues that cross his view. Jim Doe and Creed, the Native detectives in *All the Beautiful Sinners*, also voice critical issues but rather through the investigation of the case. Jim Doe and Creed very often stumble across facts that are crucial to comprehend the murderer and his next steps or the steps he has taken. Thus, it can be said that the two authors King and Jones use the detective as a critical voice but Alexie does not give the detective an important role in his novel, he rather spreads the features of the detective onto other characters as well.

2.9 Killings in Native American Crime Novels and Classical Crime Novels

The descriptions of the murders and killing behavior of all criminals in the novels share some similarities but every author has his own way of dealing with it. Sherman Alexie dedicates whole chapters to descriptions of the murder scene, the killer, his behavior, physical accuracies and the act of killing. "The killer was drenched with blood, soaking shirt, jacket, and pants. The blood was beautiful but not enough. One dead man was not enough. The killer was disappointed. Disappointment grew quickly into anger, then rage, and the killer brought the knife down into the white man's chest again and again" (Alexie 53). Firstly, Alexie describes

how the killer is covered in blood and that he likes it. Then he lets the omniscient narrator dive deeper into the killer's mind and lets the reader know that his thirst for blood is not sated. Alexie describes what emotions the killer feels and why he decides to continue stabbing an already dead man. An important keyword here is "rage". Rage, anger, frustration and depression are crucial because these emotions usually make the Indian killer murder. It is then often described that these emotions come from being angry at the world and at everything around him. This is how Alexie utters his critique on the mistreatment of Native Americans. He lets everything out in the Indian killer and the Indian killer also acts angrily and frustrated. Whenever he kills, he suddenly feels this rage and wants to let it out and he needs to kill people to continue living. He cannot continue living without taking the life of another person, especially a white one. Nonetheless, this critique is never explicitly mentioned. The Indian killer just feels these emotions coming up, but the source is unknown.

Secondly, it is never enough for the Indian killer to kill. He always needs to go one step further: "Still not satiated, the killer knew there was more work to do. [...] With hands curved into talons, the killer tore the white man's eyes from his face and swallowed them whole." (6). Here the reader realized that Alexie intentionally exaggerates and portrays the Indian killer as a monstrous creature. He depicts images of Native Americans that white people sometimes expect to find in Native American novels. It is images that still come from a time that is centuries ago. The way the Indian killer kills demonstrates similarities to blood revenge. Blood revenge is not something white people came up with and used to portray Native Americans as killers and primitive beings. "The idea of blood revenge upheld the Cherokee's guiding principle, the concept of dualism, and death was used as a means of maintaining the balance." (Chowritmootoo qtd. in Stoecklein 56). Thus, even though blood revenge sounds cruel and primitive, it is not a concept of pure killing and having pleasure doing it. It is there to maintain balance and to restore harmony. It is a foreign concept but there is no difference to the death penalty that still exists in the US and torture or former ways of treating Native Americans. Concepts like "Kill the Indian. Save the man" (King, *Inconvenient* 108) that led to many suicides and trauma of Native American children can be put in the same category or even worse categories than blood revenge.

"In the Cherokee worldview, failure to avenge the victim would have two detrimental effects" (Chowritmootoo qtd. in Stoecklein 56-57). One of these would be that the world is not in harmony anymore and this would mean that diseases start to spread (56-57). The second effect

would be that the soul of the victim could not go over to another world (56-57). These blood revenge principles are, nevertheless, those of former times and Cherokees do not stick to these principles nowadays. However, this is how many Native Americans are portrayed and behave in *Indian Killer*. Even Stoecklein (161) points out that “[...] retaliatory killings may seem like acts of vigilant justice, but closer examination of tribally-specific cultural contexts reveals that such a label is inaccurate”. It is only the Western or Caucasian perception that these types of killings are primitive and unjust, whereas they could very likely be compared to the capital punishment.

Stoecklein mentions that these “traditional killings” she talks about in the book are very likely not accepted by the majority of Americans, these killings were there to bring harmony and balance among the victims and the other people of the tribe (162). “This is a key idea to understand when looking at Native American mystery, crime, and detective fiction, because this is a specific area in which Native-authored texts vastly deviate from non-Native-authored texts” (162). Many people just ignore it because they think that killing is cruel but this still does not mean that understanding the concept behind it, is worthless. It helps one understand the whole idea of blood revenge much better. “Instead of viewing the retaliatory killings in a negative light, it is important that readers understand tribally-specific cultural contexts to comprehend some of the ways in which the depicted individuals and communities respond to crime” (162). When a reader understands that, he can perceive many issues in First Nation crime novels differently than before. “And yet, the political statements of these texts extend beyond assertion of continued existence, since the authors examined in this study also announces that Indigenous ways of knowing, seeing, and perceiving the world persist, and they are particularly relevant within the context of mystery, crime, and detective work” (167). Moses Blood in *DreadfulWater* is one of those characters that help Thumps think Natively in certain passages, which sometimes helps him find out crucial information about the case.

Nevertheless, the reason why so many Native Americans are perceived as monstrous and cannibals is because certain tribes were cannibals and blood killing was, as aforementioned, something certain tribes practiced. However, many settlers, especially the Spaniards used certain features of some tribe as an excuse to kill and enslave all Native American tribes they came across (Reséndez 42). Andrés Reséndez points out that “[s]cholars have argued that early Spaniards had perverse incentives to exaggerate, sensationalize, and even fabricate stories of man-eating Indians, given the legal context” (42). A Spanish judge even ruled in 1518 that

many Native Americans were unrighteously enslaved as many were actually not from the Caribbean, where most of the cannibals lived (42). In addition to using cannibalism as a justification for raids, many priests and other Spaniards in higher positions argued that Native Americans would have a better life with Christians than in their natural environment which many settlers associated with barbarity and heathenism (53).

Even though many Native Americans were helpless and lost as they were attacked by the Europeans, some fought back. For instances, Chichimecs fought with bows and arrows and before they started a fight, they got rid of their clothes and fought the Spaniards (Reséndez 88). Many Spaniards had no chance against the Chichimecs because Spaniards were dressed in heavy armor and it took them some time to get their guns ready (88). When Spaniards were captured by Chichimecs, the first thing that happened to them was being scalped (88). Moreover, Chichimecs also cut off the arms and legs of their victims while they were still alive (89). Thus, some features that people at that time and, as it can be perceived in the crime novels, still attach to Native Americans turn out to be true. However, the most substantial problem is that certain features of the Chichimecs or Caribs were transferred to all Native American tribes and it was used as a justification to commit genocide on them.

In *Indian Killer* the killings reflect exactly the blood killing of the Cherokee, the scalping of some tribes like the Chichimecs, and the cannibalism of the Caribbean tribes and Alexie does not spare the reader from details. The Indian killer does not just kill, he also mutilates his victims but it does not stop here, he even swallows their eyes. Alexie introduces the reader to obscene and thorough images. The killer ends the act of killing by “[...] pull[ing] two white owl feathers out of another pocket, and set[ting] them on the white man’s chest” (Alexie 6). With this last description, it is clear that Alexie uses the elements of satire for this act of killing. The worst nightmares one might have of a killer or of being killed come true because the murderer does not just end the person’s life, he takes out organs and eats them. It is clear that this is meant to be satirical because Alexie describes the blood revenge practices of former times and even goes one step beyond. The portrayal of Native Americans or the Native American killer cannot be filled with more misinterpretations and misconceptions. Whereas some white people in the novels joke about this kind of Native American behavior, not just in the *Indian Killer*, but in the other novels as well, Alexie fulfills all of these erroneous clichés. It is a different but very effective way of evoking critical thinking in the reader and Alexie tries to make the reader question the accuracy of these thorough descriptions. However, they also give a kind of

justification to perceive Native Americans as beasts, which is also done intentionally by Alexie to remind the reader of the aforementioned categorization of Native Americans as one people.

The question that immediately arose, especially in me as a white male reader, was if mutilating people is something that Native Americans really do. I caught myself thinking if something like this could be possible and realized how white and inadequate my thoughts were. Somehow, I thought that this is exactly what Alexie wants to provoke, the white reader to catch himself losing the difference between reality and fiction. Nevertheless, these exaggerations are part of Alexie's satirical style and in most cases, the reader will recognize it and realize what Alexie is trying to achieve. It is not just Alexie who works like this but it is mainly *Indian Killer* that makes one question the killings and the behavior of Native Americans, whereas the other novels do not really evoke these emotions in the reader. Jones' novel is filled with riddles and it takes time to process all the information and *DreadfulWater* does not shock as much as *Indian Killer*.

An example that demonstrates that Alexie is also very satirical and not trying to be taken too literally, especially when it comes to the description of the murders, is the radio moderator Truck Schulz. He usually utters very racist, discriminating and insulting comments towards other races that are obviously over the top. For instance, he proposes to sterilize girls with an I.Q. below one hundred and he even goes further, he says that this will stop the dumbing down of America and he also includes Native Americans in this utterance. "Dumb girls will not give birth to dumb babies. Evil girls will not give birth to evil babies. Indian women will not give birth to Indian Killers" (Alexie 243). Alexie includes various satirical elements, like Truck Schulz, the style of the killings and John's white parents. He exaggerates and tries to create an environment of open and clichéd storytelling. He also creates a world of opposites, Marie, the Native American liberal rebel, and Truck Schulz, the Caucasian right-wing extremist that tries to not be racist but always acts like one. Due to the integration of these elements, *Indian Killer* is meant to evoke a certain uncomfortable feeling in the reader as it is almost impossible to ignore all these exaggerations.

The other authors critique the portrayal of Native Americans a bit differently, especially King. He does not use thorough explanations of the killings and he does not include detailed descriptions of mutilation but he applies ratiocination to reconstruct the murderer's steps. "Everything made sense. Chan had most certainly killed Takashi. [...] Chan had painted 'Red Hawks' on the wall of the computer complex. Chan had killed Floyd. And Chan had planted

the jacket in Stick's Mustang" (King, *DreadfulWater* 380). As a classical whodunit mystery, King does not go into detail about how the killings happen or how the killer behaves. Thumps is the detective and he tries to solve the case in his own way. This is one of the differences between Alexie or Jones and King. Jones also writes about mutilation and uses elements of traditional Indians when it comes to the recounts of the killings. King rather focuses on the classical features of a crime novel and uses Thumps *DreadfulWater*'s humoristic character traits to lead the reader through the murders. Jones, similar to Alexie, spends details on describing the murder scene but mostly through the eyes of the investigators. Jones' novel is a mixture of the classical ratiocination of the investigators, Jim Doe, Creed, and the other police officers and descriptions of the murder scene and the act of killing: "This isn't anger, or retaliation, or sexual. The ritual mutilation – you know this, right? He cares about them. He does it all after they're dead. Like he's just fixing what's wrong. That they got old. [...]" (Jones 25). Here Jones' uses traditional elements like Alexie but it is not rage or anger that leads to these acts, it is caring about the victims and not wanting them to be left dead like this. It appears to be a rational description of the crime scene, similar to ratiocinations in Poe's writings, but it also differs as Jones gives more insights on the ritualistic behavior of the killer. He integrates something that was and is very typical for many Native American tribes, rituals.

All these descriptions of the killings and forensic analyses put a bad picture onto Native Americans. They make Native Americans appear wild, violent, crazy and gross. Alexie is the author that does use the element of satire to make all these stereotypes appear ridiculous through exaggeration and it is realizable through repetition. He always repeats many actions like the actions of the killing or the arguments of Marie and Dr. Mather. These arguments and the killing process appear more ridiculous with every new victim or issue that arises. Nevertheless, even with the explanation of traditional and ceremonial killings, like blood revenge, do not shed a brighter light onto Native Americans. It does not work together with the Christian ideology and Alexie definitely knows that, otherwise he would not describe the killing acts as thoroughly as he does. Jones, on the other hand, tries to achieve a different pattern. His descriptions of victims or murder scenes are like the ones that one can encounter in thrillers or criminal movies, especially in the genre *film noir*. Jones works through suspense, whereas Alexie works with detailed descriptions of murders, intentionally exaggerating to make the reader view the portrayal of Native Americans critically.

2.10 Inclusion of Native American Beliefs

Many people in the Western world, especially European settlers, considered and still consider Native American beliefs to be ridiculous, unsophisticated, primitive and undeveloped, which all authors in the examples below point out. Moreover, many people would also refer to many Native American beliefs as mythologies but here Suzanne E. Lundquist suggests to be careful when using the word “mythology”. “[...] [M]ythologies are often thought to be fictions created by unsophisticated cultures to explain the inexplicable” (Lundquist 3). Thus, whenever Native Americans wear something traditional or explain their beliefs, Caucasians usually feel their images of the primitive Native American confirmed. Lundquist points out correctly that these “[m]ythologies are *thought* to be fictions created by *unsophisticated* cultures [...]” (3; emphasis added) and this thinking is completely inaccurate. As a matter of fact, this thinking has led to the destruction of Native American cultures and many tribes. European settlers have mistakenly assumed that whatever Native Americans tribes had produced and created until their arrival was unsophisticated, instead of accepting it as a different culture. The question of what differentiates Western religions and Native American’s arises as well because from a scientific point of view all would fall into the category of mythology or superstitions. Nevertheless, mythologies are mostly regarded as the beliefs of undeveloped peoples and especially King tries to correct these false interpretations by pointing out that science is as significant for Native American detectives as it is for all other kinds of detectives: “The cliché of an Indian gliding through a forest, alive to the vagaries of turned stones, broken branches, and scents on the wind, only happened in movies and on television. A fire trail he could follow. He might even be able to negotiate a well-used game trail.” (King, *DreadfulWater* 150-151) However, Native American myths usually give Native American crime novels a certain kick that other novels do not have but “[i]n general, Native American literature has the power to inform and transform readers, and the same idea applies to American Indian mystery, crime, and detective fiction” (Stoecklein 9). Still, the mysterious and the myth do not come from the Native Americans, they mostly come from the Western portrayal of Native Americans.

King demonstrates that many interpretations of Native Americans of being able to do the supernatural derives rather from non-Natives than from Natives.

“Toward the end of the visits, the ethnographer told Moses about the role of visions in primitive cultures and how some people believed they could see the future. ‘Look at you,’ said the ethnographer. ‘You know I’m coming before I get here.’ ‘That’s right,’ said Moses. ‘So, maybe you can see the future.’ ‘See it all the time.’ The ethnographer

was delighted and went back to California dragging behind him stories of Indian mysticism, psychic ability, and spirituality. 'For a White guy,' Moses told his great-niece after the man had left, 'he wasn't too bright.'" (King, *DreadfulWater* 165)

This quote reveals many problematic issues and demonstrates that the mystification of First Nations and the image of the American Indian with supernatural abilities is also partly a white construct. The ethnographer is convinced that Moses can see the future and Moses agrees with him but when he goes away Moses points out that he might not be very clever. The future that Moses is able to see, according to the ethnographer, is a Western and linear future and he does not even give Moses the opportunity to explain it or interpret it for him. King also writes that the ethnographer explains the "role of visions in *primitive* cultures" to Moses (165; emphasis added). It is always this adjective ("primitive") that one can find when Native American culture is mentioned and even somebody as an ethnographer uses it and does not step away from it. Additionally, the ethnographer explains Moses' culture to him and this demonstrates again the superiority that non-Natives think to have over indigenous people. Many cultures of Native American tribes are perceived as undeveloped and this perception by non-Natives can be found in all three novels. It is also discussed throughout the paper, especially in chapter 3 and 4.

Even though nobody focuses too much on the supernatural and Native American beliefs, they still appear from time to time. In Alexie's *Indian Killer*, the killer changes his face through anger and Alexie points out that it could be through magic or through different reflections of the light:

"'Whoa,'" said the white man. 'You scared the shit out of me.' The killer was silent. 'Hey,' said the white man. 'Do I know you, man?' The killer took a step back, knowing that anger would change a face. The killer had seen other people do it. Other people could change the shape of their faces at will. Through a trick of shadow and moonlight, or through some undefined magic, the killer's face did change.'" (Alexie 52)

It is not just King who often brings in the rational and explains that many descriptions of the supernatural abilities of Native Americans come from non-Natives. For instance, Alexie writes that the killer changes his face but it can either be because of the shadow and moonlight or because of magic. It is just another way of interpreting this phenomenon but it does not change the actual happening. However, this different interpretation of life by many Native American tribes was not seen as different, it was perceived as primitive and unsophisticated.

Another significant point is that these different perceptions of life are also a crucial part of Native American identity. Thumps, even though he comes across as very white, sometimes does not want to be. This comes to the surface in this passage: "A traditional Indian would not open someone else's medicine bag. Thumps did not think of himself as a traditional Indian,

but neither did he like to think of himself as an assimilated Indian.” (King, *DreadfulWater* 159) It is as if Thumps knows that the way he lives and acts is in many ways not very Native and he is aware of that but he does not want to be “an assimilated Indian” (159), which is very likely a term that is supposed to mean Native American with a Western lifestyle. Thumps is in a conflict here as he does not want to act traditional and do something that you are not supposed to do, look into another Natives medicine bag but he also does not really believe in that and does not know why he should not do it. Such situations can be observed in all novels, especially the identity conflict of being neither Native nor non-Native is thoroughly discussed in section 3.4.

However, it also has to be mentioned that there are “[...] Indigenous ways of knowing, seeing, and perceiving [...] and they are particularly relevant within the context of mystery, crime, and detective work” (Stoecklein 167). Thomas King plays with this, especially when Thumps smells sage after a powwow and when Moses Blood uses his expertise to help him with his case. “Thumps ran a hand through the fire, rubbed the soft ashes between his fingers, and smelled them. There was no mistaking the scent. Sage. He had smelled it often enough at powwows and ceremonies. Someone had come to pray. To leave an offering.” (King, *DreadfulWater* 158) Thus, Native Americans have different beliefs and different ways of seeing the world but it is hard to perceive it as such because of the worldview white people already have. Already obtaining one world view makes it difficult to switch to another one. It is something we grow into and suddenly requesting to understand something differently than one is used to, is almost impossible. That is why there are still struggles between Native Americans and white people and perceiving Native Americans just as people is almost impossible because European settlers did not start over when they came to America and adapted another world view. They basically just continued with their Christian and European traditions and modified them a little bit. However, all three novels do not deal too much with Native American beliefs as their main focus is to portray contemporary Native Americans. Native American religious customs are barely introduced through Caucasian comments of powwows and Native American differences. Certain rituals are also introduced by the descriptions of the murder scene and by explaining why the killers do these precarious things to their victims.

3. The American Indian in the Crime Novels

3.1 The Authors' Critique of the Contemporary Treatment of Native Americans

Sherman Alexie's *Indian Killer* has three protagonists and every chapter is about one, two or all three of them. The first protagonist the reader is introduced to is John. John is the Native American with the identity conflict and he is striving to become a Native American. The killer appears from time to time and the reader thinks that it is John but until the end of the novel the identity of the murderer is not revealed. The third protagonist that appears all the time as well, is Marie. She is a Navajo student and her major is Native American literature. She might be the only protagonist that perceives herself as being Native but also as a part of the American society and she wants to correct her literature professor's mistakes when he talks about Native American literature. She is often convinced that he does not pick the right authors, right books or appropriate ways to record Native American culture.

The biggest conflict Marie has with Dr. Mather, is when he does not understand the "sacred history" (Stoecklein 31). It "consists of information imparted in the vernacular about a group's origin, proper behavior and the ways in which to maintain group cohesion through ritual and ceremonial performance as well as when and how ceremonies should be performed, and how the group fits into their particular environment" (Stratton and Washburn qtd. in Stoecklein 31). Dr. Mather, even though officially recognized as a professor of Native American literature and who should know that, does not respect the "sacred history" (Stoecklein 31) at all. He wants by all means to save his recordings of Native American rituals and performances, which is forbidden, and he lies to Marie about it, which leads to a huge conflict. It is a perfect example of different values and Alexie does a good job in pointing this out and demonstrating that Mather's determinism of preserving Native American culture achieves the exact opposite, it destroys it and it even disrespects contemporary Native Americans, like Marie, who want to teach and explain why this is not okay. However, she does not succeed and even the chair of the department does not understand Marie's struggle. The two white male characters do not give this female character a chance. They do not understand her issue and they leave her alone with her struggles, ignoring her completely instead of supporting her. Alexie points out how hard it is for Native Americans, especially women, to live in a world that is still dominated by white elderly male people who are often in charge of big institutions like universities. Moreover, this can also be applied to a bigger context, like the US government and Native American

reservations as it is the same struggle: white males decide what happens with “the weak” or they do not do anything at all.

Alexie demonstrates with three characters what happened to many tribes when the settlers came. They tried to teach them different values and wanted them to adapt a different culture but it was never even considered that they already had a culture. Their way of life was exotic and interesting but in many eyes not the right and developed human way to live. With this conflict and clash of values between Marie, a Navajo woman, and Dr. Mather, Alexie manages to put the focus on a very important topic and provides a prominent reason for the mistreatment of Native Americans. He does it well because it makes the reader aware how unprofessional and, in a way even childish, Dr. Mather behaves. He does not respect and accept something that he should have, just because he wants to be able to do research and maybe rise in his academic reputation. It is a complete ignorance of another’s state just for the benefit of the good of oneself. A mild reminiscence of the first encounters of Native Americans and European settlers, who had the same problem and could not accept the Native American culture and values.

Another thing that is very interesting in Alexie’s novel is that all three protagonists appear in interchange. It appears that the protagonists could not be further apart but they also fulfill each other’s lack of inability to create a certain change. What one of the characters does not manage, can be achieved by another character. Therefore, they complement each other, which is a unique way of portraying Native Americans and it is not done like this in Thomas King’s *Dreadful Water* or in Stephen Graham Jones’ *All the Beautiful Sinners*. Nevertheless, King also tries to make the reader aware of the current or unimproved situation of Native Americans in North America by the use of an exaggerative and humorous style. He includes a sheriff, stereotypical white people and other characters who often do not know what a Native American is and only use clichés to express something about Native Americans. Whereas Alexie tries to criticize subtly and obviously intentionally exaggerates when he uses stereotypes, like with the radio moderator Truck Schulz, who is undoubtedly racist and does not try to hide that in any way, King figuratively forces Native American stereotypes onto the reader. For instance, by comparing the security guard of the building where the murder had happened, Cooley, to movies such as *Little Big Man* and *Dances with Wolves*.

“Cooley had been the perfect choice for the gate guard. Huge and friendly, he was security personified, and he had the one attribute that money couldn’t buy. With his dark brown skin, his high cheekbones, his piercing eyes, and his long black hair, Cooley looked as though he had just stepped out of an Edward Curtis photograph on his way to

a movie set. Not many of the people who were going to visit Buffalo Mountain Resort or were going to buy condominiums at the complex had ever spent any time with Native people. But if they had seen *Little Big Man* or *Dances with Wolves* – and who hadn't – they knew Cooley.” (King, *DreadfulWater* 27)

This quote contains various elements that need to be discussed, like the description of Cooley himself, the reason why King makes Native American detective DreadfulWater describe another Native American like this and why he uses stereotypical Hollywood movies to give the reader an impression of Cooley.

First of all, King describes Cooley like every other Native American, “dark brown skin, high cheekbones, piercing eyes, and [...] long black hair” (King, *DreadfulWater* 27) and then he mentions Edward Curtis and says that Cooley looked as if he had just come out of one of his photographs. This is again very stereotypical because Curtis was known for taking pictures of Native American peoples (Wikipedia). Moreover, he also quotes two movies, *Little Big Man* and *Dances with Wolves*, to make sure that the reader really gets the image of Cooley. In addition, the name Cooley looks very similar to “coolie” and this was “an insulting word used in the past for a worker with no special skills in China, India, and other parts of Asia” (Macmillan Dictionary). It was a word for Asian workers but not directly for Native Americans. Still, it was used for people from India and King might consciously provoke the reader with this ambiguity.

King fulfills many clichés but he mainly does this comparison to satisfy a certain reader clientele. As it has been discussed already, the authors use the crime novels because they are the perfect vehicle to transport Native American issues into the minds of non-Native people. Now, King does not just describe Cooley and points out that he is very Native, he uses the most stereotypical movie, *Dances with Wolves*, to help the reader create an image of this Native American security guard. It is almost ridiculous how detailed he describes him and that he then additionally uses two very stereotypical movies many whites could know because of their popularity. King himself has once stated his opinion on stereotypes in an article in the newspaper *Newsweek*. He wrote that he is “[...] ‘constantly butting [his] head’ against the myriad of stereotypes that still exist about Native North Americans [...]” (King qtd. in Andrews and Walton 106). This revelation demonstrates that he is not favoring the stereotypes but that there is no way around them. He also states that he “[...] tries to infuse his work with an inclusive, Native-based humour” (106); however, he does not want to see his writing dismissed as less than serious, stating that “[t]ragedy is my topic. Comedy is my strategy” (106). What

King does here is point out exactly why sarcasm is vehemently used in Native American crime novels. It is there because they use comedic elements to deal with difficult and personal topics, especially the intolerance towards Native Americans and traits of the genocide on them. King knows that is only possible to spread these tragic topics with a decent amount of humor. Therefore, he uses ridiculous character traits and conversations throughout the book and it works perfectly fine.

King, and of course the other authors as well, try to exaggerate as much as they can to make the reader feel bad, especially Caucasians. The reason why King does not hesitate to make use of the stereotypes is because they appear like this in the heads of many non-Native peoples. The best example for this is King's non-fiction book *The Inconvenient Indian* because it demonstrates that Native Americans are confronted with all these stereotypes in real life as well and not just in fiction. In addition, the authors also want the reader to read the books and also have fun with it. If they really wrote about the Native Americans matter-of-factly and included all the mistreatments they received and still receive, many people would not even touch these books. Hence, it is better to use humor and wit than anger and frustration. The crime novels are supposed to entertain as this has been one of their main objectives when they emerged with the dime novel and later continued as pulp fiction. Humor is, next to awe and exaggeration, a very good method to entertain and keep the reader interested in a story. If the readers felt attacked, they would not continue reading the books. Even people who are tolerant might face a hard time being confronted with the history of the settlers, like the Spaniards and their way of enslaving and killing Natives.

If we move back to *Indian Killer* and take a closer look at its characters, one would perceive a similar take on stereotypes. Marie is the strongest character as she knows what she wants and fights for the rights of Native Americans as one would expect a female Native American to fight for her rights, taking the maltreatment and perception of women into consideration. She recognizes that there are still problems, like the white professor who demonstrates himself as the perfect white American with the ability to answer all questions about Native American literature. Marie is completely disgusted by Dr. Mather as he is only offering the white perspective, having many authors on his literature list which are not of Native origin and Marie cannot bear the fact that he has recorded a ceremony of a tribe and that he does not want to destroy the tape. The tapes do not mean an insult or any cross of boundaries for the professor but they mean the world to Marie. The reader is confronted with a typical clash of values. A

tribal ceremony should never be recorded for Marie but the professor does not know how she can act like this because it is not an academic approach towards knowledge and culture in his eyes. A conflict between Marie and the professor arises and it continues throughout the whole book. The professor wants to preserve the old ceremony but Marie says that this is not allowed. The professor does not understand it and tells her that he will destroy them, even though he does not. He betrays her trust and puts his values before the values of the people he studies. He completely ignores to value the culture he conducts research in, which is just one of the themes that demonstrates white suppression of Native American values and culture.

Another character in *Indian Killer*, John, is the personification of the problems of Native Americans, which can be observed in many paragraphs. In the beginning, the reader encounters very quickly that John's mind does not work like everyone else's. He hears voices in his head and always appears to be very confused. An identity conflict is introduced in the book already on page 8. "When John imagines his birth, his mother is sometimes Navajo. Other times she is Lakota. Often, she is from the same tribe as the last Indian woman he has seen on television" (Alexie 4). Furthermore, John was adopted by white people and even though they try to provide him with information about his heritage, it is not enough. "She had learned a few words in many Indian languages. From books, Western movies, documentaries. Once she saw an Indian woman at the supermarket and asked her a few questions that were answered with bemused tolerance" (12). Due to such mental difficulties and his identity struggle, one immediately and from an early point on in the book assumes that John is the Indian killer. Nevertheless, it is never clear and even at the end of the book, nobody knows who the real Indian killer is.

The third protagonist in the book is the killer. He appears in every second or third chapter and he is always referred to as the killer and as a dark creature that always has something terrible in his or her mind. The killer never talks. He is only talked to and referred to by all the other characters. Detectives, police officers, radio anchors and students talk about him but he never talks and appears to be silent and only killing people. When people talk to them, they very often appear to be in fear and angst as they know that the killer is determined to kill them and not even willing to listen or think about anything they say. He kills them and decorates them with feathers and makes the crime scene look as if a Native American traditionalist has committed the murder. In *Dreadful Water*, Thumps also discovers a bit later in the novel that the crime scene also contains a sign of the Red Hawks and he finds out that somebody wants to frame a radical Native American group with this crime. In fact, all three novels, *All the Beautiful Sinners*

as well, contain traditional elements that are often found at the crime scene. In Jones' novel, the killer uses special ritual mutilation after he has killed his victims and the Indian killer also scalps his victims and does not even hide that a Native American kills the victims. Still, it could also be a white man, woman or a person of another ethnicity and gender that commits the murders but wants to frame another ethnic group.

In *Dreadful Water* this is exactly what happens. Stanley, the son of Thumps' part-time lover, is a member of the Red Hawks resistance group and on the scene of the murder Thumps discovers that somebody had drawn the symbol of the Red Hawks. Nevertheless, what Thumps really discovers is that somebody cleaned it and only remains of it were left. At the end it is revealed that Stanley did actually clean it but he did not draw it or commit the murder, it was only there to frame Native Americans and to make it look like an act against the casino operators. When Stanley saw the motive of the Red Hawks, he had to do something and he had to interact. This also demonstrates how negatively Native American images are connotated. Just the symbol of the Red Hawks already makes everybody believe that Native Americans have committed a murder. There is no benefit of the doubt or another way of thinking that the Native Americans did not paint their symbol on the crime scene. They are immediately suspected to be involved in the murder because of their stigmatization. Moreover, Thumps wants to fight these stereotypes; therefore, he has to act and clean up after his lover's son. There is no way around it and it does not matter how hard he tries to not be too much of a Native American, he has to clean up Native American signs and this only happens because he is coerced into it due to being part of this minority. He often risks his life in many passages, just to save the reputation of Native Americans.

3.2 The Main Differences between Alexie, King and Jones

Whereas Alexie and King use a rather humorous style in their crime novels, Jones does not completely drift off from this writing style, but he includes a more serious tone and includes much more historical facts than King or Alexie. For instance, at the beginning of Jones' *All the Beautiful Sinners*, there is a conversation between the sheriff and the protagonist police officer, Gentry and Jim Doe, and Gentry refers to Jim Doe as "chief". Jim Doe makes Gentry aware that he is talking through an open line with him and Gentry replies, "'I'll call you a damn red-ass Indian on the six o'clock news, if you want [...]" (Jones 14). Even though Jones tries to establish a more mysterious, convoluted and darker style, he also uses elements of exaggeration

and stereotypes to refer to Native Americans. The reader then learns a bit later in the book that Gentry and Jim Doe actually know each other since Doe's childhood and that sheriff Gentry wants to express closeness by talking like this to Jim Doe. Nevertheless, one can immediately tell that Jones is subtly criticizing white people like King. There is no sugar-coating or politeness when people talk to Native Americans or about them. They are very often insulted and they have to deal with it but nobody cares how, unless it interrupts with the flow of life of a non-Native person. Then the mindsets change completely and Native Americans become very significant, especially if they are the criminals. It is like a thread that can be seen through all the books that contains the same situation of Native Americans throughout the different plots. All authors actually use and play with the same stereotypes. All police officers refer to their Native American colleagues as "chief" (or something similar) and they do not hesitate to make politically incorrect jokes or to insult their colleagues. These colleagues that use these derogatory terms do not want to express hatred but they do not know how else to communicate with their Native American colleagues. A conversation between whites or other ethnicities, at least in the crime novels, does not contain such discrimination. Native Americans are called names whether they like it or not. Their colleagues and other characters in the books keep on doing this and nobody is against it.

One of the differences one immediately perceives in Jones' novel, compared to the other two novels, is the inclusion of thorough historical facts and the importance these historical facts have when it comes to finding the Tin Man, the killer in *All the Beautiful Sinners*. Trying to find the Tin Man and why he murders children, a Native detective, Creed, gets information from another police officer. This police officer provides information on the "Indian Child Welfare Act" and he says that before 1978, many agencies in the US were adopting the children out and this changed with 1978. In this year, these agencies had to provide information about the child's tribe. To receive the information about the child's tribe, these agencies had to call the BIA, the "Bureau of Indian Affairs", which was situated in Washington. All this information is never provided in such detail as it is in Jones' novel. Alexie very often includes information about Native American history, especially through Marie but King does not do it very often, at least not explicitly.

King rather expresses Native American struggles subtly and through the characters. For instance, many of the Native American characters in *Dreadful Water* have been in jail, had trouble with the law or police and have had it difficult in life. Thus, where Alexie and Jones

rather explicitly include history and criticize the situation of Native Americans, King points out the unrighteousness that is still happening. Moreover, King's novel is really focused to be a classical crime novel and demonstrates many similarities with Agatha Christie's crime novels. Thumps DreadfulWater is not as old as Miss Marple but he has some characteristics of an elderly person and he finds out many things by just talking to people, observing them and interacting with them. Through his observations and conversations with the other characters, one learns a lot about their issues with the law, their life's struggles and other troubles they are having.

In addition to including historical fact, Jones also tries to correct false interpretations or perceptions of Native Americans with the help of the characters. For instance, when the sheriff tries to describe a Native American criminal at the beginning of the book and he says, "And he's got one of those damn chicken feathers hanging from his rearview," (Jones 15-16) Jim Doe corrects him and says, "Eagle" (Jones 16). Another passage, where this correction is immanent, is the aforementioned passage where the police officer lectures Creed about the "Indian Child Welfare Act" (Jones 241) and Creed corrects him when he says "Indian" (241) instead of "Native American" (241) and "Mennonite" (241) instead of "Menominee" (241). This style is also applied in the other novels but it is more prominent in *All the Beautiful Sinners* than in *DreadfulWater* or *Indian Killer*. This correction of misinterpretations of Native American peoples and their cultures is undoubtedly very visible in Jones' novel but Alexie does it as well with a female Native American voice. Marie is the correctional voice and argues with her Caucasian professor permanently when he talks about Native American literature. The most significant problem for her is the dealing of Native American literature that has been written by white people, instead of dealing with Native authors and their work. These arguments between the professor and Marie are usually passages that are a bit less humorous and more serious than the other passages. Jones' novel, in contrast, is perceived to be darker and more matter-of-fact throughout the whole story than King's or Alexie's novel. Nevertheless, Jones' mixes various styles. He also includes humor, wit and jokes but these historic facts, the murder of infants and the design of the book itself, put it into a different category.

All the Beautiful Sinners is divided into four parts and it occasionally switches from 1999 to 1966 or 1995. This does not happen very often but it happens and it gives an insight into the prehistory of the killer. Every part of the book starts with a new picture and these pictures are all very similar because they show a suburb with a couple of houses and a playground. The

pictures are printed in black and white but the contrast of them is increased. The increase of the contrast leads to a scenery that is very gloomy, mysterious and dubious. Even though there are just four of these pictures, they give the whole story an additional mystery kick that is not recognizable in the other two crime novels, especially because it is the only book with a couple of pictures. The way that the Tin Man is presented, how the characters interact, how they are treated on their look for the Tin Man and how they eventually catch him is more like in a *film noir* than in a contemporary detective or crime story. It still contains all the features and it is more or less the novel with the most stereotypical features of a crime novel, it is mysterious, angst-inducing and puzzling. *All the Beautiful Sinners* also reminds one of David Fincher movies like *Seven* or *Zodiac*. Both of these movies are crime thrillers and they contain very similar elements as they are suspenseful, contain dark humor and are filled with riddles.

Indian Killer contains some dark passages but *DreadfulWater* is the only one that does not focus too much on Native American history or on Native American problems. However, King does not leave them out or displays a Native American world without any problems. He actually criticizes the American society and the treatment of Native Americans but he does it differently than Alexie and Jones. King inserts his criticism through the characters and explains briefly why, for example, the new casino in the Buffalo Mountain Resort is a problem for Stanley but he never explicitly dives into the cause of the problem. The reader has the feeling that he is thrown into the world of Native Americans but he mainly receives the perspectives of the whites and other ethnicities, although one often gets Thumps' perspective as well. The way King lets the reader experience the Native world is very comfortable because he does not mention too much history or mental problems, he lets the reader experience a lot through Thumps *DreadfulWater*.

Thumps' life is put into focus and the reader usually only receives information about Native American struggles when Thumps makes observations, which are mostly done to solve the death of Takashi. King also sticks to very conventional norms of crime novels that can be observed in many typical whodunit mysteries. He has a lead character who is a detective that works on his own and that collects as much information as he can to solve the case. Throughout the whole story it seems that he does not really do his job and that he is just pretending to solve the crime but in the end many observations that he made through the stories, make sense. For instance, in the beginning it is very clear that Stanley, his lover's son, has something to do with the murder but for a long time it is not clear if he is the murderer or how he is involved in the

crime. One also perceives Thumps DreadfulWater's fight between being righteous in a white sense and righteous in a Native sense. He wants to protect Stanley because he is a Native American boy and Stanley's mum is his lover but he also wants to solve the case and catch the murderer. Thumps DreadfulWater is torn apart because he tries to act lawfully but he also wants to protect his own people, especially because no one else is looking out after them. Here Thumps DreadfulWater gets into a conflict with himself and with his morality. He is the example of a Cherokee that is very well integrated into the life of Caucasians and other Americans but in a way he is not.

Here one again thinks of the way he is treated by many other characters, especially white ones, in the book. They do not accept what he is doing because he is pretending to just be taking pictures of crime scenes for the police but he is actually investigating the case the whole time. He observes everything thoroughly but he pretends to not be doing anything. Most of the time the other police officers, often his colleagues, hate him, ignore him or call him names to specify that he is just another not very valuable and annoying Native American. They point out that he is just obstructing the real investigations and not helping at all. Even his lover Beth makes fun of Thumps at the end of the novel and says that he should officially become a private detective: "‘Maybe you should think about working as a private detective,’ said Beth. ‘You know, Kate Fansler, V. I. Warshawski, Jane Lawless’" (King, *DreadfulWater* 404). It is obvious that she is joking because she only compares him to fictitious detectives and does not take him too seriously as she thinks that he was just lucky solving the case. Being just an obstruction and not a part of the investigation is something that is again very similar to the whole situation of Native Americans. All Americans know that they are a part of American history and society but it appears that everybody would be happier if they were not there. Thumps value is recognized by some characters but still many think that he is useless and they would like to live without him. King perfectly puts many issues of Native Americans in Thumps, especially the identity struggle because it is never really clear on which side he is or what he is actually trying to achieve with his behavior.

Alexie has a different approach towards this. He also uses his characters to explain Native American hurdles and includes information about Native American cultures but he uses the characters differently. He explicitly uses them as voices to mention specific struggles. John is the one with the identity conflict and he has a mental disorder, which becomes clear in the parts of the book where the reader has to go through dark phases. Marie, on the other hand, is the

Native American feminist who condemns unrighteousness towards Native Americans but she has a very positive charisma and tackles all issues with energy and optimism. Then there is the killer, who usually spreads fear and rather provides a negative picture of Native Americans. In addition to these three characters, there is Truck Schultz, a radio moderator who is openly racist, and then there is the ex-cop, who writes crime novels and asks questions about the Indian Killer, only to publish a good book. John is the most controversial one because he appears very often in the book and the reader never knows if he is the murderer or a poor Native American with a completely troubled life. One of his most important traits is the rage that the omniscient narrator voices in various parts of the novel. These mental struggles often make him explode in the inside and demonstrate how difficult it is for Native Americans, even with white parents who give him everything. It reveals that materialism cannot solve any problems, it usually makes them worse and harder to deal with. Marie on the other hand is more powerful than any of the other characters in the book. She is a feminist and a Native American and this makes her a heroic character that tries to solve many First Nation problems.

3.3 On Cowboys and Indians

The typical image one might associate with when one talks about Native Americans and uses the term “Indian”, is the picture of an Indian riding a horse with bow and arrow fighting white men with rifles. Even though this paper tries to move away from exactly this picture, dealing with it is more than necessary. All three authors deal with the common stereotypes of the traditional Indian. It is not that they introduce these stereotypes by the Natives, they let the stereotypes be introduced by the white characters in their books. Thus, even though the Native American authors have the insider’s perspective, they use the outsider’s perspective to introduce the stereotypes.

First of all, this common stereotypes of the traditional Native American appears in all the three novels and it is apparent that the authors want the readers to do something with this image. In Alexie’s *Indian Killer* stereotypes of such kind appear to be there from the beginning of the novel. One of John’s girlfriends tells her father about John and she tells him that he is Indian. Her father immediately thinks that he is an Indian from Asia but she replies and enlightens him: “No, daddy, he’s Indian from here. You know, American Indian. Like bows and arrows and stuff. Except he’s not like that. His parents are white” (Alexie 18). Alexie does not spare the reader, he starts with the stereotypes and throws them uncensored at the reader. The image of

the Indian with bow and arrow is introduced on page 12 and it does not stop here. Already on page 19, the foreman of the construction site John is working at, refers to him as “chief” (23).

This is a perfect example of how this one stereotypical image of Indians is still in the minds of many white people. John’s girlfriend does not even think of any other way of describing John to him. She uses the most stereotypical terms there are “bow and arrow”. She could have used every other term, like Indigenous, Native American, First Nation, or just American but she does not. Nevertheless, she does not allow her father to classify him as a foreigner, “he’s Indian from here” (18). Thus, Native Americans are not foreigners because she tells her father that he is from American soil but somehow he is still not American. He is an American Indian with bow and arrow, even though he does not even have a bow and arrow or at least does not carry them around. Already in this description of a Native American by a white person, the identity conflict is more than perceptible because John’s girlfriend does not know how to refer to him. Thus, what John actually has to live through is something that does not come from him, it is also something that derives from white thinking. Absurdly, she says, “he’s Indian from here” (18), but at the same time she also mentions bows and arrows and that he is not like that. The question that immediately arises is what does she mean by saying “he’s not like that” (18). It appears that just the mere Native American origin seems to be negatively connotated and something bad. Moreover, the traditional Native American of former times with bows and arrows, apparently evokes negative connotations. She also adds that he is different because he has white parents, which leads to the conclusion that having white parents, according to John’s girlfriend, eradicates the Nativeness. Nonetheless, Alexie uses fictional characters and the *Indian Killer* is still a novel but later on in this paper, the discussion of Thomas King’s personal experience in *The Inconvenient Indian* and other recounts of real life experiences of other First Nations reveal that even reality demonstrates that the sole presence of Native Americans can be problematic. Moreover, being Native American increases the probability of becoming a victim of violence or drifting off into criminality.

Another example in one of the fiction novels, King’s *DreadfulWater*, demonstrates almost the exact stereotypes as Alexie’s. Thumps DreadfulWater is an ex-cop who officially works as a photographer and unofficially as a detective. Quite at the beginning of the novel, when the sheriff and Thumps appear together for the first time, the sheriff immediately greets him with a stereotype: “‘Hey Thumps,’ said the sheriff. ‘Guess it’s true what they say.’ What’s that?’ ‘That Indians can sneak up on you without making a sound’” (King, *DreadfulWater* 89). Here,

Thumps DreadfulWater is without any sugar-coating described as an Indian and not just as a Native American or just American, he is described as the typical Indian one could see in a movie. It is also not an image of a contemporary Native American that the sheriff uses. The image that the sheriff uses is one of a traditional Native American and just because Thumps is Native American, he compares him to a historical one. The sheriff then even mentions *Dances with Wolves* when Thumps tells him that he has been watching too many movies. But it does not stop here, throughout the whole mystery novel, but especially at the end, the stereotypes are more than obvious. When Thumps confronts the alleged murderer with his evidence, he takes out a gun and points it at Thumps, saying, “Looks like we get to play cowboys and Indians again” (415). The man that is saying that is called Beaumont and he is described as a typical white man with blond hair. In fact, King even describes him like a privileged white man: “The blond man stepped forward with the assurance that only race and class can provide” (89). Thus, King also plays with stereotypes and one could even say that in the quote above, “cowboys” is used as a synonym for whites and “Indians”, is mostly not just used as a synonym, but as the only reference for Native Americans. It is not just the whites who use these old-fashioned terms and who play with them. In the same part of the book, Cooley does it as well. “‘You know what?’ said Cooley. ‘I like playing cowboys and Indians.’ ‘Looks like you kicked a little cowboy butt’” (418). As the whites cannot stop using derogatory terms for Native Americans, Native Americans also use them to refer to whites. Nevertheless, if “cowboy” is as negatively connotated as “Indian”, remains to be seen but taking into consideration the already given examples, “Indian” is the more negative term so far.

In *The Inconvenient Indian* King writes that, although he is Cherokee, he wanted to be a cowboy as a kid because cowboys always triumphed over Native Americans (King, *Inconvenient* 40). “Indians” were always the losers and nobody wanted to be one (40). This example demonstrates clearly the indoctrination of children with the image of the progressive, powerful and stronger cowboy and the weak, underdeveloped and unprogressive Native American. Even though this image is not up to date anymore, it is still something that children are taught from their early days onwards. The relevance of this image can be perceived in all novels because the children’s game of “cowboys and Indians” continues to be played later on but in disguise. Native Americans always have a lower status, it does not matter what kind of occupation they have, they are never on a level with their white colleagues, who are always in a more powerful position like the cowboys. There are various reasons for that but one of those reasons could be that the contemporary Native American was never allowed to enter the American society.

Native Americans are mostly portrayed as traditional Native Americans but rarely as contemporary ones. In all three novels, the detectives and Native American characters are never really considered to be Americans. They are “chiefs”, powwow dancers and monsters but never just an average citizen with a different lifestyle or worldview.

In *All the Beautiful Sinners* Jones’ shift into a more serious mystery novel does not change anything about the interaction of whites and Native Americans. Jim Doe’s partner, the sheriff, gets shot in the beginning of the novel and he then reminisces about the first time he met sheriff Gentry: “‘Indian Joe,’ she said through the screen door. It was what Gentry had called Jim Doe the first time he saw him, when Jim Doe was still ten” (Jones 36). Here one can observe that Gentry called Jim Doe “Indian Joe” and other colleagues did so as well because it is only when a female colleague calls Jim Doe “Indian Joe” that he remembers Gentry. Intertextuality occurs here as well because “Indian Joe” is the murderer in Mark Twain’s *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and instead of mentioning a positive character, a negative one is used for a nickname. Thus, it is not just in Alexie’s or King’s more humoristic novels that stereotypical name calling and insults of Native Americans are an issue, it also happens in Jones’ novel. This leads to the conclusion that all these authors, even though from different backgrounds, tribes and intentions, had to insert these problematic designations because there is no way around it. Co-workers, friends, enemies and foreigners only have the picture of the traditional, mean and primitive man or woman in their minds, when they see a Native American. The immediate associations when one sees feathers on the car of a Native American are bow and arrow, powwows, and traditional rituals. It appears that nobody perceives the Native Americans as equal colleagues. They are always something different, the “other” and not really part of the team. Colleagues make fun of them and try to always bring up the traditional Indian. Nobody ever talks about or mentions the contemporary Indian. Native Americans in all three novels do not get a chance to climb out of this hole filled with stereotypes and with every further insulting comment, they fall deeper into the hole. One could also assume that these stereotypes are only there because all three authors want to add an element of exaggeration to their novels but various accounts of the life of real Native Americans, especially King’s non-fictional book *The Inconvenient Indian*, reveal that there is no exaggeration when it comes to these stereotypes, it is actually a reference to reality.

In addition to being insulted and only referred to as a “wild Indian”, First Nations are all the same to Caucasians. In Jones’ novel, Jim Doe starts to look for the murderer of sheriff Gentry and drives through various states with a phantom picture of the killer. The killer is a Native

American and Jim Doe himself is a Native police officer. While he drives around with the phantom picture, everybody thinks that he is kidding at first when he shows the picture to them. “Jim Doe took out one of the flyers he’d made, unrolled it on the counter for her. ‘Him?’ he asked. The girl looked down at the face. ‘This is a joke?’ she said. ‘It’s not me,’ Jim Doe said.” (48) The girl does not even hesitate to ask if Jim Doe is just making fun of her, she is convinced that it must be a joke because to her Jim Doe looks like the killer. However, she is not the only one who cannot differentiate between the picture and Jim Doe: “He’d had to say it in Montezuma and in Jetmore and in Bazine already” (48). Thus, it is not just that Native Americans are only perceived as the ones with bows and arrows but they are all the same person or the same people. Nobody differentiates between tribes or regions, a problem that started with the Spaniards who put all First Nations into the same category, which is discussed more thoroughly in chapter 2. Nobody of them has their own identity because they are immediately thrown into the same category. They are perceived as a collective and not as individuals, there is no mentioning of tribes, or regional differences, Native Americans are all just “Indians with bows and arrows”. Jones even goes further and lets Jim Doe think that the killer changed his appearance to look like him or “maybe he’d been him all along” (48). The stubborn ignorance and egotism of other ethnicities, especially Caucasians, convinces Native Americans sometimes of such beliefs.

In Alexie’s *Indian Killer* John is immediately portrayed as being different, he is perceived to be the other. John is not a real American, according to the description of his girlfriend, he is described as an alien. His girlfriend points out that he is not an immigrant but her father still recognizes him as one. Thus, the *Indian Killer*, even though written in 1996, includes a tone that does not hide or sugarcoat the politically incorrect perception of Native Americans at the end of the 20th century. Nevertheless, even at the beginning of the 21st century, there has not been a lot of change, as one can read in King’s *Dreadful Water*. Nonetheless, as *Indian Killer* takes place in the US, one might suppose that other white people in Europe, Australia or New Zealand would have a different perception but this is not the case. That the integration of such stereotypes in Native American crime novels is not a fictional invention but pure reality is demonstrated in Thomas King’s non-fictional book *The Inconvenient Indian*. Thomas King describes a scenario where he spent more time than he was legally allowed to in New Zealand and immigration called him, asked him for the reasons of his stay and wanted to clarify who he is (King, *Inconvenient* 137). King describes it like this, “[...] ‘Wrong Indians. I’m North American Indian.’ There was another long pause. ‘What?’ said the immigration man. ‘You

mean like cowboys and Indians?’” (137). King continues explaining how the phone conversation ended and says that he did not get a visa and went to Australia for a couple of years (137). This incidence demonstrates that Native American Indians are still perceived by, not just Americans, but the whole world or people of European descendance as a folk that fights with tomahawks on horses against white cowboys.

There is an ambivalence in being Native American. On the one hand, Native Americans are proud of their heritage and do not want to hide who they are, on the other hand, they would like to hide or change their appearance from time to time because many people only see them as something they are not. They had been fighting with bows, arrows and tomahawks but these times are over but whenever they want to explain who they are or whenever they show themselves, they are all immediately categorized into the same people or, as aforementioned, as the same person. Furthermore, there is also the fusion of internal and external stereotypes. Thumps DreadfulWater, Jim Doe and John are all confronted with the same external stereotypes but the internal stereotypes differ from character to character. John does not know what he is, he is neither white nor is he Native. Thumps lives like the average American but knows that he is Native American and acts as one when he needs to or when people want him to. Jim Doe is very similar to Thumps, he looks like a Native American but behaves like the average American and rather tries to act white than Native American or than white characters think that Native Americans act.

It is more than obvious that the old portrayals of traditional First Nations that are used in fiction are also prevalent in non-fiction books or in real-life encounters. Thus, the crime novels contain these perceptions of Native Americans because they reflect the encounters of Native American peoples with other peoples and they appear to always be very similar. Native Americans have trouble explaining who they are and what they mean by being native than when they say Indian. Furthermore, as King’s example with the New Zealand immigration officer demonstrates, mentioning the word “Indian” can also be problematic. Therefore, many Native Americans also have to use stereotypes to make clear who and what they are and cannot get rid of the typical image of cowboys and Indians. For example, Thumps DreadfulWater confuses an American woman who works as a concierge at a hotel when he looks for the driver of a car and mentions the word native. “‘He said the driver he had was excellent. A Native man.’ ‘Native?’ Kimberly’s smile faded a bit. ‘Indian.’ ‘Oh, Indian.’ The smile was back.” (King, *DreadfulWater* 113) Kimberly is confused, she does not understand the word “Native” but she immediately knows

what Thumps means when he says “Indian”. This passage demonstrates clearly that the word “Indian” is deeply rooted in the American culture and that it is almost impossible for a Native American to get rid of this designation. “Indian” could pose more problems as it could also mean a citizen from India but Kimberly immediately comprehends Thumps. It appears that Kimberly does not consciously act impolite, she just does not know what Thumps means when he says “Native”. Nevertheless, King might also subtly criticize the American society because the story takes place in the Buffalo Mountain reservation and not knowing what the word “Native” means, is not just impolite, it might also be arrogant and egotistic.

Another example comes from Jones’ *All the Beautiful Sinners*, Jim Doe is in the plane and flies to another state. In the airplane, a flight attendant “asked if he was Indian. Jim Doe said he just tanned well” (Jones 163). This flight attendant behaves exactly like Kimberly. These encounters demonstrate that the status of Native Americans is not just confusing but very often ignored. They are always perceived as the “other” and never as real Americans; they contain the status of foreigners, even though they are not. Furthermore, it is not just individuals like Kimberly or the flight attendant that are not aware of the word “Native”, characters throughout the book all act in the exact same way. One of the main reasons why Native Americans are never recognized as “normal” citizens, is their skin color. Their skin color makes them already look different and this very often leads to the interpretation of being the “other”. Furthermore, the other is in most cases also perceived to be the weaker because everything that does not look cowboylike, is weak, different and maybe even dangerous.

A perfect example of “the other” is one of Alexie’s protagonists in the *Indian Killer*. John is a rather dark figure, very introverted, does not talk much, is big, described as scary and not social. He does not create a character that is adorable but a character that has mental problems, which the reader is introduced to from an early point on in the novel: “He was eating lunch alone on the fortieth floor when he heard the voices again” (Alexie 23). John is definitely not a character the reader falls in love with, especially because one assumes quite from the beginning that he might be the killer. Still, Alexie wrote this crime novel by integrating Native American traditions, identity conflicts and stereotypes. The stereotypes are highly exaggerated. Rhonda Harris Taylor points out, “Similarly, the juxtaposition of the mystery story plot with Native American characters has a long history but evidences a too-familiar pattern of stereotypes substituting for characterization” (101). This is exactly what happens in all three novels. The reason for it is very likely the reference to reality and to make the novels as authentic and

realistic as possible, they have to use stereotypes as character traits because they are used by Caucasians. A majority of Americans is white and, therefore, the target audience is white and so the stereotypes have to be white as well.

Putting aside the mysterious John, there is a certain compassion one feels when John is being described or appears in the book. The omniscient narrator jumps in from time to time and tries to explain why John behaves the way he does and what makes him the person he is. “If John happened to be a little fragile, well, that was perfectly understandable, considering his people’s history. All that alcoholism and poverty, the lack of God in their lives.” (Alexie 19) Moreover, Native Americans did not just lack God, they were always perceived as a “[...] daemon, a modernist simulation of the other in the wicked cause of savagism and civilization” (Vizenor qtd. in King, *Inconvenient* 21). How problematic this demonization of Native Americans is, reveals the dictionary explanation of the word “daemon”: “an evil spelling” or “a source of agent of evil, harm, distress, or ruin” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary). Thus, Native Americans are compared to pure evil and this perception has not changed or vanished completely until today. There are other explanations of the word “daemon” but it is obvious that Gerald Vizenor emphasizes the most negatively connoted meaning. What Alexie does here with John is justifying his behavior but from an outsider’s perspective. A Native American would never consider the “lack of God” to be the reason for their behavior or failure in any kind and it is interesting that Alexie, being a Native American, does it the way a white person would explain it. It is the same explanation that was used to “[k]ill the Indian [...] [and] to save the man” (King, *Inconvenient* 108) when residential schools were introduced in Canada and the USA. It was and it appears to be still an issue that white people consider that being Native American can somehow be deleted with the introduction of European values and beliefs (104). Nevertheless, “[t]his was not to be a compromise between cultures. It was to be a unilateral surrender” (104). Natives were forced to trade in what they stood for and believed in for what the European settlers considered right and appropriate (104).

3.4 Neither Native nor American

Even though John is by all other characters perceived as a Native American, he himself is struggling throughout the whole story with his identity. He was born by a Native American (it is not completely clear if it was a Navajo woman) but then adopted by white parents and he is in permanent struggle with who he is because he does not even know which tribe his mother

belonged to or who his parents were. A very significant passage is when John's foreman calls him chief and John becomes angry but realizes that he is powerless, which would be different if he was a "real Indian". "John knew if he were a real Indian, he could have called the wind. He could have called a crosscutting wind that would've sliced through the fortieth floor, pulled the foreman out of the elevator, and sent him over the edge of the building" (Alexie 24). Alexie subtly uses Native American beliefs and introduces them but lets John react to these beliefs as if he was white. Only whites would have referred to these beliefs as superpowers like John does it by wishing to hurt the foreman. However, he never really hurts the foreman, he just fantasizes about it. John represents a Native American who is actually very white because he was raised by white people. Only his appearance makes him Native American and he wishes, especially in this part of the book, to be Native American but he is not. Nevertheless, neither is he white and Alexie's character John is the personification of the identity conflict many Native Americans have to go through. He tries to find himself but he never manages it and this is something that all Native characters in the novel have to go through.

Duane Champagne also writes about this issue and she poses the most significant question, "Who is Indian" (11)? She mentions that this is a very contemporary issue, especially because of globalization and the mixing of all different cultures (11). For many Native Americans it was crucial from which tribe the mother was as this determined the tribe (11). For keeping on the traditions, it was crucial to speak the language, attend religious ceremonies, and live with the tribespeople (11). Some Native Americans "[...] might use the term ethnic to mean that both their racial background and cultural adherence are Indian. Other individuals who claim to be Indian but who have no cultural connection to their tribe may also refer to themselves as ethnically Indian" (11). Thus, it is not always clear who is Native American and how much one is Native American. The main conflict we have in John is that he is definitely Native American but he was raised by non-Native Americans and could never truly learn the traditions he was supposed to learn.

John is not the only one who struggles with his identity. Many characters do in the three books and it is something that even happens in real life. Champagne points out the four life stages of Cross. He says that many people from minority groups go through certain stages until they accept themselves (15). The first stage one goes through is the "pre-encounter" (15) stage, which means, in case of Native Americans, that they are aware of who they are but they do not know a lot about their culture and roots (15). The second stage is "encounter", which means

that one has a “positive experience with one’s culture” (15). The third stage is a more difficult one as it “[...] can be a volatile stage, often causing anxiety, depression, and frustration over attempts at becoming the ‘right kind of Indian’” (28). This is exactly the biggest issue John is struggling with because he does not know what kind of Native American he wants to become. This third stage is called “Immersion-Emersion” (28) and it also very often leads to aggressive behavior (28). Champagne quotes Cross and he points out that “the person begins to demolish the old perspective and simultaneously tries to construct what will become his or her new frame of reference” (Cross qtd. in Champagne 28). John never really manages to get out of this old frame, he tries to but there is something that stops him from getting into the new frame. It is the whole negative and gloomy atmosphere that surrounds Native Americans, which is induced by the white characters. The fourth and last stage of Cross’ life stages is “internalization” (Champagne 29), which starts when a person feels secure with her or his identity (29). This person can “[...] discuss in a rational manner racial issues with members of other racial and/or ethnic groups” (29).

Throughout the whole plot of *Indian Killer*, John is mostly in the third stage. He has aggressive thoughts, is suspected to be the killer and wants to hurt himself or somebody else. It could be argued that when he meets Marie, he starts the fourth stage “internalization” because he is calmer and more relaxed when he is with her. She fulfills him because she tells him that it is okay to be a Native American and to embrace the American culture. She does something that nobody else does and her powerful performance and confidence in her Native American heritage make him appreciate himself even more. Even when the characters do not have to go through such an inner conflict, it is thrown upon them by throwing Native American misrepresentations on them. Thumps DreadfulWater, who tries to convey a rather American and white perspective about Native Americans, is also rather put into the category of a Native American by the other characters than by himself. Thus, Native Americans are very often categorized by others to be Native than by themselves and this means that it does not matter if they want to be Native or not, they often have to be.

It is not just the identity conflict that is thematized in the novels, it is also the unwillingness to be recognized as an American. In all three novels the Native Americans are by most people, especially their colleagues never referred to as colleague or by their names. They are always called out by their nicknames and these are often politically incorrect but nobody cares and the Native Americans do not have a choice. The Americanness is withheld from them and they

never get the chance to experience it because even the phrase “Native American” is not used by most of the other characters. Derogatory terms dominate and fill the stories. The characters in all three novels also never get the chance to correct the whites calling them names. They accept it and it is just the way of interaction between whites and Native Americans. Furthermore, it never works the other way around. First Nations never use stereotypes for whites or call them derogatory nicknames. Thus, there is a certain power structure and whites always look down on Native Americans. With the help of the detective figure and being responsible to solve a crime, all three authors try to rebel against this power structure.

Thumps DreadfulWater, in contrast to John, does not have a problem with his identity but by observing how other Native Americans are treated, like Cooley for instance, he points out many unrighteous things that happen to Native Americans. One of those things is that Native Americans are immediately considered to be scapegoats. For instance, Thumps’ girlfriend’s son is a member of the Red Hawks and a symbol of them has been found at the murder scene. Thumps tries to protect him but he does not want anybody to know anything about it. He does not even want to show people that he cares, even though it should not be shameful to care, especially because he is Native American himself. This is an example that demonstrates that even Thumps, who acts cool and relaxed all the time, struggles with his identity sometimes. He does not want to put too much attention on himself but he also does not want his Nativeness to vanish. Thumps’ struggle is not at all as obvious as John’s struggle but it is there. Jim Doe, in Jones’ novel has similar struggles as Thumps. He never really utters them in any way, not even through an omniscient narrator, but he is confronted with looks because of his appearance and name calling. Even though all characters try to fit in and they are all very different from each other, none of them manages it because they are also struggling with their identity and cannot find the right way to appear to others. The main reason why it does not work is other people not accepting them by always pointing out that they are different and do not really belong. All protagonists struggle with their identity and it does not matter how hard they try to take on Western and Native American values, in the end, they always remain the other.

4. Forever and Always American Indian

4.1 Why Killing Indians is Not a Crime

One of the most prominent messages the reader subtly receives by reading the three novels is that it is always a horrible crime when a white person dies but it is never even considered to be a real crime when a Native character dies. Thomas King mentions an everyday example from his personal experience in his non-fiction book *The Inconvenient Indian* that demonstrates the devaluation of Native Americans in real life as well and proves that a Native American life is worth less than another life, especially a white one. He moved with his family to a new place and bought a house. As soon as he bought a house, the whole neighborhood lost in value because a Native American was part of the community (King, *Inconvenient* 222). Thomas King describes this situation as a very bad and uncomfortable experience but he does not act enraged or frustrated, even though a reader might come up with mixed feelings, especially when taking into consideration what has been done by the invaders and first settlers on American soil. He only appears to be frustrated when he writes about this experience in this book. It is as if nobody wants Native Americans, even though it is what they are, Natives; indigenous people that have been in America before everybody else. This has been the case with the first step on American soil and it continues to be like this until today. All three crime novels have not been there for ages, most of them are not older than 20 years and the negative and inconvenient perception of Native Americans that is provided in the fictional books is not fictional at all.

A passage in Holm's book demonstrates what fictitious characters do when they want to cover their tracks when murdering a Native American.

“[...] ‘He’s just another redskin dumped alongside the road,’ it is conveyed that the dead man is a Native person [...]. The passenger then asks the driver, ‘You got any whiskey in your poke?’ and the passenger subsequently pours ‘the whiskey over the hair and rubbed some into the cheeks’ of the deceased individual [...]. The passenger then tells his partner, ‘Now, even if they find him, they’ll think he was drunk and got into a fight [...].’” (Holm qtd. in Stoecklein 38)

Native Americans are so stigmatized and described by stereotypes that even being murdered is not enough for justice. The ruthless murderers are not even a bit afraid of being caught by the police or somebody else. They know that nothing can happen to them because the corpse has to be found first and even if someone finds it, they would think that the man drank, got into a fight and died. This passage reveals that the status of Native Americans is below zero. They have no rights and no status. The next paragraph demonstrates that this fictitious example is not

too fictitious as very similar incidences happen in the lives of many Native Americans, especially Native American women.

Another real-life example provides a podcast in the daily British newspaper *The Guardian*. A Native American woman talks about her missing sister and how these things are actually a normality in America, especially with Native American women. 30% of missing women in Montana are Native Americans and, even though it does not sound much, it is a lot when one considers that Native Americans only make out 3% of Montana's population (Rao, Hodal, and Carter). The problematic issue here is that nobody actually knows the real numbers as nobody counts the number of women who go missing, especially because mostly nobody knows that they went missing (Rao, Hodal, and Carter). Stoecklein also points out that even though "[...] each study varies in its specificity of the rate of per capita rape of Native women, it is clear that all studies confirm that Native women suffer a higher chance of rape than other groups of women in the U.S." (60). Native Americans, especially women are treated like objects that can be thrown away. Statistics demonstrate that "[o]ne in three women will be raped [...] [and] [m]ore than 84% of Native women will experience violence in their life" (Rao, Hodal, and Carter). One might think that all other women are spared of crime, which is not true as numbers also show that also one of five non-Native American women will be raped, but it is obvious that Native American women are specifically targeted (Roa, Hodal, and Carter). Moreover, Native women or generally crimes that happen to Native people are often not considered to be crimes at all. "Indian tribal courts do not have inherent criminal jurisdiction to try and to punish non-Indians, and hence may not assume such jurisdiction unless specifically authorized to do so by Congress" (Tharp qtd. in Stoecklein 80). Thus, it is almost impossible, even if a crime has been committed, to punish criminals that have committed a crime on Native territory (Stoecklein 80). It is especially hard for women who have been assaulted by a non-Native perpetrator (80). This reveals that there are many flaws in the law and that Native Americans, even though they legally have their own land, it is not really their land because non-Native people can enter and behave worse than on their own territory. They are even more powerful and do not have to fear the law or any other consequences. Non-Native people do not have to fear anything from Native people and the discrimination that has been started centuries ago continues through unrighteousness in the law and the perception of Native Americans as being less worth than white people.

The fact that Native Americans, in this case Native American women in Montana, experience violence every day is also a reason why Alexie, King and Jones use the crime novel as the medium to talk about Native American struggles. The genre of the crime novel is undoubtedly wide-spread and many choose it for entertainment purposes but the life of Native Americans is, as the real-life examples demonstrate, the life of a crime novel. Native American lives, especially the lives of women, are an object of permanent peril. If women are not raped, they will still experience another kind of violence in their lives (Rao, Hodal, and Carter). The status of Native American women, if compared to the typical victims of a serial killer in a crime novel: “society’s isolated outcasts: prostitutes, hustlers, and the homeless” (Cassuto 304), is not better, maybe even worse. They are considered to be citizens of second order and it does not matter how they behave or how they talk, they are never mentioned as American citizens. Even the designation “Native American” is never used in the books by white people. Native Americans are really not explicitly but indirectly portrayed in the novels as not belonging to society, being weird and odd, and unfortunately existing. In addition to their portrayal in fiction, Native Americans are even different by law or at least their territories. ““Indian tribal courts do not have inherent criminal jurisdiction to try and to punish non-Indians, and hence may not assume such jurisdiction unless specifically authorized to do so by Congress”” (Tharp qtd. in Stoecklein 80). Julie Tharp points out that exactly this flaw in the law leads to problems with finding the perpetrator. Thus, Native women and men are just left unprotected by the law and there has not been a change for a very long time. It is something that sounds inaccurate at first and it does not appear to be believable but Native Americans are not protected from non-Native Americans because they are not on their territory and, therefore, non-Native Americans cannot be punished for something they have not done on their land. However, the question arises how it can be legal that a non-Native American can enter a venue that is not on his territory and not be punished for it, even though he would be punishable for the same crime on his territory. It is obvious that there are flaws in the law and many perpetrators abuse them. The only ones who suffer are the ones who have been suffering for the whole time. Taking the land of Native Americans was for many non-Native people not enough. Native Americans even have to suffer from ridiculous gaps in the law and instead of using a law that protects them, Native Americans have to endure a law that brings them disadvantages. This unrighteousness is exactly the one that Alexie, Jones and King are complaining about. It is not that Native Americans have not tried to adapt to European or Christian values and to the laws and rules that the settlers have brought with them but it is the system that has not been adapted to contemporary First Nations and their ways of life.

“King [also] invests his detective fiction with a strongly political message, exploring the challenges of Native stereotypes as well as the complex relationship of Native communities with the North American nations that often claim jurisdiction over crimes even when they occur on tribal lands.” (Andrews and Walton 107) As it has been pointed out already, King does not explicitly criticize Native American circumstances but he sets the plot on Native American territory and integrates Native Americans to convey his message. He tries to comment on the unrighteousness that is conducted on Native Americans “[t]hrough his hard-boiled detective novels, King links these jurisdictional conflicts to the white Western scholarly tendency to describe and label Aboriginal identities and literatures based on Western paradigms of nationhood (107). The question still remains if this method is successful and as *The Guardian* podcast and the crime novels themselves demonstrate, there are still many assaults that are conducted on Native Americans and they are rarely mentioned in the news or dealt with at court.

King and Alexie usually talk about crimes that are conducted on adult Native Americans but Jones went further and also included child victims in his novel. “Two of the first four towns Monica had given him had pairs of children missing, presumed dead. Each older than eight, younger than twelve. All Indian. Always a brother and a sister.” (Jones 135) These crimes are fictional crimes but many non-fictional recounts of Native American crimes or crimes on Native Americans reveal that these fictional examples are closer to reality than they might appear to be on first sight. *The Guardian* podcast gives an insight into the daily struggles of Native American women. Nobody cares about them; if they live or if they die does not play a role for other Americans, and this makes them a target for sexual assault and other cruel crimes, such as being murdered. Nonetheless, the maltreatment of women is not the focusing issue in the novels. The victims are mostly men and children. One of the reasons for that could be the wish to shift away from total stereotypes and to emphasize that this crime novels, even though actually very authentic and with references to reality, do not represent real crimes and are undoubtedly fiction. Another reason for it could be that nobody of the authors thought about this or wanted to use this ubiquitous topic of Native American women in their books. Nonetheless, Alexie briefly mentions one case of a homeless Native American woman that was killed and that nobody cared about:

“Wilson remembered Beautiful Mary, who had been almost forgotten because she was an Indian. He remembered how she had lain behind the Dumpster beneath the Viaduct. Blood everywhere. A broken bottle tossed in the Dumpster. Her eyes still open. Nobody in the police department cared when an Indian was killed, but everybody cared now that an Indian might be killing white men.” (Alexie 242)

It is the ex-cop and crime novel author, Wilson, who remembers Mary and that she was found dead. Alexie does not hesitate to say that she “had been almost forgotten because she was an Indian” (Alexie 242). He even uses the word “Indian”, instead of another one. This is a passage that demonstrates exactly what *The Guardian* podcast thematized, Native women do not matter, nobody cares if they are alive or not and if they die or are killed, it does not matter how cruel the murder has been, everybody keeps not caring. At the end of the quote, Alexie mentions that everybody cares when a Native American kills white man. This is another example of the difficult struggles Native Americans have to face. On the one hand nobody cares about their lives but as soon as their lives have an impact on white lives, be it through minor things or things such as physical assault, then suddenly everybody cares. This is a thread that is visible in all three novels. In *DreadfulWater* Native Americans are immediately suspects because of the Red Hawks symbol at the murder scene. In *Indian Killer* nobody doubts that a Native American is killing the people, just because of the scalping and the feathers at the crime scene, and in *All the Beautiful Sinners*, it is clear from the beginning that a Native American is the killer. He shows himself and kills a sheriff in the first chapter. All people appear to be more alarmed because Native Americans are portrayed as monstrous killers and it is very unlikely that people would react similar if the killer was Caucasian. The Native American as a killer is also something that appears to be normal because they are considered to be primitive and unintellectual beings. Killing is something that comes naturally to them, is something that many non-Native people might think. They do not perceive Native Americans to be human beings, they perceive them to be instinctually driven individuals. This way of thinking has been going on for a very long time and it has never stopped.

The instance that a white life is worth more than a Native life just proves that Native Americans are citizens of second order. They do not have to do anything, they can live their lives averagely and they still will be considered to be different and not belonging. The absurdity is never really thematized but it is obvious. Native Americans were in America before the settlers and they still are considered strangers. *Indian Killer* is the novel that especially thematizes this topic and the other novels only subtly touch upon it but it is not really an issue. Alexie introduces this topic through various characters. For instance, he uses Truck Schultz as the racist white male who only talks about how poor Caucasians are and that Native Americans have to live with the fact that their land was stolen. This happened a long time ago and is not relevant anymore. Then there is John

who is often maltreated by white people and the Indian killer who rebels against this unrighteousness by killing white people. This rage is something that can especially be observed in the *Indian Killer* and almost all characters have a kind of rage. Many white characters wish that they never have had to deal with Native Americans and Native Americans cannot endure the pain that has been caused to them and all of it appears to be a never-ending story.

4.2 Living the Crime Novel

The Guardian reporter who talked about the experience of looking for Kimberly's missing sister, describes it as a very tragic and emotional situation (Rao, Hodal, and Carter). She reports that white Americans never experience such violence and that non-Native people can commit a crime on native territory and nobody can charge them with a crime, except if it is a crime against a woman (Rao, Hodal, and Carter). The only problem is that even crimes against women never get charged (Rao, Hodal, and Carter). Native Americans appear to be another kind of people, they appear to be aliens in all novels and it is paradoxical as all other people that came to America are more alien than Native Americans. Somehow just being Native is a problem and this issue is also often thematized in the novels. In *All the Beautiful Sinners* Jim Doe tries to not cause too much attention by acting white. Curiously, Jim Doe has to become "white" because only if he acts white, he can hide himself. "He turned into a white person so as not to attract attention – White – all his hair telescoping into his scalp, pressing on his brain so that he had to set his teeth against it [...]" (Jones 55) Whiteness is an issue in all novels, and most of the non-fictional work that has been used for this paper. The white settlers that came to America were convinced that they were superior over other races, especially Native Americans that appeared to be uncivilized and primitive. Instead of leaving them alone and letting them live their lives, white people thought that they have to civilize them and turn them into white people. They had to "[k]ill the Indian [and] [...] save the man" (King, *Inconvenient* 108). This mindset of changing the Native Americans and making them white, has never really changed. The white characters in the novels do not actively force the people to stop being Native but they make fun of them, do not accept how they look and try to make them as uncomfortable as they can. They try to crush the Nativeness in them and to stop them from being what they are. Being Native is considered to be a threat, dangerous and it should be avoided. The only question that remains is how does one avoid being oneself. These assumptions are proven to be true by the conversations and encounters of Native Americans and whites in the three novels.

The genre of the crime novel has also been there to demonstrate the current situation of the society (Cassuto 295). Alexie, Jones and King use exactly this feature of the crime novel and demonstrate, not the situation of the majority of the American society, but they focus on the current status of Native Americans. The life of these characters demonstrates that Native Americans are really living the crime novel. They are permanently in peril of being called names, insulted by strangers, criticized for their appearance and compared to their traditional ancestors. Even at work they have to endure being called “chief” and “Indian”. They cannot enter a bar without having to take into account that people will look at them and probably start a physical or verbal fight with them just because somebody feels scared and uncomfortable with their presence. Wilson in *Indian Killer* ends up in a bar fight because he cannot stand any longer how he is treated by the other people, especially his bar acquaintances.

Native Americans are also never allowed to raise their voice. Marie, for instance, argues with the professor, Dr. Mather, and he tells her to leave the auditorium: ““Ms. Polatkin, I’m going to have to ask you to leave the classroom. In fact, I strongly suggest that you drop this class entirely”” (Alexie 248). She insulted him before and called him a “wimp” but instead of reacting differently, he pushes her out of the lecture room and even advises her to never come back again, even though she is the only Native American that takes this class about Native American literature. This argument of Marie and Dr. Mather is symbolic for the treatment of Native Americans by the white settlers. The invaders studied the Native Americans, some even liked them or adored their way of life and culture, but Native Americans were not allowed to continue living it as they were used to, they had to listen to the white people or vanish through eradication. Moreover, many whites, like Dr. Mather, cannot stand it when their ideas and plans have to suffer because of the respect for the other culture. Marie tells him that the recordings are not allowed to exist and Dr. Mather does not care, he lies that he will destroy them but he does not do it. It is a clash of values and it demonstrates that many Caucasians or other ethnicities as well, accept another culture as long as this other culture does not affect their own. As soon as it affects their own culture, tolerance stops. Here Dr. Mather’s ways of saving such cultural goods are typical for the Western world and this is a usual process in Western cultures but it is not something Native Americans do, especially of powwows. Marie forbids him to do that and Dr. Mather does not want to listen because he does not understand how something like this can be a problem.

The professor's behavior is symbolic for a behavior that led to the genocide of Native Americans. Western people did not comprehend the Native American way of life and this incapability of accepting something, even though one does not understand it completely, led to the eradication of many tribes. The lack of accepting something that is strange and different to oneself is one of the main reasons why First Nations are still considered to be foreigners in their own country. They are on the threshold of belonging to the USA, instead of being seen as the ones who consider all the others being in such a position. It is one of the main themes that the authors criticize in the novels: the importance of being white (or a "cowboy") to belong, even though one actually already belonged and just doesn't belong because of the current power structures in the Western world.

4.3 Being a Citizen of Second Order

Even though one might argue evidently that Native Americans have been in America before the settlers and should be classified as citizens of first order, this is clearly not the case. As Alexie, King and Jones demonstrate it in their novels, many people would not even like them to be regarded as any kind of citizen. When Wilson, the former police officer, now a crime novel writer, and Ted, a current police officer, talk about the murders of the Indian Killer, Ted is convinced that the Indian Killer is of Native American origin. "How do you know an Indian did it?" asked Wilson. "Because of the scalping? Shit, anybody who ever watched Western movies knows about scalping (Alexie 239)." Wilson, not visible but of Native American origin, tries to defend Native Americans and stand in for them but Ted is sure that the murderer is definitely an Indian and he appears to just know, "[w]e know, we know," said Ted" (239). Moreover, the scalping, according to Marie, is not originally a Native American invention. "You've got it all wrong," Marie said as she sat at a desk near the front. "The French were the first to scalp people in this country. Indians just copied them" (57). Nevertheless, nobody else spends a thought about this in the novel. American Indians are perceived as primitive citizens of second order and mostly just because they look foreign to Caucasians. They do not look familiar, they have their own beliefs, their own values and are considered to be savages and not natural, even though they are more natural and real than any other settlers that came to America. Nevertheless, people only perceive them as something unnecessary, as something unimportant and only standing in one's way.

Alexie also uses the genre of the crime novel to make people, especially white people, feel hurt and discriminated just because they are white. The following excerpt of the novel of chapter 21 “Testimony” gives an insight into how Native Americans and other races must feel when they are charged for something that they haven’t even done or just because they look guilty. It is a conversation of a white man, Mr. Harris, who was attacked by three Natives, one of them was Marie’s cousin Reggie, with a homicide detective.

“‘It’s so strange. It’s, like, those Indians [sic] guys hurt me just because I’m white. But I haven’t done anything bad to Indians. I like Indians, man. I even visited a couple of reservations. The Navajo, the Hopi. Beautiful. And this Indian Killer is killing white guys just because they’re white, right? And he kidnapped that little boy because he was white?’ ‘That seems to be the motive.’ ‘And that little dude, what’s his name, Mark?’ ‘Yes, Mark Jones.’ ‘Yeah, well, he certainly didn’t do anything bad to Indians. I mean, not every white guy is an evil dude, you know?’” (Alexie 273)

It is a conversation that demonstrates complete incomprehensibility of Mr. Harris. He states that he loves Native Americans and he has even been to reservations. He cannot understand why Native Americans would attack him. Then he realizes that they just attacked him because he is white. He thinks it is absurd, very hard to understand and completely insane. Alexie obviously tries to display that this is exactly how other ethnicities feel when they are attacked or insulted by white people. Mr. Harris is shocked and does not understand how one can be violent towards someone just because of the color of one’s skin. Thomas King writes exactly about such absurd and lunatic situations that he has encountered in reality and that have happened in the past. For instance, in the 19th century, many people thought that with “[...] a little training and a push in the right direction, [Native Americans] [...] would become contributing members of White North America” (King, *Inconvenient* 104). It was actually the motto of the white settlers because they wanted to demonstrate Native Americans how they have to live. Nevertheless, Natives were not asked, they had to lose everything they had and take over all the whites offered, mentally and materialistically (104).

“For Pratt, the problem of educating and civilizing the Indian was not race or some defect in the blood. It was environmental determinism” (108). Thus, some people like Pratt were convinced that it should not be a problem to make Native Americans white because race was not the issue for him. “‘It is a great mistake to think that the Indian is born an inevitable savage,’ said Pratt. ‘He is born a blank, like the rest of us. We make our greatest mistake in feeding our civilization to the Indians instead of feeding the Indians to our civilization.’” (108) However, until today Native Americans carry the attribute of being short-witted, uneducated and primitive and even though Pratt thought correctly, he went into a totally different direction. One of the

biggest problems was that many people tried to change the Native Americans through coercion. They did not try to convince Native Americans lightly, they wanted to make Europeans out of Americans, Native Americans. The three novels demonstrate that it does not matter what the Native Americans do, if they are policemen or homeless, they all fall into the same category. Things have been like this since the discovery of America as a quote about Pratt demonstrates it: “Kill the Indian, save the man. A little late in being codified perhaps, but concise and elegant in its simplicity. If I had been Pratt, I would have been tempted to hang the slogan over the entrance to every residential school in Canada and the United States (108).”

Pratt was determined to make Europeans out of Native Americans and his determination was so bad that he did not take into consideration the suffering of the people. Native Americans who refused to learn and to live the life of a white settler, were immediately considered as being unwilling to learn or even not capable to. This mindset was completely wrong and Thomas King explains why it was foolish to think this way:

“Here’s the irony. Native people have never been resistant to education. We had been educating our children long before Europeans showed up. Nor were we against our children learning about White culture. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, Natives and Whites had been living together in the same neighbourhood for almost three hundred years. Like it or not. It made sense for Native people to know English and/or French. It made sense to understand how the European mind worked.” (King, *Inconvenient* 119)

Thomas King stresses that white people did not even give Native Americans a chance. They did not accept who they were. They were treated like savages and seen as savages and they were not allowed to be who they wanted to be. They were only allowed to be what the whites expected them to be. It was very problematic and Alexie wants to discuss this issue and raises awareness for it in his crime novel *Indian Killer* because he is convinced that white people will react to this. It is always something different when one has a different vantage point and looks at things from another perspective. This is the problem with Mr. Harris. He is a white man who just cannot understand why he and little Mark would be hurt or even kidnapped just because of their race.

Mr. Harris and many other characters in Sherman Alexie’s novel don’t even spend a thought on the fact that many other nationalities in America and in the whole world are often attacked just because they are not white. Even though it is ridiculously obvious what Alexie is trying to achieve here, no change is happening and one can still read in the news that things like these happen regularly. The best example is *The Guardian* podcast about the lost Native woman in

Montana. Just because these women look different, do not belong to the majority of Americans, they are more likely to be assaulted than women who are non-Native. In addition to that, racial profiling is an issue and it happens permanently. It even happens between colleagues as the conversations of the police officers, detectives and sheriffs demonstrate in the novels. Native Americans are citizens of second order and it does not matter if they are working as bodyguards, police officers, real estate agents or detectives. If they are Native Americans, they will always carry the word “Native” or rather “Indian” in front of American and they will never be proper Americans, whatever this might be.

Deborah L. Madsen includes a quote in her book about Native American literature that says, “‘When asked by an anthropologist what the Indians called America before the white man came, [...] Indians said simply, ‘Ours’” (qtd. in Deborah L. Madsen). This quote demonstrates the involvement of the Native Americans with their country. Just as the Americans thought that the land they had discovered was there, the Native Americans had the same impression of the American soil. Moreover, they actually thought that they were born into or out of American soil (Treuer 28). “And the belief in tribal indigeneity is crucial to understanding modern Indian realities.” (Treuer 28) However, until today, as Thomas King mentions it abundantly in his non-fiction book *The Inconvenient Indian*, Americans think that they righteously bought the land from the Native Americans and that they have the right to build wherever they like. It is clear that this is not the case but ignorance has been a part of American, especially Caucasian retailing. It is paradoxical that a neighborhood loses in value just because somebody who has lived in this country before everybody else comes and buys a house. Considering that real estate has been passed on for generations among European families, it is inevitable to perceive that all these problems with Native Americans are an ethnic issue and not a territorial one. Native Americans have been in the US before the white settlers but because they look different, they have not been accepted into American society until this very day. Alexie, King and Jones try everything to point out these problems but it appears to be a never ending problem and something that has been broken in many ways and many times that fixing it seems to be impossible.

Thomas King writes about the urgent wish of the settlers to change the Native Americans, to “kill the Indian and save the man” (King, *Inconvenient* 108). This attitude towards the indigenous people could not have been more inaccurate. Madsen points out that the actual destruction of the Native Americans was not the conquering of American land but their

intellectual work (1). They destroyed “written artifacts or ancient mounds and earthworks [...] in order to validate that New World ‘savages’ possessed no ‘civilization’” (1). Thus, Native Americans never really had the chance to be perceived as people. They were automatically classified as uncivilized because their civilization and intellectual achievements were different than the European ones. They were perceived as the “other”. Therefore, white settlers saw it as their task to change them and force European or Christian values onto them. What many settlers have perceived as primitive or undeveloped was actually just different and unknown.

Native Americans had different values and many settlers mistook these values as traits of underdevelopment and primitiveness. The Native American way of life was not progressive for the European mindset. Therefore, many settlers saw it as their duty to change that but instead of improving the lives of Native Americans, they achieved the exact opposite. MacDonald, MacDonald, and Sheridan state that “[t]he near eradication of native peoples from the American West was almost always rationalized with the need to move forward [...]” (25). All these references demonstrate that the white settlers saw themselves as progressive and could not accept the “otherness” or, as it was perceived at that time, the “primitiveness” because they were convinced that they have to “replace ‘primitive’ and ‘savage’ ways with those of ‘civilization’ and ‘the future’” (MacDonald, MacDonald, and Sheridan 25). Native American traditions, their ways of life and their culture were not considered to be worth saving or at least to be left alone. There was this determination that Native peoples need to be saved from themselves, which remained prevalent until today.

David H. Lawrence said, “The red life flows in a different direction from the white life. You can’t make two streams that flow in opposite directions meet and mingle soothingly” (qtd. in Belling 15). There has been the perception from the beginning of the encounter of Native Americans and Europeans that it is just impossible to live together. Belling also writes about Eliot, somebody who started his ministry in 1646 and was convinced that he had to eradicate the “Indianness” in Native Americans (16). For Eliot and his admirers “Indian ‘culture’ – a term none would have used – was merely an elaboration of heathenism and was thus doomed perforce and providentially” (17). It was clear that they did not consider anything Native to be good, it had to be changed. Native Americans that had to go through the doctrines of becoming white and were then sent out to live their lives, often had two options: they could forget everything they learnt and become “Indian” again or stay white (23). Some chose the option to kill themselves (23). It was never understood that Native Americans are not different or more

unintellectual than white people, there was always the idea to integrate them into the society by assimilating them into white people than by integrating them and learning from them. The main problem that persists is that many non-Native people are convinced that Native Americans have a primitive culture and instead of favoring a mutual understanding, white superiority rules out this option. There is no space for two cultures merging, only one culture is accepted and this is the culture that European settlers have brought with them. Everything that First Nations had and still try to maintain is considered to be old and worthless as it does not work together with the capitalistic mentality.

Some Native American tribes tried to take on parts of the white culture, but even this was not enough. For instance, Cherokees' "leaders generally advocated Euro-American ideals (and, it seems, met with internal resistance as a result), they undertook these ideals on and in their own terms" (Belling 25). This was just not enough, because complete conversion was a wish of many white settlers and a mix of culture was obviously not desired. Suicide was the only solution for some people and even though it is prevalent in secondary literature about Native Americans, the primary literature does not deal with the topic exhaustively. Alexie includes suicide with the Native protagonist John. His identity conflict is so advanced that one often has the feeling that he might not just be the murderer but he could also kill himself at a certain passage in the novel. Jones also includes a passage where Jim Doe talks to McKirkle, an insurance vendor, about four eighth-graders that killed themselves. Jim Doe tells McKirkle a story about a tornado and how five years after the tornado, four teenagers killed themselves. When McKirkle does not really show any kind of reaction, Jim Doe says, "Some of us wait a little longer, I guess," (Jones 486). When one reads this passage for the first time, one struggles to understand the reason of comparing a tornado to suicide but it is actually a societal critique that Jones utters here. A tornado does not manage to kill these adolescents but their frustration, depression or any other kind of mental problem does so. Moreover, Jim Doe mentions the year in which this happened, 1982. Thus, a year that many readers of this paper can actually relate to and this demonstrates that there has still not been a change since Pratt's idea to "kill the Indian and save the man" (King, *Inconvenient* 108).

Even in the 21st century, there are certain elements that define Indian culture for the masses: "ceremonial ethnic clothing, regional food, overt social and family structures" (MacDonald, MacDonald, and Sheridan 25). Native Americans are never perceived just as people, they have to wear these traditional clothes to be perceived as being Native. "It is no secret that Native

American culture was commodified from its earliest days, with everything from wampum belts to weaponry finding ready buyers on the American East Coast and around the world, and even scalps and other ghastly ‘trophies’ becoming a currency for trade.” (26). Thus, from their earliest days, Native Americans have been popular figures but only when dressed as ones. The Native Americans that live in today’s America are not welcome, not wanted because they do not fit. They are different because they are not white, they don’t belong. It is very hard to comprehend why this is still the case but Macdonald et al. explain that this is the status quo. They also state that Caucasian Americans do not have a problem and they like to experience encounters with natives of South America but a more than cosmetic difference of people in North America is problematic (27). It appears that there is an interest in Native cultures and different cultures in general but only one culture is allowed in the US. It appears that everyone can do whatever he or she wants outside of North American territory but on Native American territory, only European culture and values may prevail.

The true roots and solutions to these problems are very hard to find. Alexie, King and Jones do not really reveal any solutions or try to enlighten the reader with answers but their approaches dive into the problems of Native Americans. All three authors have their native protagonists and they all deal with identity conflicts, stereotypes, insults, primitive behavior towards them, categorization, discrimination, racism and minority complexes. Thus, they might not deal with the topic of suicide per sé but they give motives and reasons why this is an issue in the Native American communities. Sometimes it is the only solution because they have to live their lives in a country that actually belongs or belonged to them but was taken away from them. Now they have to live in a free country but are actually incarcerated because wherever they go, they are not welcome. People know that they were in America before everybody else but the fact that they look different and do not share European appearances and cultures, makes many Caucasians perceive Native Americans as a history of the country that could have been left out. First Nations are very often seen as obstacles. King’s demonstrations of real-life experiences and many incidences in the novels prove that. Some Native Americans use this attitude of whites towards them as a reason to rebel. The Indian killer is one of those but Marie, even though she might be the Indian killer, also rebels in a more traditional way. She uses her intellectual capabilities to defy Professor Mather’s false perceptions of Native Americans and his unwillingness to accept that some parts of Native American culture have to remain unrecorded. Dr. Mather is a very crucial character in *Indian Killer* because he pretends to be a white man who understands Native American culture and he strongly tries to be a white

professor who is different. However, his striving for difference makes him actually ridiculous because the more he tries to demonstrate his willingness to preserve Native American culture, the more he loses in credibility. Marie tries to warn him and to make him aware of these facts but instead he does not even want to let her share her thoughts appropriately. It is a mirroring of the settlers when they made their first steps on American soil. They wanted to teach the Native Americans how to be human but they have always been human and this is something many privileged people in the 21st century are struggling to comprehend.

In addition to being obstacles, Native Americans were also considered to be people who have not developed like people should have. Bellin writes about how the discoverers of America perceived the Native Americans as people who lack (43). They did not have any “[...] sort of traffic, no knowledge of letters, no science of numbers, no name for a magistrate or for political superiority, [...] no occupations but leisure ones, [...]” (Montaigne qtd. in Bellin 43). Thus, the white settlers could not value what the Native Americans had, they perceived them as people who do not have what they possessed and this made them appear to be savages. This is what Native Americans had to endure, they had to live with the fact that the white settlers thought that this lack of things made them worthless, but it just was not necessary for them to develop and use all these things. It was a clash of two systems with different values, capitalism against a natural communistic model where sharing and not materialistic possession was the way of life. Native Americans lived without whites for centuries and they could have continued living like this for centuries if there had not been the idea of many whites to change that and make them white, without considering that they actually had a culture, a way of life, a language, a hierarchy and did not need the white settlers to tell them what they have to do. Somehow, for whatever reason, they felt obliged to put an end to the way of life of the Native Americans, there was the urge to change it, even though it was completely against the original idea of the United States of America. Native American peoples, who had their freedom, had to lose it for the freedom of others.

Bellin quotes various authors who wrote about their perception of Native Americans at the time the New World had been discovered. In these quotes many actually contradict themselves. They very often talk about their lack of culture and economy and then they describe practices like sharing and funerals that are extremely similar to practices of Christians (Bellin 47). The main difference seems to be that First Nations were perceived as the other and whatever they did, could not be perceived differently, even though it was not so different at all. The mindset of the

conquerors was determined to take Native American land for themselves and to get rid of the people who had already conquered it centuries ago. It was actually territorial behavior and many settlers made it look as if they cared but in the end and until today, nobody appears to do so. Of course, many tried to prove their Christian values and wanted to help Native Americans by teaching them European values but that meant stripping them of everything that actually made them Native. One of the problems was that the Europeans thought that they had to take away the land of the Natives like they would have had to take it away if they had been Europeans. They did not comprehend that Native Americans spent centuries without Europe and European values and that sharing of what they had with others was not something unimaginable for them (47). Nevertheless, their attitude towards life and their values were just not common to the Europeans and instead of thinking that learning from each other would be an option, they thought that only one side could learn from the other.

It is often just the skin color and differences in hair styles that are enough to put Native Americans into another category because it is often not more that makes Native Americans different from other Americans. Especially many contemporary Native Americans act Americanly but they look different than Caucasians and this is enough to be classified as strange and foreign. Even though “foreign” is as inappropriate when talking about Native Americans as it can be, it explains their situation perfectly. They are foreigners in their own country and many whites cannot see this because of their status. Being white is a privileged status and whoever is not white is perceived as being less and not worth to be in the country. Considering the rage that many Native Americans must experience, characters like the Indian killer and the Tin Man must appear because they are personifications of this jammed anger and they are there to make the readers aware of that. However, it often backfires because the privileged people cannot perceive unrighteousness when it happens to others, they can only perceive it when it happens to their people. This leads to conflicts and to an additional enforcement of stigmas, instead of an escape from stigmatizations.

5. Conclusion

Native American authors use the genre of the crime novel to reach as many people as possible and to point out that a Native life is a crime novel in itself. Furthermore, they stick to traditional

images of Native Americans as there is no other perception of them by other ethnicities. There is no other image of Native Americans than the mainstream white perspective in North America. To point this out and criticize the current status, Alexie, King and Jones chose the crime novel genre. Their crime novels include common elements of a typical crime novel, like mysterious murders, people who want to solve the case, detectives detached from everyday life, suspense, gloominess and cruelty. In addition, they also make use of one particular feature of the crime novel, namely the fact that crime novels criticize the current social status. The only big difference that one can point out immediately is that there are more Native Americans in their novels than in other crime novels.

Adding more Native Americans to the crime novel than one would usually perceive in one, does not necessarily mean a positive portrayal of Native Americans. Tony Hillermann wrote many novels with Native American detectives and he even did good research but what his novels lacked was mainly authenticity. He was a Caucasian author and not of Native American origin; nevertheless, he did not write completely inaccurate or stereotypical Native American crime novels. However, even though Alexie's, King's and Jones' novels are more authentic, they still include inappropriate images of Native Americans.

The question was why they still stick to it even as Native Americans and the answer proved to be not as simple as the question. A thorough analysis of the texts has demonstrated that they all work similarly but not to its entirety. One thing they do have in common is the inclusion of characters who do not use politically correct terms and some of them even insult Native Americans, mostly implicitly, but even explicitly. Jim Doe is permanently referred to as "chief" by his colleagues, Thumps DreadfulWater as an annoying Native American and John as a troubled young man, even as a potential murderer. Moreover, many other characters call these protagonists names and they give them a very hard time. In addition to this political incorrectness, the authors convey the daily struggle of Native Americans in contemporary North America and how negatively they are still perceived. Some of them are unemployed, in prison or mentally ill. What Alexie, King and Jones try to achieve here is to point out everything other ethnicities think about Native Americans and combine it with humor. Jones even tries to add a lot of suspense, gloominess and Hollywood thrilling. All three of them manage to convey the same picture. The assumption was that they do it to criticize the current status of Native Americans and their daily struggles. Comparing the novels to each other and consulting other secondary sources leads to the conclusion that they use a similar writing style, to honor the

elements of the crime novel and to also make the reader aware that this is still the image of Native Americans and there is nobody who does anything against it. No character, neither the ethnographer in King's novel nor the professor of Native American literature acts appropriately and tries to fight and act against the misrepresentations of First Nations.

For many characters in the novels, First Nations still do not have a culture and are primitive and unsophisticated humans. Images of cowboys and Indians still exist in many minds and even the word Native American is not used at all by the characters in the novels. Sometimes Native Americans correct other characters if other ethnicities use incorrect terms, like Creed does it to one of his colleagues in *All the Beautiful Sinners* and Marie makes her professor aware of many mistakes he commits in *Indian Killer*, but it is rather the exception than the rule. Most of the time, the Native characters endure being called old traditional Indian names and they do not voice any concerns about it. To fight this on-going misconception of Native Americans and their maltreatment, Alexie, King and Jones make use of satire and irony to put the spotlight onto these problematic portrayals.

My initial thought was that these books were not going to be written like this, but all of them were and the reason for it became clearer through the discussion in the paper. It is anger, frustration, desperateness and helplessness that drives the authors to use the method of exaggeration and hoping that readers will react to them. King even pointed out in one interview that he is conveying tragic messages but his tool is humor. Jones uses the same tool and Alexie does not use it in the same way but exaggerations are something that one can find abundantly in *Indian Killer*.

All authors manage to make the reader think about a lot of Native American struggles, especially their treatment by other characters and their helplessness. They do not overwhelm the reader with details about Native American traditions, culture and life but they insert it in bits and pieces. By doing this, they make the novel reader-friendly and at the same time educational as they make First Nation culture more accessible to a broader audience. Their intentions are not really clear, especially when one just focuses on the content and on the crime plot, but they manage to convey various messages subtly. The only thing that is still unclear is if they succeed and *The Guardian* podcast about the lost women in Montana gives a kind of answer to this question. They do not really because the problems are still there and the struggles are not becoming less. However, it appears that the US government takes action, but it is

debatable if changing the name of Columbus Day to Indigenous Day will solve many issues of Native Americans. In fact, it will probably not change a single thing.

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7. Appendix

7.1 Abstract of the Thesis/Zusammenfassung der Diplomarbeit

„Problematic Portrayals of Native Americans/First Nations in Native American Crime Novels [...]“ behandelt die Darstellung der kontemporären indigenen Bevölkerung Nordamerikas in „Native American“ Kriminalromanen, die von indigenen Nordamerikanern verfasst wurden. Bei den Texten, die analysiert werden, handelt es sich um *DreadfulWater* von Thomas King, *Indian Killer* von Sherman Alexie und *All the Beautiful Sinners* von Stephen Graham Jones. In allen Texten wurde durch eine genauere Betrachtung festgestellt, dass, obwohl alle Autoren indigenen Ursprungs sind, Stereotypen trotzdem vorkommen und das Bild des primitiven und wilden Indianers überwiegt. Wieso dieses Bild überwiegt und alle Autoren dieses übernehmen, anstatt genau diese Darstellung des „Indianers“ zu bekämpfen und richtig zu stellen, wird zum zentralen Thema dieser Diplomarbeit.

Kapitel 2 befasst sich mit den Anfängen des Kriminalromans in den USA und geht den Gründen nach, wieso die Autoren dieses Medium dazu verwenden, um über die Probleme und Falschdarstellungen des indigenen/der indigenen Nordamerikaners/Nordamerikanerin zu schreiben. Recherchen zu diesen Themen zeigen, dass der Kriminalroman das perfekt Medium zu sein scheint, da in den meisten Krimis schon immer auch Kritiken an der Gesellschaft ausgedrückt wurden und die Thematik des kontemporären „Indianers“ genau in dieses Genre passt. Hinzuzufügen wäre auch noch, dass das Leben vieler indigener Stämme in den USA einem Kriminalroman in vielerlei Hinsicht gleicht.

Das nächste Kapitel befasst sich dann näher mit den indigenen Charakteren in den primären Texten und analysiert wie diese in den Kriminalromanen dargestellt werden. Die meisten Charaktere leiden, da sie die ungleiche Behandlung der Gesellschaft spüren und oft in einer Identitätskrise stecken. Den meisten ist nicht klar, ob sie Amerikaner sind oder Navajo, Cherokee oder einem anderen Stamm angehören. Die ungleiche Behandlung wird dann auch im vierten Kapitel thematisiert und die Diskussion wird langsam zu einem Ende geführt. Die literarische Analyse zeigt, dass der Großteil der Bevölkerung der Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika noch immer nur den traditionellen Indianer sieht und den heutigen Ureinwohner Nordamerikas noch immer nicht akzeptiert hat.