



## NON-BELONGING AND TESTIMONY OF FEELING IN THERE, THERE (2018) BY TOMMY ORANGE<sup>1</sup>

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**ABSTRACT:** This study examines how a sense of non-belonging is represented through the “testimony of feeling” in Tommy Orange’s *There There*. Given that the process of colonization led to the forced displacement of Native American peoples from their ancestral lands, resulting in historical trauma, we will analyze how the characters Opal Viola and Tony Loneman relate to the “testimony of feeling” proposed by Tânia Sarmiento-Pantoja (2024), and how coloniality and displacement as historical trauma permeate this feeling imprinted in the narratives of Indigenous people living in urban contexts. Additionally, the study draws upon bell hooks<sup>3</sup> (2014) and the concept of marginalization and non-belonging caused by displacement through coloniality. This study employs an exploratory qualitative bibliographic research approach (Gil, 2002) combined with comparative literature (Carvalho, 2017).

**Keywords:** Non-belonging. Testimony of Feeling. Displacement. Native Americans. *There, There*.

**RESUMO:** Essa pesquisa analisa como o não pertencimento é representado pelo “testemunho do sentir” em *There There* de Tommy Orange. Tendo o processo de colonização como causador de um deslocamento forçado dos povos nativos americanos dos seus territórios de origem, que causa um trauma histórico, analisaremos como os personagens Opal Viola e Tony Loneman tem relação com o “testemunho do sentir” postulado por Tânia Sarmiento-Pantoja (2024) e como a colonialidade e o deslocamento como trauma histórico

<sup>1</sup> Trabalho de conclusão de curso, orientado pelo(a) Prof. Dra Ana Lilia Carvalho Rocha, apresentado à banca examinadora no dia 25 de maio de 2026.

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<sup>3</sup> Due to a political choice by the author, bell hooks prefers her name to be written in lowercase.

atravessam esse sentir imprimido nas narrativas de pessoas indígenas que vivem em contexto urbano. Além de Bell Hooks (2014) e o conceito de marginalização e não pertencimento causado por um deslocamento através da colonialidade. Este estudo apropria-se de uma pesquisa bibliográfica qualitativa de cunho exploratório (Gil, 2002) aliada à literatura comparada (Carvalho, 2017).

**Palavras-chave:** Não-pertencimento. Testemunho do sentir. Deslocamento. Nativos-Americanos. *There, There*.

## 1-INTRODUCTION

The fact that indigenous peoples now live in urban settings is the result of migration from regions considered rural to large cities. This migration was driven by colonialism and the search for better opportunities through the assimilation of the capitalist way of life. That is the cosmological way of life of a millennia-old culture.

In this context, the relationship between the urban capitalist ‘Other’ and the rural, or rather original, ‘Other’ stands out clearly as a power relationship resulting from coloniality (Quijano, 2005). In which, displacement from one's place of origin and the clash of ontological ways of life cause marginalization in the urban context for the indigenous person. Thus, implying a set of feelings generated by a sense of non-belonging.

For this reason, the impact of the colonial process on indigenous peoples, specifically North Americans in this research focus, directly affects the way they are displaced to urban spaces. With this displacement to urban areas, indigenous peoples face physical and emotional tensions and erasures resulting from the territorial impositions of colonizers and their cosmic relationships between the land, spirituality, and the people.

In this analysis, we will work on how the testimony of feeling (Sarmiento-Pantoja, 2025) is manifested among urban Indians, from the narrative based on their experiences of displacement and adaptation from their area of origin to the urban area. Thus, based on the characters Opal Viola Victoria Bear Shield and Tony Loneman, we will analyze how non-belonging, displacement and the testimony of feeling cross the characters of the narrative, in the urban Indigenous context, in the USA.

The aim of this study is to analyze how the Testimony of Feeling and resistance are articulated in the chapters dedicated to the characters Opal Viola and Tony Loneman in Tommy Orange's *There, There*. The specific objectives are: 1) discuss how the literature of

resistance is expressed in the chapters dedicated to the characters Opal Viola and Tony Loneman in Tommy Orange's *There, There*; 2) understand how the testimony of feeling manifests itself through processes of displacement and non-belonging. This research is the result of studies conducted within the research project CRENAC (Configurações de Resistência em Narrativas Anglófonas Contemporâneas), coordinated by Professor Ana Lilia Carvalho Rocha. Thus, we seek to explore works of Anglophone literature related to resistance and its various ramifications. For this reason, we selected *There, There* (2019) for this investigation.

## 2-LITERATURE REVIEW

The work *There, There*, the debut novel by Californian author Tommy Orange, immerses us in the nuances of the experiences of Native Americans as they transitioned to urban life. With Cheyenne and Arapaho ancestry from Oklahoma, Orange was born in Oakland and graduated from the MFA program at the Institute of American Indian Arts; he is a registered member of the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes of Oklahoma (Rocco, 2024). In this way, he draws upon his own narrative, heritage, and that of his community to bring his novel to life, fictionally recounting the story of urban Indigenous peoples who have suffered the consequences of colonialism in the United States.

The novel *There, There* presents, through 13 Native American characters with distinct perspectives, explores the process of their forced removal from their ancestral lands to live in an urban setting. These stories are set in Oakland, California, where these characters live. However, they tragically find themselves at an event that was meant to commemorate and celebrate the culture of Oakland's indigenous peoples: The *Powwow*. Thus, Orange's work is a multigenerational story about violence and recovery, memory and Native identity (Rocco, 2024), historical trauma resulting from the colonialism suffered by these people, cultural erasure, and the constant search for belonging in an urban context a place that does not belong to their origins.

Among the characters in the novel *There, There*, only two were selected for this research study; they will be analyzed later in light of the selected categories (which will be discussed below). First, Opal Viola Victoria Bear Shield. This character has experienced trauma since her childhood in an urban Native community. Her mother, Victoria, struggles with alcoholism while raising two children, Opal and Jacquie. For this reason, Victoria is unable to raise and care for her two daughters. Consequently, her daughters are placed in the

care of their adoptive uncle. Opal, being the older sister, takes on the responsibility of caring for her younger sister. Thus, Opal raises Jacquie's grandchildren with this survival instinct and navigates the dilemma of whether or not to allow her sister's grandchildren to have contact with Indigenous culture and the Powwow.

The second character we will examine in this analysis is Tony Loneman. His main source of trauma is coming to terms with his own appearance, as he has Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS)<sup>4</sup>, or as he calls it in his narrative, *The Drome*. He lives under the judgmental stares of others due to his appearance and Indigenous heritage. Tony ends up selling drugs to help support his family, especially Maxine, his grandmother who raised him. However, he harbors a lot of resentment toward his mother, because he holds her responsible for his physical condition; the prejudice he faces from society, combined with his urban Indigenous identity. As a result, he plans an armed robbery during the Powwow, not only for financial reasons and a limited employment opportunities, but as an attempt to be seen and respected.

The narrative, within a broader historical context, introduces urban Native Americans in Oakland, particularly those of Cheyenne peoples. Right at the beginning of the narrative, in its prologue, the historical and political context is established. Orange (2018) details in his narrative various instances of atrocities committed against Native Americans, such as massacres, the mutilation of bodies, and the display of these acts of violence as symbols of victory. Historical events are mentioned, such as: the distortion of Thanksgiving; the display of Indigenous heads as trophies; the Sand Creek Massacre; and stereotyping.

In 1637, anywhere from four to seven hundred Pequot gathered for their annual Green Corn Dance. Colonists surrounded their village, set it on fire, and shot any Pequot who tried to escape. The next day the Massachusetts Bay Colony had a feast in celebration, and the governor declared it a day of thanksgiving. Thanksgivings like these happened everywhere, whenever there were what we have to call "successful massacres." At one such celebration in Manhattan, people were said to have celebrated by kicking the heads of Pequot people through the streets like soccer balls (Orange, 2018, p. 9-10).

According to Grinnell (1972), the Cheyenne people originally inhabited the region known as the Great Lakes. Today, this corresponds to the states of Minnesota and Wisconsin. Over time, they gradually moved from the Great Lakes region to the central plains of the United States (states such as Nebraska, Kansas, Colorado, and North Dakota). This movement had a significant impact on their cultural development. The Spanish introduced horses, and

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<sup>4</sup> Fetal alcohol syndrome is one of a spectrum of disorders under the umbrella term of fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD). There is a total of five disorders that comprise fetal alcohol spectrum disorders. (Vorgias; Bynum; Bernstein, 2026)

the Cheyenne became formidable buffalo (or bison) hunters and developed a warrior culture typical of the plains.

During the expansion of the United States in the nineteenth century, contact and conflict intensified. Treaties such as the Fort Laramie (which aimed to ensure peace and safe passage for settlers on the Oregon Trail) were signed. Cheyenne territories were invaded, armed conflicts became frequent, and their lands were progressively seized and reduced. Among the most famous massacres is that of Sand Creek (1864), mentioned in the prologue to *There, There*. In that massacre, hundreds were killed, including women and children, and brutal mutilations took place. These events resulted in the considerable destruction of the traditional Cheyenne leadership:

Some of us grew up with stories about massacres. [...] At Sand Creek, we heard it said that they mowed us down with their howitzers. Volunteer militia under Colonel John Chivington came to kill us—we were mostly women, children, and elders. The men were away to hunt. They'd told us to fly the American flag. We flew that and a white flag too. Surrender, the white flag waved. We stood under both flags as they came at us. They did more than kill us. They tore us up. Mutilated us. Broke our fingers to take our rings, cut off our ears to take our silver, scalped us for our hair. We hid in the hollows of tree trunks, buried ourselves in sand by the riverbank. That same sand ran red with blood. They tore unborn babies out of bellies, took what we intended to be, our children before they were children, babies before they were babies, they ripped them out of our bellies. They broke soft baby heads against trees. Then they took our body parts as trophies and displayed them on a stage in downtown Denver. Colonel Chivington danced with dismembered parts of us in his hands, with women's pubic hair, drunk, he danced, and the crowd gathered there before him was all the worse for cheering and laughing along with him. It was a celebration. (Orange, 2018, p. 12)

As described by Benjamin Madley (2016) and as seen in the quote above, the mass destruction of Native American peoples was not merely an indirect consequence of colonization, but a orchestrated genocide. In 1848, when gold was discovered, as Madley (2016) calls it, the Gold Rush numerous immigrants arrived on indigenous lands and violence intensified. The genocides were primarily carried out through massacres. The demographic impact resulting from these atrocities between 1846 and 1870 was a decrease from 150,000 to 30,000 Indigenous people inhabiting North American territory. According to the same author, approximately 9,492 to 16,094 Indigenous people were killed by violence. As a result, “territorial dispossession and deterritorialization are, therefore, a fundamental component and

context of the genocidal complex in the Americas, both during the colonial period and thereafter”<sup>5</sup> (Palmquist, 2018, p.126, Our translation<sup>6</sup>).

With regard to resistance, it is first necessary to understand the definition of the word. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, resistance is “the act of fighting against something that is attacking you, or refusing to accept something”<sup>7</sup>. In this sense, Bosi emphasizes that the “deepest meaning of resistance is the willpower that resists another force, external to the subject” (1996, p. 11)<sup>8</sup>. In other words, to resist would be to oppose one’s own strength to the strength of others. The author further argues that resistance manifests in two forms: Resistance as a theme and Resistance as an immanent form of writing.

From this perspective, in Orange’s narrative, we will examine resistance as an immanent form of writing. From this perspective, “immanent” is understood as something internal; that is, resistance extends beyond the work itself. The act of writing is, in itself, an act of resistance. According to Bosi, a work does not necessarily need to be political in nature to be resistant. Resistant writing goes against “life as it is” (Bosi, 1996, p.13),<sup>9</sup> but the narrative is permeated by “critical tension; it shows, without rhetoric or ideological fanfare, that this ‘life as it is’ is, almost always, the cog in an alienating mechanism” (Bosi, 1996, p.13).<sup>10</sup> Resistance is an internal movement to the narrative focus; it is bringing to light the hidden social discourse; it is resisting the dominant ideology, stereotypes, and social masks.

In accordance with Augusto Sarmiento-Pantoja (2022), it is necessary to adopt a broader perspective on resistance beyond its understanding as an immanent form of writing or as a political theme. Thus, he proposes expanding the concept to encompass the resistance of lived experiences. A literary text becomes an act of resistance when it brings to light the lives that are or have been silenced, marginalized, dehumanized, or rendered invisible on a daily basis. Having one’s existence narrated through one’s own voice and experience is an act of resistance.

It is necessary to exist in order to resist. Following this idea, Larissa Fontinele de Alencar, in her work *Poéticas da “Rexistencia”* argues that:

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<sup>5</sup> O esbulho territorial e a desterritorialização são, portanto, componente fundamental e contexto do complexo genocida nas Américas no período colonial quanto posteriormente (Palmquist, 2018, p.126).

<sup>6</sup> The author is responsible for all the translations present in this work.

<sup>7</sup> O ato de lutar contra algo que o ataca, ou recusar-se a aceitar algo (Cambridge).

<sup>8</sup> significado mais profundo de resistência é a força de vontade que resiste a outra força, externa ao sujeito (1996, p. 11).

<sup>9</sup> “a vida como ela é” (Bosi, 1996, p.13)

<sup>10</sup> tensão crítica, mostra, sem retórica nem alarde ideológico, que essa “vida como ela é” é, quase sempre, o ramerrão de um mecanismo alienante” (Bosi, 1996, p.13).

In the history of indigenous peoples, the victor is simply the one who survives; consequently, history undergoes a long process of interpreting the facts, which remains shaped by the singular perspective of those who lived to tell the story in their own way, erasing traces by wiping out entire nations and, in this sense, reducing cultures and epistemes to mere pejorative stereotypes (Alencar, 2022, p.29).<sup>11</sup>

In this way, survival is a form of resistance for Indigenous peoples. For this, in and of itself, is considered a battle. To denounce and articulate the past and the present through literature is to resist and reaffirm life. Thus, Alencar (2022) proposes “*reexistencia*”. That is, resisting in order to exist, “that is, existence above all to tell other stories formed by counter-narratives of peoples who have been subalternized” (Alencar, 2022, p.49).<sup>12</sup> Thus, it is evident that in the literary works of Indigenous peoples, “we find this writing of resistance; between the lines of the work’s style, we perceive the act of resisting in order to exist” (Barros, 2025, p. 39).<sup>13</sup>

From the perspective of bell hooks (2014), there is a concept known as *Homeplace*. In her book *Yearning*, the author defines this concept as a place of resistance. In this context, *Homeplace* is primarily conceptualized for Black people. That is to say, as it is in the home, far from the social prejudices that historically shaped homes as spaces of resistance, protection against racist domination and oppression, the reconstruction of identity, and the preservation of the culture of marginalized people took place. Thus, it is possible to rebuild and restructure spaces marginalized by oppressors in a way that embodies resistance.

Consequently, in this study, we will explore the concept of *homeplace* as a place that holds symbolic significance for Native American peoples. In *There, There*, we see that the understanding of home is not merely material, but also a sense of belonging. Thus, we view the *Powwow* as a place of resistance, as the event features cultural expressions, rituals, collective memory, and a reaffirmation of identity for the Native Americans of Oakland.

To bear witness is a form of resistance. From the perspective of Wilberth Salgueiro (2012), there are numerous forms and modalities of testimony, which may stem from lived experiences in historical events or be expressed through different narrative forms, such as novels, films, and music. According to the same author, literature and testimony may, at first

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<sup>11</sup> na história dos povos originários, o vencedor é simplesmente aquele que sobrevive e, por isso, a história passa por um longo processo de entendimento dos fatos que permanece sob o ponto de vista único de quem viveu para contar a história a seu modo, ocultando rastros ao extinguir nações inteiras e, nesse sentido, balizando culturas e epistemes como meros estereótipos pejorativos (Alencar, 2022, p.29).

<sup>12</sup> seja, existência sobretudo para contar outras histórias formadas por contranarrativas de povos que foram subalternizados (Alencar, 2022, p.49).

<sup>13</sup> temos essa escrita de resistência, nas entrelinhas do estilo da obra que percebemos o resistir para existir (Barros, 2025, p. 39).

glance, seem to be opposites. However, “considerations regarding testimonial literature’ involve issues of genre, value, and knowledge, which, once again, strain the boundaries between aesthetics and ethics, between truth and fiction, between reality and representation.” (Salgueiro, 2012, p. 6).<sup>14</sup>

In line with Márcio Seligmann-Silva (2003), testimonial literature emerges from the need to narrate historical traumas. Such literature is not merely a literary genre, but a means of recounting the great acts of violence that have ravaged humanity. Thus, testimonial literature establishes a connection between literature, testimony, and reality. Situating the text within the “blend of fiction and reality” (Seligmann-Silva, 2003, p. 380)<sup>15</sup>, for “only the passage through the imagination could account for that which escapes the concept” (Seligmann-Silva, 2003, p. 380).<sup>16</sup> The fictional content is not merely invention, but describes the narrative and the construction of the ‘real,’ requiring an ethical stance on the part of the author in this type of literature.

Based on Augusto Sarmiento-Pantoja (2023), coupled with Seligmann-Silva (2003), there is no complete separation between reality and fiction. Thus, Sarmiento-Pantoja (2021) introduces three concepts: truth content; testimonial content; and fictional content. In summary, the author states that the concept of truth content originates from Walter Benjamin (2009), since there are facts on writing narrative, “in such an evident and well-articulated manner, that they are capable of generating a truth content, which comes to be that which transcends relations with materiality, relations composed of historical and philological elements” (Sarmiento-Pantoja, 2021, p. 116).<sup>17</sup> As well as testimonial content, a concept derived from Seligmann-Silva (2003), who asserts that many works, even though fictional, carry testimonies, as they deal with trauma, historical violence, and collective or individual memories.

Thereupon, literature bears an ethical obligation to remain committed to reality. To conclude his argument, the author presents the final point of his contribution: the fictional element. Regarding this concept, it is noted that testimony can be presented using fictional techniques, such as: character development; plot; textual/narrative organization; and

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<sup>14</sup> as considerações acerca da “literatura de testemunho” envolvem questões de gênero, de valor, de saberes, que, mais uma vez, tensionam os limites entre estética e ética, entre verdade e ficção, entre realidade e representação (Salgueiro, 2012, p. 6).

<sup>15</sup> mistura de ficção e realidade (Seligmann-Silva, 2003, p.380),

<sup>16</sup> apenas a passagem pela a imaginação poderia dar conta daquilo que escapa ao conceito (Seligmann-Silva, 2003, p.380)

<sup>17</sup> fatos presentes no texto, de forma tão evidente e bem articulada, que é capaz de gerar um teor de verdade, que vem a ser aquilo que ultrapassa as relações com a materialidade, relações estas compostas pelos elementos históricos e filológicos (Sarmiento-Pantoja, 2021, p. 116).

metaphors. Since these events cause significant trauma and are, in short, difficult to narrate in their entirety, fiction builds a bridge between the real and the fictional to make narrative possible as a form of testimony. Thus, “given the level of unbearability, they must be constituted in other ways, hence the presence of fictional content in the testimony” (Sarmiento-Pantoja, 2021, p. 128).<sup>18</sup>

Consistent with the narrative in *There, There* is told through fiction, yet it does not lose its relevance because it recounts the trauma caused by displacement and the sense of not belonging experienced by Native Americans in Oakland. In other words, even though it is a work of fiction, it does not lose the ethical, political, and expository nature that such literature embodies.

As the main focus of analysis, this study adopts the concept of the “testimony of feeling,” proposed by Tânia Sarmiento-Pantoja (2025). More specifically, the testimony of feeling is linked to the emotions involved in the testimony, such as affections and physical and psychological emotions that are directly connected to memories of the context of violence. In this way, the witness recounts not only the events experienced but also the feelings and memories that were felt. Thus, feelings appear in the narratives as: fear, hope, pain, memories, sounds, images, smells, among others.

Reflecting on the testimony of feeling as a category implies, first and foremost, considering the interplay between memory and sensitivity. And to reflect on this relationship is to reflect on life—above all, on how life is mediated by the body as the translator of the mind’s modes of feeling. As a place of learning and education, memory plays a role in the formation of the subject by aggregating knowledge and values. In turn, as (also) a constituent of the body, the emotion involved in the process of remembrance is translated through affections and affectations, the realm of sensibility (Sarmiento-Pantoja, 2025, p. 114).<sup>19</sup>

Therefore, the non-belonging and displacement of Native American peoples in Oakland affect the characters’ senses and emotions throughout the development of the

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<sup>18</sup> given the level of unbearability, they must be constituted in other ways, hence the presence of fictional content in the testimony (Sarmiento-Pantoja, 2021, p. 128).

<sup>19</sup> Pensar sobre o testemunho do sentir como categoria implica considerar, primeiramente, o envolvimento entre memória e sensibilidade. E pensar sobre essa relação é pensar sobre a vida, pensar sobretudo como a vida é mediada pelo corpo enquanto tradutor dos modos de sentir da mente. Enquanto lugar de aprendizados e aprendizagem a memória toma parte na formação do sujeito ao agregar conhecimentos e valores. Por sua vez, sendo (também) constituidora do corpo a emoção envolvida no processo de rememoração traduz-se através dos afetos e das afetações, lugar da sensibilidade (Sarmiento-Pantoja, 2025, p. 114).

narrative. As such, it conveys aspects that are directly linked to the concept about testimony of feeling, such as childhood memories and issues related to the Native American past.

Regarding displacement and coloniality, the author Aníbal Quijano (2005) argues that the concept of power and hierarchy took shape during colonization, establishing the distinction between the dominant and the dominated. For in “America, the idea of race was a way of conferring legitimacy on the relations of domination imposed by the conquest” (Quijano, 2003, p. 118).<sup>20</sup>

Thus, Eurocentrism has constructed the idea of the ‘other’ as inferior. Consequently, Native American indigenous peoples, who from a Eurocentric perspective are viewed as the ‘other’ primitive or backward are contrasted with Europeans, who are considered modern and advanced. According to Quijano (2003), this form of colonial power continues to exist. In his conceptualization, it is termed the ‘Coloniality of Power’. Thus, the three elements that underpin the coloniality of power capitalism, Eurocentrism, and race continue to be on the rise within the global system.

In this context, *There, There* there is a displacement caused directly by the colonial nature of power. This is because Native American peoples, both in fiction and in reality, have suffered the loss of their territory and have been subjugated by powers that are directly linked to capitalist, Eurocentric, and racial relations.

### **3- METHODOLOGY**

This study consists of a qualitative, exploratory literature review (Gil, 2008), combined with comparative literature (Carvalho, 1986). In this regard, the literature review was used to examine and analyze published materials related to our subject of study, including books, scientific papers, book chapters, and Tommy Orange’s own work, *There, There*, for analysis.

In this study, qualitative research will be used to conduct an in-depth analysis of the narrative, specifically focusing on the characters Opal Viola and Tony Lonemann. We will also draw upon resistance literature and testimonial literature. For this purpose, we seek to understand the context in which the narrative is embedded, the reasons why the situations depicted in the work occur, and how these elements are articulated within the theories mentioned. In addition, exploratory research is employed—a method for “modifying concepts

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<sup>20</sup> América, a idéia de raça foi uma maneira de outorgar legitimidade às relações de dominação impostas pela conquista (Quijano, 2003, p. 118).

and ideas with a view to formulating more precise problems or testable hypotheses for future studies” (Gil, 2008, p. 27)<sup>21</sup> to clarify and develop the aforementioned concepts and provide an overview of the work and associated theories.

Then, by blending different cultures and languages, with the aim of describing and understanding the analysis as thoroughly as possible. This study connects Tommy Orange’s narrative with other fields of knowledge, such as history, anthropology, and literature itself, along with their branches, in order to carry out this comparison.

#### 4- DISCUSSION

In *There, There*, testimony emerges in a more affective and sensitive engagement with events. It manifests through feeling, and memory that translates into emotion, sensitivity, and the affectivity of what is being portrayed. Trauma is more than physical; it is sensitive. That is, it is witnessed through the testimony of feeling, a concept proposed by Tânia Sarmiento-Pantoja (2025). In the work, the characters selected to analyze the expression of the testimony of feeling are Tony Loneman and Opal Viola Victoria Bear Shield. Both carry with them much more than physical trauma; they also carry sensations that bear witness to what they experienced in their past. Directly, as in Opal’s childhood, or indirectly, as in Tony’s case, before his birth.

In Tony Loneman’s narrative, the testimony of feeling is inscribed in his body. His body itself bears witness to the memory of trauma. Tony was born with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS), or as he calls it, “The drome.” This physical condition is a result of his social and historical context, as his mother drank alcohol while pregnant, and he developed the syndrome. Shortly after his birth, he was abandoned by his mother. Throughout his life, due to the physical condition of his face, he suffered from prejudice. Because of his Indigenous heritage, he faced marginalization. Thus, the character’s body has experienced trauma since before his birth; he feels this not only through his physical appearance but also through the constant sense of judgment he faces from society, a judgment caused by *The drome* and his Indigenous identity.

THE DROME FIRST CAME to me in the mirror when I was six.[...] Back home, in front of the TV, before I turned it on, I saw my face in the dark reflection there. It was the first time I saw it. My own face, the way everyone else saw it. When I asked Maxine, she told me my mom drank when I was in her, she told me real slow that I have fetal alcohol syn-drome. All I heard her say was Drome, and then I was back in

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<sup>21</sup> modificar conceitos e ideias, com vistas a formular problemas mais precisos ou hipóteses pesquisáveis para estudos futuros (Gil, 2008, p. 27)

front of the turned-off TV, staring at it. My face stretched across the screen. The Drome. I tried but couldn't make the face that I found there my own again ((Orange, 2019, p. 16).

Tony describes the constant feeling of being judged by others, and how this creates a sense of nonbelonging within him. For he always lives under society's gaze of strangeness. The character says: "People look at me and then look away when they see that I'm watching them watch me. That's Drome, too" (Orange, 2019, p. 19). Thus, it is understood that "the drome" is the "way in which history lands (Orange, 2019, p. 19) on his body and is experienced through sensations such as shame, fear, and anger.

The testimony of feeling is also evident when Tony finds Native American clothing among Maxine's belongings and puts it on in secret. There, he didn't just see "the drome" on his face; he was able to feel like a Native American, a part of the Powwow. Reconnecting with and feeling his roots: "I looked at my face. The Drome. I didn't see it there. I saw an Indian. I saw a dancer" (Orange, 2019, p. 19). Furthermore, Maxine read about Indigenous traditions to Tony, fostering a sense of belonging in him to his Indigenous heritage.

In Opal Viola Victoria Bear Shield's narrative, the testimony of feeling is presented in a different way. It emerges from the traumatic memories the character experienced during her childhood. Thus, trauma is a constant presence in Opal's life. She constantly relives the feeling of fear within herself. The character recounts that during her childhood, her family (mother and sister) moved to Alcatraz after she and her sister witnessed their mother coming home physically abused. Opal has this vivid visual image of her mother, which has become a traumatic memory. Thus, the testimony of feeling is embodied in Opal's body, stemming from these memories and emotions that have been continuously generated since childhood:

One morning our mom woke us up in a hurry, her face was beat up. She had a brown leather jacket way too big for her draped over her shoulders. Both her top and bottom lips were swollen. Seeing those big lips messed me up. She couldn't talk right. She told us to pack our things then too. (Orange, 2019, p. 45).

Tânia Sarmiento-Pantoja points out that the testimony of feeling "being (also) constitutive of the body, the emotion involved in the process of remembrance is translated through affects and affections, as a site of sensibility" (Sarmiento-Pantoja, 2025, p. 144). In the character Opal, this is reflected in actions related to care and protection, both toward her sister when they were orphaned and toward her nephews and nieces in adulthood. For these actions result from the trauma that constantly bears witness to and affects her body and mind in this process of recalling her childhood and origins.

We ate watery beef stew out of Styrofoam bowls around a bonfire some of the younger men kept pretty big and hot with chunks of wood pallets. Our mom smoked cigarettes farther out from the fire with two big old Indian women with loud laughs. There were stacks of Wonder Bread and butter on tables with pots of stew. When the fire got too hot, we moved back and sat down (Orange, 2019, p. 48).

In the excerpt above, we have yet another example of how sensory experience is brought to life in Opal's narrative, as it involves memory, sensitivity, and bodily perception. When Opal describes the watery beef stew, Styrofoam bowls, a large, warm fire, and sliced bread with butter, her sensory experience is expressed through the senses of taste, touch, and sight.

The narrative *There, There* is characterized as testimonial literature, since, following Salgueiro's (2012) line of thought, testimonial literature can narrate experience as a form of fiction, that is, through artistic expressions. In turn, Seligmann-Silva (2003) argues that testimonial literature is not merely a literary genre that emerged by chance, but rather a form of representation for those who have been victimized, exposing the evils of major global violence. As in the selected work, the testimony takes the form of a narrative in the novel genre, constructing even within fiction, a tension between ethical and aesthetic boundaries within the narrated testimony.

In addition to highlighting the abuses suffered by Native Americans, particularly those in Oakland, when colonizers arrived on their territory. As described in the book's prologue, it details the massacres, genocides, mutilations, and abuses that ravaged Native Americans, leaving a past marked by extreme violence. Similarly, this testimony is reflected in the characters' narratives, particularly those of Tony and Opal, who recount their urban lives marked by trauma and memories stemming from the historical consequences of violence against Indigenous peoples.

According to Seligmann-Silva and Sarmiento-Pantoja, the fictional content in testimonial literature carries an ethical weight when transformed into fiction. Fiction comes to be seen as an accessible way to bear witness to events that caused profound shock. Thus, based on the fictional content, a plot is shaped, with the construction of characters, as in *There, There*, where the narrative is told through 13 characters who were directly linked to the Powwow tragedy and the indigenous heritage that has deteriorated since the arrival of the colonizers.

To narrate a testimony is to resist forces that have been imposed against one's will. Writing testimonies of great violence in a fictional form, such as the novel, and in an ethical

manner is an act of resistance. More specifically, it is resistance through writing, or, as Bosi (1996) puts it, being immanent to it. Tommy Orange incorporates this resistant writing into his novel, *There, There*. For he articulates, in a fictional manner, with a plot and character development, ways of recounting the oppressions that Native American communities suffer and/or have suffered at the hands of their rulers/colonizers. *There, There* is resistance in written form.

The characters bear witness to their experiences in the urban environment, showing how this has happened, and continues to happen, in a cruel way for indigenous peoples. They resist the dominant ideology that surrounds them in the urban area. They resist the stereotypes shaped by their origins. And above all, in the living memory of each character, affirming their existence.

To resist in order to exist: this observation aligns with Alencar work's (2024) and Sarmento-Pantoja (2022), both of whom address the concept of *resistência*. Survival is a means by which Native American peoples have found a way to resist. The struggle to survive is an act of resistance, and telling their story through a narrative is to resist a context marked, in short, by marginalization. It is a way to ensure that society never ignores what they have suffered. Thus, Tommy Orange's novel *There, There* fictionally bears witness to the abuses and violations that Indigenous peoples endured before reaching urban life and how they survive in it today.

Armed with ancestral memories and cultural inheritances that each Native person carries, even in the face of multiple genocides, they bear witness to their *resistance* amid the many counternarratives produced by dominant peoples. As the narrator states in the narrative's prologue: "[...] But we are what our ancestors did. How they survived. We are the memories we cannot recall, that dwell within us [...]" (Orange, 2018, p.14). As also analyzed in the following quote, the testimony interwoven into the book's prologue regarding the abuses and genocides suffered by Native Americans:

[...] feelings from memories that flare and bloom unexpectedly in our lives like blood through a blanket from a wound made by a bullet fired by a man shooting us in the back for our hair, for our heads, for a bounty, or just to get rid of us. — When they first came for us with their bullets, we didn't stop moving even though the bullets moved twice as fast as the sound of our screams, and even when their heat and speed broke our skin, shattered our bones, skulls, pierced our hearts, we kept on, even when we saw the bullets send our bodies flailing through the air like flags, like the many flags and buildings that went up in place of everything we knew this land to be before (Orange, 2018, p.14-15).

In this sense, a home can be configured as a point of resistance. Drawing on Bell Hooks's (2014) concept, *homeplace* is understood as a place that resists, welcomes, and protects. In this analysis, we use the idea of home not merely as a fixed individual point, but as a collective space known as a *Powwow*. The *Powwow* is a place that connects urban Native Americans to their culture and ancestral identity. It brings together dance, food, teaching, and music in a single place, representing memory and belonging. Consequently, the *Powwow* aligns with this idea of a place of resistance, or *homeplace*.

Based on Anibal Quijano's (2003) concept of the coloniality of power and its enduring relevance today, we connect this to the idea of urban indigenous peoples and their resulting sense of not belonging, which is directly linked to the displacement caused by the dominant power. Quijano (2003) emphasizes that such power continues to be fully active in today's society. Given that the coloniality of power persists in the impositions on culture, identity, and social structure, it is dismissive of urban indigenous peoples.

In *There, There*, this is evident in the sense that Indigenous people do not belong in urban life, as they have been uprooted from their origins. It is also marked by the idea of stereotypes. In the narrative, we see the concept of the 'Real Native' (Orange, 2018), which reinforces the pejorative view of Indigenous peoples. Thus, it becomes clear that the genocide that marked the past manifests itself today as the marginalization of the remaining Indigenous people in urban life:

Getting us to cities was supposed to be the final, necessary step in our assimilation, absorption, erasure, the completion of a five-hundred-year-old genocidal campaign. But the city made us new, and we made it ours. We didn't get lost amid the sprawl of tall buildings, the stream of anonymous masses, the ceaseless din of traffic.[...] We did not move to cities to die. The sidewalks and streets, the concrete, absorbed our heaviness (Orange, 2018, p. 13).

In light of the above, we can observe the marginalization and sense of alienation that arose during the process of migration to urban areas, as well as how Native Americans coped with this process. This was an oppressive and domineering process that led to the loss of their identities and culture as they were assimilated into the colonizers' urban way of life.]

## 5- RESULTS

As a result, it was observed that the testimony of feeling is effectively expressed, based on the experiences narrated by the characters Opal, Viola, Victoria, Shield, and Tommy Loneman. It is noted that the feelings of not belonging and marginalization are caused by the

forced displacement of indigenous peoples from their ancestral lands, stemming from the coloniality of power. This highlights a coordinated form of resistance and the testimony of feeling to preserve their memories, cultures, and identities.

Given that the testimony of feeling is the main focus of this study, it was found that it is expressed in different ways by each character. For Tony Loneman, it is expressed through his body as a result of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, causing a sense of not belonging due to constant judgment. In Opal Viola, we see this testimony expressed more intensely through her traumatic childhood memories. Thus, she constantly carries a sense of fear within her. Therefore, it is understood that the testimony of feeling can manifest itself both physically and through memories.

Therefore, Orange's narrative was analyzed in light of the literature of resistance, since, among the characteristics mentioned throughout the analysis, the work *There, There* fits the description of resistance inherent in the writing. Orange brings to light the experiences and impacts that Native Americans face in urban life, stemming from a displacement caused by the coloniality of power.

In this sense, memories and identities endure within the narrative framework, highlighting the book as an act of resistance through the very act of writing. Beyond the resilience of these lives, Indigenous peoples struggle to keep their memories and experiences alive, resisting the erasure of both their culture and the oppressions they have endured (and continue to endure).

## **6- FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Finally, this study sought to analyze how the testimony of feeling and resistance are articulated in *There, There* through the selected characters, Opal Viola and Tony Loneman. Thus, the study examined the displacement resulting from the colonial power structures affecting Native American peoples, which led to an abrupt transition to urban life. Consequently, the feelings of marginalization and not belonging were expressed in the Native Americans who survived.

Furthermore, it is important to highlight the significance of studies on works focused on Indigenous literature, resistance, and testimony, given that such narratives bring to light the voices that have been silenced, hidden, and disregarded throughout history. Given that the

expression “There, There” conveys the feeling of not belonging to a people who abruptly lost their original roots, culture, and identity, yet continue to (r)exist on a daily basis.

## **7-ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

First, I thank God for having guided me steadfastly to the end of this first stage of my academic life. To the glorious Saint Benedict, for his constant intercession in my supplications and in my quietest prayers—those offered amid doubts and difficulties. And finally, to my Most Holy Mother, Our Lady of Nazareth, for her infinite care, for never abandoning me, and for being my refuge in the most difficult moments, always welcoming me into her maternal embrace and guiding me with love and protection.

I thank my foundation: my family. Especially my mother, Ana, who has always been a mirror of strength, an example of womanhood, and a symbol of resilience. In my academic life, it was by observing her determination, both in the classroom and in her own journey, that I learned the true value of education and perseverance. To my brother, Luis Paulo, for every morning, afternoon, or night he drove me to UFPA and for always listening when I needed it. To my cousin, Juliana, for all the comfort, care, and support during difficult times, and for always being by my side with unconditional support. To my grandfather, Afonso (in memoriam), who, with love and dedication, instilled in me the certainty that education transforms destinies. I carry his teachings with me, and they continue to guide my steps even in his absence. And finally, I thank all my family members who stood by my side every day on this journey.

I would like to extend a special thank you to my advisor, Ana Lilia Rocha, who took me under her wing and welcomed me as a scholarship recipient from my very first week at UFPA. Her presence has been instrumental in my journey, always guiding me with responsibility, sensitivity, and dedication throughout my education. Thank you for all the patience and trust you have always placed in me. Beyond being an exceptional advisor, I would like to express my personal admiration here. To CRENAC, the project that welcomed me and played an essential role in this journey, I offer my immense gratitude for every lesson and experience I’ve had. And to the friends the project has given me—friends I will carry with me for the rest of my life—for making this journey lighter and unforgettable.

To my friends, who made this journey lighter and more meaningful. In particular, to my friend Andreza, for her always wise and welcoming advice; to my friend Ruany, for all

her care, affection, and sensitivity; and to my friend Flávio, for believing in my potential and for all his support throughout my academic journey.

As I complete this stage, I would like to thank the Federal University of Pará (UFPA), and in particular the School of Foreign Languages (FALEST), for welcoming me throughout these four years, which have been so significant in my academic journey. I would also like to thank the entire faculty, from whom I had the privilege of learning, for their dedication, their teachings, and for contributing in such a meaningful and compassionate way to my education.

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