

# The Depiction of Violence and Racism in Sherman Alexie's *Indian Killer*

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## **Abstract:**

Violence can be defined as using physical force to inflict hurt, injury, or fatality upon another individual or living entity. Violence has a range of manifestations, encompassing physical aggressiveness, assault, homicide, and armed conflict. Violence has two distinct dimensions: interpersonal violence, characterized by the direct injury inflicted by one individual upon another, and systemic violence, which denotes the perpetuation of suffering and injustice on a broader scale by institutions or systems. Racism is a pervasive and institutionalized ideology or collection of behaviours that perpetuate discrimination against individuals or communities based on their race or ethnic background. Racism encompasses subjecting someone to disparate and unjust treatment based on their skin colour, ethnic heritage, or racial affiliation. The connections between violence and racism are complex and multiple. This article examines the portrayal of violence and racism in Sherman Alexie's *Indian Killer* (1998) through the perspectives of Frantz Fanon's 'Decolonization Theory.' Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* is a significant critical work that explores colonialism's psychological and social consequences and the importance of violence in decolonization. Violence and racism are interconnected concepts in Fanon's theory. The novel depicts a serial killer on a Native American reservation, highlighting the connections between racial injustice, violence, and racism. Various forms of physical and emotional violence are depicted in the novel, leading to feelings of rage, revenge, murder, and hatred. The protagonist believes that killing a White man will bring him closer to his roots by seeking retribution for the injustices inflicted upon the Native American community by his own people and culture.

**Keywords:** Indian killer, violence, racism, injustice, society, revenge, Native American

## **Introduction**

Violence is the intentional use of physical force or power to cause harm, injury, or damage to oneself, others, and property, whilst able to manifest in a myriad of ways, including physical aggression, assault, abuse, or even the mere threat of such actions. Individuals and society as a whole recognize violence as harmful and detrimental. Frantz Fanon argued that violence was crucial in opposing and dismantling colonial power, as it profoundly shaped the meaning and practice of colonialism, as violence served as both the poison and the antidote of colonialism.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1961), p. 51.

According to Fanon, violence permits communities subjected to colonization to achieve psychological liberation and allows individuals to break free from oppression whilst asserting their autonomy. Acts of resistance and rebellion help colonized individuals reclaim their dignity and self-worth from the dehumanizing effects of colonialism. Violence frees them from feelings of inferiority and submission, empowering them to become confident and assertive. Viewing violence as an expressive event rather than an instrumental one is important, as it arises from long-term oppression caused by various experiences, like role conflict or the suppression of natural impulses.

Notably, racism and race relations are the social, political, and economic issues that have received the greatest attention and debate worldwide, particularly in the United States.<sup>2</sup> Despite this, these are the least understood. Black Lives Matter founders Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi, in an online conversation with Mia Birdsong, spoke about how the United States operates on a spectrum from Black to White, and the closer one is to the White end of the spectrum, the better their circumstances. Conversely, as one moves towards the Black end, the situation worsens.<sup>3</sup> Racism is the belief that one race is superior to another, leading to various forms of racial and ethnic oppression, often resulting in prejudice against a particular group. The system of structural supremacy perpetuates racial divisions by granting authority and advantages based on race while portraying one group as pure or noble. Racism is learned behaviour “exhibited by a group towards other groups whose physical characteristics differ from their own, treating them solely based on these physical characteristics and denying their shared humanity.”<sup>4</sup>

### ***Indian Killer: Setting the Scene***

The research methodology used in this study involves a comprehensive analysis of Sherman Alexie’s work *Indian Killer* through the lens of Frantz Fanon’s theory on decolonization, with a particular focus on the themes of violence and racism. The objective is to explore the concept of Indigenous sovereignty, which refers to the rights and ability of Indigenous groups to govern themselves in terms of their territories, cultural practices, and political and economic structures. Decolonization involves the reconciliation of two traditionally conflicting forces, often marked by a history of violence during their coexistence. Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* argues that violence is an inherent aspect of decolonization in all its forms. Alexie’s book addresses the issues of violence and racism, which pose significant challenges to our world today. Race, once seen as an inherent part of human identity, is now recognized as a psychological and cultural construct that emerged during slavery for a specific reason. This article analyses how the themes of violence, racism, and Indigenous sovereignty are portrayed and interconnected in the novel’s narrative.

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<sup>2</sup> James Giles, *The Spaces of Violence* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2006), pp. 1-3.

<sup>3</sup> Mia Birdsong, “An interview with the founders of Black Lives Matter: Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, Opal Tometi,” TED: Ideas Worth Spreading. At: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tbicAmaXYtM>. See also Rosalind M. Peters, “Racism Hypertension among African Americans,” *Western Journal of Nursing Research*, vol. 26. no. 6 (2004), pp. 612-631.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Miles, *Racism*, second edition (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 1-3.

Since arriving in America, Europeans have relocated Native Americans from their homes to reservations, robbing the Native American population of lands and lifeways. Despite the imposition of reservations, Indigenous peoples maintained their distinct identities. Alexie is the most widely-read Native American novelist, an individual that is willing to speak the truth to expose the harsher realities. He criticizes the (White) American way of life in a positive way and consistently seeks to be truthful about Native Americans through the portrayal of their lives in his novels.<sup>5</sup> Believing that pain is the only way for Indians to express themselves, Alexie purposely makes his character struggle and experience loss, justifying the depiction of Native American aggression and racism as the inevitable result of centuries of exploitation, invasion, and slaughter. Violence and racism are passed down from one generation to another, an important theme in Alexie's works. Both racism and violence create significant suffering for their victims, and Alexie vividly portrays some of the harshest instances of physical force against people. Fanon argues that colonialism relies on physical force and coercion to establish and maintain control over invaded communities. The physical manifestation of colonial powers often involves the acquisition and control of territory, which can lead to the displacement of indigenous communities, forced labour, and the exploitation of resources to benefit the colonizing state. Physical violence is a prevalent form of segregation and discrimination experienced by colonial individuals, primarily based on their racial or ethnic background. It includes the establishment of separate housing, educational institutions, and public areas, as well as the implementation of discriminatory laws and policies. According to literary critic Daniel Grassian, violence and conflict are widespread on reservations; "Conflict is not exclusively an after-effect of encounters with Whites," he says "It is, in great part, a by-product of the Reservation, where violence is rampant even in childhood."<sup>6</sup>

Alexie's novels explore characters who are falsely accused, imprisoned, and oppressed due to violence and racism. *Indian Killer* is a psychological thriller with racial undertones. The protagonist, John Smith, has a peculiar name and a complicated background. He was either given up for adoption by his young Indian mother or taken away from her against her will. Alexie begins the story with Indian John Smith, who is adopted by wealthy White parents Daniel and Olivia Smith, as they cannot have children. The novel is set in Seattle during the 1960s when Indian children were frequently adopted by Whites. The couple tries to provide a loving home for John Smith, but they fail to understand his needs.<sup>7</sup> As an adult, he feels like "an Indian without a tribe," a misfit who does not belong to any culture. He roams the streets of the poverty-stricken city, searching for a way to release his pent-up anger. He realizes he can no longer control his adoptive parents due to their ignorance and obliviousness. John experiences feelings of hopelessness and social alienation. As Fanon notes in *The Wretched of the Earth*, colonialism forces the colonized to constantly question their authentic identity, as it systematically denies their existence.<sup>8</sup> This leads John to develop dysfunctional behaviour patterns that result from his psychological trauma:

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<sup>5</sup> Paul Hadella, "Indian Killer by Sherman Alexie (Review)," *Journal of Western American Literature*, vol. 32, no. 2 (1997), p. 181.

<sup>6</sup> Daniel Grassian, *Understanding Sherman Alexie* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2005), p. 98.

<sup>7</sup> Sherman Alexie, *Indian Killer* (New York: Grove Press, 1998), p. 9.

<sup>8</sup> B. K. Jha, "Fanon's theory of violence," *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, vol. 49, no. 3 (1988), pp. 359-369.

The violence which has ruled over the ordering of the colonial world, which has ceaselessly drummed the rhythm for the destruction of native social forms and broken up without reserve the systems of reference of the economy, the customs of dress, and external life that same violence will be claimed and taken over by the natives at the moment when he decides to embody history in his own person, he surges into the forbidden quarters.<sup>9</sup>

Fanon suggested that racism has a profound psychological impact on those who experience it. In *Indian Killer* John Smith is frequently referred to derogatorily as ‘Indian’ and subjected to insulting stereotypes. These experiences contribute to John’s growing frustration and anger, aligning with Fanon’s theory that racism can cause internal distress and psychological harm. Fanon states, “Violence frees the native from his inferiority complex and his despair and inaction; it makes him fearless and restores his self-respect.”<sup>10</sup> John cannot escape the ‘Indian’ label, which follows him like a shadow, taunting him in the voices of strangers and haunting his dreams. Racial tensions in Seattle reach a peak due to the actions of the *Indian Killer*, a serial killer who targets White victims and leaves white owl feathers on their bodies. Later in the novel, it leads to a surge in prejudice, particularly among the White public, who begin randomly attacking Native Americans. Throughout the novel, Alexie highlights the racism and prejudices faced by Seattle’s Native American community, bringing attention to these issues:

“Oh, shit, of course. I remember you. The rookie lost your breakfast.” Wilson blushed.  
“Shit, that case is the low rook. One dead doesn’t add up much. Some other Indian guy killed her, you know. Happens all the time. Those people are like that. You ask me, it’s pest control.”<sup>11</sup>

Due to their forced assimilation into mainstream White society, Indian children experienced a condition known as Lost Birds or ‘Split Feather.’<sup>12</sup> Fanon explains that violence is not simply a random or practical action but rather a result of prolonged frustration stemming from various social encounters; these encounters include routine humiliations under colonial rule, the suppression of cultural traditions, and the denial of basic rights.<sup>13</sup>

### ***Indian Killer*: Role Conflict and Anti-Colonial Violence**

Fanon’s work explores the phenomenon of role conflict faced by the colonized as they struggle to meet the expectations of their Indigenous culture while also conforming to the demands imposed by the colonial conquerors. This conflict leads to increased frustration and, ultimately, violence as a means of resolution. In the novel, the characters exhibit social violence against White people.

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<sup>9</sup> Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, p. 40.

<sup>10</sup> Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, p. 19.

<sup>11</sup> Alexie, *Indian Killer*, p. 56.

<sup>12</sup> Alexie, *Indian Killer*, p. 61.

<sup>13</sup> Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, p. 61.

Marie Polatkin, a passionate Spokane activist and scholarship recipient, organizes protests and provides clothing and food to homeless Indians. However, Marie and Reggie's protests, aimed at drawing attention to the injustices faced by Native Americans, are met with violent opposition from the majority.<sup>14</sup> These acts of violence prove ineffective in bringing about change through protest. The novel illustrates how acts of revenge only perpetuate further violence. Marie sometimes wonders if her resentment towards wealthy White men fuels her dedication to her cause. She wonders if her pursuit of education and academic success are acts of retaliation; "She wanted every white man to disappear. She wanted to burn them all down to ash and feast on their smoke. Hateful, powerful thought. She wondered what those hateful, powerful thoughts could create."<sup>15</sup>

In the novel, John is controlled by his mental health struggles and shattered perception of his heritage. Marie understands that John recognizes the need for drastic measures to raise awareness and bring about change. The imagined reaction of the White power structure infuriates him. John is aware that killing a thousand wealthy White men would not accomplish anything. Revenge killings are violent but do not lead to change; they only provoke more negative social reactions. Fanon argues that violence is the 'natural state' in the colonizer's racialized views of the colonized subjects, attributing this brutality to the colonial control that "brings violence into the home and mind of the Native."<sup>16</sup> John fantasizes about using his 'real Indian' abilities to summon the wind and knock the supervisor of the skyscraper project off the scaffolding. The novel portrays emotional violence through its characters. *Indian Killer* emphasizes the importance of understanding that violence alone will not make the world a better place. Furthermore, the justification of force reveals Native Americans' underlying anger towards their past and the significance of hybridization. The main point of *Indian Killer* appears to be the expression of animosity through violent acts. Both cultures generally view violence as an inevitable part of upholding their principles and expressing their emotions. It stems from a racist mentality that pits White people against Native Americans and inverted racism that works in the opposite direction.

Racism involves favouring individuals of the same race and treating people differently based on their racial or ethnic background. On the other hand, violence can take various forms, including physical attacks, invasions of privacy, and cruelty towards others. Europeans and Native Americans attacked each other out of anger and frustration. John Smith, the unstable and violent Native American protagonist in Sherman Alexie's novel, analyzed the power of myths and lies.<sup>17</sup> He concluded that killing White people was a way to end the suffering of all Indigenous peoples. "John knew there was one White man who should die for all the lies told to Indians."<sup>18</sup> John's belief that the murder of a White victim will bring salvation to his people is the disturbing issue of the *Indian Killer*. Marie strongly dislikes Mather, a White professor who claims to understand the Native American experience and teaches anthropology at her institution. Marie frequently

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<sup>14</sup> Lydia R. Cooper, "The critique of violent atonement in Sherman Alexie's *Indian Killer* and David Treuer's *The Hiawatha*," *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, vol. 22, no. 4 (2010), pp. 32-57.

<sup>15</sup> Alexie, *Indian Killer*, p. 85.

<sup>16</sup> Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, pp. 38, 61.

<sup>17</sup> Alexie, *Indian Killer*, p. 132.

<sup>18</sup> Alexie, *Indian Killer*, p. 132.

criticizes Mather, accusing him of being dishonest about Native Americans and their culture. Native Americans resort to violence to seek revenge for the injustices they have suffered, as Whites resent the preferential treatment Native Americans have received due to past events.<sup>19</sup> The situation is worsened by the media's encouraging native residents to react negatively towards Indians. Furthermore, individuals like Mather and Wilson are detrimental to Native American rights. They both suggest that anyone can become Native American by studying the culture, despite having distinct cultures and harbouring hostility towards each other for the same reasons. Justifying group cruelty is not difficult, but racism, the root cause of every crime in the book, can never be an excuse for violence. However, it is difficult to find an explanation for the killer's atrocities, as the author deliberately withholds the killer's identity (is it John? Marie? Marie's 'half-breed cousin Reggie? Perhaps the killer is not even 'Indian'?).<sup>20</sup> The first act of violence in the book occurs when John is taken from his birth mother and adopted by White parents. Later in the novel, Mrs Jones asks, "What kind of monster would take someone's child?"<sup>21</sup>

Although she does not explicitly mention the first kidnapping in the novel, there are many similarities between the two incidents. Mrs Jones implies that only monsters would commit such an act, suggesting that White people are monsters for doing so. This heinous crime is the first in a series of violent and horrific crimes. John's adoptive parents want to create the illusion that he comes from a noble family and has done the right thing, but they fail to realize that they have already destroyed John's sense of self. Without knowledge of his tribe, he will never fully fit into either the White or Native American communities. He will always be caught between two civilizations, never truly belonging to either because he was taken from his birth mother and never taught about his heritage. Father Duncan leaves a lasting impression on John and once took him to downtown Seattle to see the cathedral of the North American Martyrs, which features vivid stained-glass images of priests being killed by Indians. It prompts John to ask Father Duncan a sudden question; "Why did the Indians kill them?" He replied, "They wanted to kick the White people out of America. Since the priests were the leaders, they were the first to be killed." John looked up at the stained-glass Jesuits, then at the Spokane Indian Jesuit."<sup>22</sup>

John lacked the appropriate vocabulary to express his emotions. Still, he noticed the stark contrast between Father Duncan and the murdered Jesuits, and the Jesuits and their killers. He had been taught about the distinction between White people and Indians since he was a child. The story also highlights another instance of racism when John, who often struggled with anger, felt the need to escape and hide from his math class. Despite this, his teachers consistently provided him with opportunities because they knew he was an adopted Indian orphan. Due to his dark skin, John always felt ashamed at school, where only three students were black, and John was the fourth non-white student. He only played basketball when the outcome of the game was already determined. His teammates would cheer for him whenever he entered the game, which is expected behaviour

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<sup>19</sup> Sarah Kunz, *Expressing Rage: The Use of Violence in Sherman Alexie's Novel Indian Killer*, (Grin Verlag, 2017).

<sup>20</sup> Cari M. Carpenter, "Fancydancing Through the Minefield: Sherman Alexie's *Indian Killer*, Racism, and Anger," *Transformations: The Journal of Inclusive Scholarship and Pedagogy*, vol. 22, no. 2 (2012), pp. 132-143.

<sup>21</sup> Alexie, *Indian Killer*, p. 169.

<sup>22</sup> Alexie, *Indian Killer*, p. 14.

among teammates. John realizes that White people always made him feel insecure.<sup>23</sup> The novel frequently mentions the unnamed 'Indian Killer', who ritually kills White people, adding a dark element to John's distorted exploration of his mind and the reality of Seattle. In a ceremony that promises to revolutionize the world,<sup>24</sup> the Indian Killer dances and places white owl feathers on the bodies of his victims. John is aware of the significance of the owl dance, as many Indian nations consider it a symbol of death.<sup>25</sup>

Fanon's theory suggests that oppressed individuals may turn to counter-violence as a means of resistance and empowerment. In *Indian Killer*, John Smith's descent into violence can be seen as a response to the racism and discrimination he faces. Although his actions are horrifying, they can be understood within the context of Fanon's theory as a desperate reaction to systemic oppression. "As John's frustration grew, so did his inclination towards violence. He believed that taking matters into his own hands was the only way to make society acknowledge the racism and violence inflicted upon Native Americans."<sup>26</sup> In the story, talk show host Truck Schultz's angry words prompt the people of Seattle to confront the Indian Killer and reconsider their treatment of Native Americans as being exceptional. The crowd recognizes Schultz's influence, which he misuses to incite animosity among Indians. Security personnel then patrol the streets, mistreating innocent Native Americans. Racist social media, which is supposed to be impartial and unbiased, encourages violent behaviour; Schultz states that "They [Indians] have refused to recognize how well we [whites] have educated them, how well we have fed them, how well we have treated them. To this day, they have responded to our positive efforts in the only way they know: violence."<sup>27</sup>

Truck Schultz clearly is biased against Native Americans and is frustrated with what he perceives as preferential treatment towards them. During his talk show, he discusses David Rogers's disappearance and blamed the Native American community. He argues that Native American nations believe they are exempt from the law. What exactly are these groups trying to achieve? While the Native Americans have acknowledged our coexistence, they are adamant about maintaining their separate identity from mainstream society.<sup>28</sup> Schultz also expresses his opinion on native gaming, claiming it is a form of retaliation against White people. He fails to recognize that Native Americans have not abandoned their cultural heritage and traditions. In *Indian Killer*, Alexie portrays the serial killer's brutal murders of White men as a reflection of the violence perpetuated by colonialism. These acts of violence mirror the broader societal violence experienced by Native Americans due to systemic racism.

Another instance of racism occurs later in the book when Aaron looks at the woods beside the road while returning to Seattle. He describes the tall, dark, and slender trees as resembling

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<sup>23</sup> Alexie, *Indian Killer*, p. 18.

<sup>24</sup> Alexie, *Indian Killer*, p. 19.

<sup>25</sup> Janet Dean, "The Violence of Collection: *Indian Killer's* Archives," *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, vol. 20. no. 3 (2008), pp. 29-51.

<sup>26</sup> Alexie, *Indian Killer*, p. 118.

<sup>27</sup> Alexie, *Indian Killer*, p. 118.

<sup>28</sup> Michele Fazio, "Homeless in Seattle: Class Violence in Sherman Alexie's *Indian Killer*," in *Critical Approaches to American Working-Class Literature*, ed. Michelle Tokarczyk (London: Routledge, 2014).

Indians.<sup>29</sup> This comparison between trees and Native Americans is racist and offensive. Native Americans are diverse in appearance and cannot be reduced to a single stereotype. Reggie's violent criticisms of Bird, a prejudiced white father, also exemplify physical violence and racism within the novel. Reggie's lectures on history reflect the teachings he received from Bird during his childhood, such as the belief that smallpox was a form of divine retribution.<sup>30</sup> Bird also physically abused Reggie as a means of punishment. Despite the lack of documentation, oral history is still preserved, as Reggie is forced to be aware of it.<sup>31</sup> Later in the story, Marie defends John Smith against allegations of murder while simultaneously trying to justify his actions morally.<sup>32</sup> She argues that if a Native American were killing White individuals, it would be a testament to the endurance of their culture over the course of five hundred years.<sup>33</sup> She even suggests that the murderer may not be Native American but European. Marie's remarks to the disagreeable professor show her insightful reasoning; "I mean, calling him the Indian Killer does not make any sense. Does it? If it was an Indian doing the killing, they would he not be called the killer Indian? I mean, Custer was an Indian Killer, not a killer Indian."<sup>34</sup>

It is challenging to distinguish between a well-known Indian killer and a murderer who is guilty because hatred is hatred. Eradicating the dualism of White and Black identities is the way to achieve true liberation.<sup>35</sup> John now focuses on Jack Wilson, a mystery author who incorporates Native American themes into his work and claims to have Native American ancestry. Despite his appearance as a White man, Wilson believes that through his writing, he understands and represents Indians. John confronts Wilson and uses a knife to cut his face. Intrusive thoughts follow, and he flees. The killer wears a carved wooden mask and sits alone at the tomb. The inscription on the tomb is illegible.<sup>36</sup> The murderer softly hums a new tune reminiscent of the previous one. As the killer sings, an owl peacefully perches on nearby tree branches. The killer also carries a backpack containing various items.<sup>37</sup>

The text reflects the potential racial problems of this specific killing spree and Alexie's work in general, using scalps and owl feathers as symbols of murder. The scrapbook and the text address the novel's less dramatic but equally important theme: the systematic collection and preservation of artefacts from violent interracial encounters.<sup>38</sup> While the killer's scrapbook and scalps serve as a reminder of violent acts against White males, they are far from the triumphant success of a warrior. Fanon also explores the concept of violence perpetuating itself in a cycle. The novel *Indian Killer* depicts a series of murders that trigger a subsequent wave of fear and

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<sup>29</sup> Alexie, *Indian Killer*, p. 122.

<sup>30</sup> Alexie, *Indian Killer*, p. 90.

<sup>31</sup> Alexie, *Indian Killer*, p. 91.

<sup>32</sup> Alexie, *Indian Killer*, p. 95.

<sup>33</sup> Alexie, *Indian Killer*, p. 165.

<sup>34</sup> Alexie, *Indian Killer*, p. 146.

<sup>35</sup> Paul Nursey-Bray, "Race and Nation: Ideology in the Thought of Frantz Fanon," *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 18, no. 1 (1980), pp. 135-142.

<sup>36</sup> Alexie, *Indian Killer*, p. 420.

<sup>37</sup> Fazio, "Homeless in Seattle," pp. 150-167.

<sup>38</sup> Stuart Christie, "Renaissance Man: The Tribal 'Schizophrenic' in Sherman Alexie's *Indian Killer*," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*, vol. 25, no. 4 (2001), pp. 1-19.



hatred, intensifying racial tensions in the urban setting. The recurring pattern of violence highlights Fanon's argument that the perpetuation of violence is inevitable when racism is ignored. "As the killings continued, the city was gripped by fear. Racial tensions escalated, leading to retaliatory attacks and a vicious cycle of violence that seemed impossible to break."<sup>39</sup>

Ultimately, the Indian Killer is not a triumphant individual, but a directionless, anonymous result of violent accumulation trapped in a cycle. When more Indians arrived, the killer joined them in a song and dance performance, displaying confidence in his actions. However, the success of counter-collecting highlights the dangers it poses to Native Americans and others, fueling destructive racial hatred and violence.<sup>40</sup> In the novel's climactic scene John Smith descends from Seattle's last skyscraper to the dimly lit urban street below; whether on or off the reservation, he finds no available space. He must reinvent himself as he has nowhere to call home. The author's intention with *Indian Killer* is not to provide new housing for displaced Native Americans but to demonstrate how the duality fails them and renders creating a new space impossible. The novel aims to give a voice to Native Americans, emphasizing the importance of self-representation and advocacy.<sup>41</sup>

A method for establishing and affirming a positive political Identity imbued with a freed national consciousness was developed by Frantz Fanon as well: "At the level of individuals, "violence is a Cleansing force." The native is set free from his inferiority complex, despair, and inaction; he gains courage and regains his self-respect."<sup>42</sup>

## Conclusion

*Indian Killer* concerns the intertwining of racism and violence. It portrays the violence faced by Native American characters, both physical and psychological. The experiences of the characters reflect the systemic racism and discrimination that continue to perpetuate violence in their lives. This aligns with Fanon's ideas about how racism and colonialism can lead to acts of violence against oppressed groups, as he argued that violence is a response to the dehumanizing effects of racism. Frantz Fanon's work often centered on the psychological impact of colonialism and racism on both the colonized and the colonizers. He argued that violence could be a form of resistance and a means to regain lost identity. The characters in *Indian Killer* experience a profound loss of identity and cultural heritage due to racism. Some are driven to respond with violence, mirroring Fanon's ideas about how violence can be a reaction to oppression. The novel's concluding chapter shows a morality tale instead of a celebration; the collection in the so-called murderer's backpack, which seems to assemble hundreds of Native Americans in an ecstasy of community identification, distorts Indigenous identity in its rejection of tribal definition. With this mask, with this secret, the

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<sup>39</sup> Alexie, *Indian Killer*, p. 185.

<sup>40</sup> Deborah Finfgeld-Connett, "Qualitative Systematic Review of Intimate Partner Violence Among Native Americans," *Issues in Mental Health Nursing*, vol. 36, no. 10 (2015), pp. 754-760.

<sup>41</sup> Alexie, *Indian Killer*, p. 419.

<sup>42</sup> Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, p. 94.

murderer can dance forever. The killer is never named or even portrayed in detail in the text because his identity is based only on his collection of deadly artefacts. He cannot be anything other than ‘the killer.’ The mask of unknown origin and association is made of ‘cedar, pine, or maple’ and symbolizes ‘any reservation.’ Violence in the novel is not limited to physical brutality; it also includes psychological harm. The characters in the story grapple with the distortion of their individual identities due to racism and violence. This distortion perpetuates racial hierarchies and establishes lasting power imbalances, which is a central concern in Fanon’s work. He argued that colonialism and racism not only physically harm the colonized but also damage their sense of self and identity. To make more space, Alexie writes a book that employs fictitious violence and racism in protest against actual injustice. In conclusion, *Indian Killer* is a thought-provoking work that effectively explores the complex relationship between violence and racism, echoing the insights of Frantz Fanon. By examining the psychological and physical violence faced by Native Americans and their struggle for identity and justice, the novel becomes a compelling critique of colonialism, oppression, and the enduring legacy of systemic racism in America.