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## Self and belonging in movement

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My preoccupation with situated identities stem from a long family history of displacement, government seizure of property, and exclusionary immigration policies as my parents moved across countries and learned different languages to avoid political persecution (Yeh et al. 2014). The identities emergent from these complex stories shift—willingly and not—across and between contexts without belonging. They are messy, incomplete, and scattered but nonetheless authentic. My work with the Atayal aboriginal community in Taiwan centers on their loss of land, identity, language, and the reclamation of cultural identities through the eyes and voices of elders. These cases reflect how interstitial ways of being create contextual selves through survival and not belongingness. *There There* by Tommy Orange is an important reflection and reminder of how post-colonial identities and feelings of belonging are not always centered in location but may be transient and exist in movement.

The deep connection between identity and place is at the center of feminist and critical approaches to geographical inquiry that questions how place and space fashion, recreate, and contextualize human identity (Massey, 2013). These notions detract from previous capitalistic perspectives of self and location which are infused with ideas of land in terms of property ownership and colonial practices in displacement and dislocation. In particular, political narratives about the American Indian\* experience would have you believe that their “place” in society is comprised of the corners of a casino, the boundaries of a reservation, or the walls of a government-instituted rehabilitation center. It is the romanticized images of deserts, mountains, and rivers in our Hollywood films with eagles soaring and running wild horses.

In *There There*, these oversimplified guilt-ridden portraits are interrogated through intersecting stories of “urban Indians” living in Oakland and we see the ways that place—Oakland—matters as a sight for contesting assimilationist accounts about native communities. “Getting us to the cities was supposed to be the final necessary step in our assimilation, absorption, erasure, completion of a five-hundred year-old genocidal campaign. But the city made us new and we made it ours” (p.8). These new identities created in and around Oakland are disruptive, incongruous anomalies that

weave in and out of pain, memory, and history. They are riding BART and AC Transit, riding a bicycle, driving cars, walking, running, moving away and coming back.

Orange's Oakland in *There There* humanizes the current Indian experience in ways that inform and question our assumptions about what we know and don't know while simultaneously enlarging our thinking about the importance of place. Some may see American Indian relocation to cities as directly contradicting their racist stereotypes as simple, unsophisticated, or nature-bound. Orange is most aware of the possibilities that emerge through moving in between and around Oakland and allowing present-day stories to mold meanings of the past. *There There* unapologetically challenges historical characterizations of indigenous Indians with more nuanced current and future realities using geography to locate and question physical boundaries and attendant selves. "We know the sound of the freeway better than we do the rivers, the howl of distant trains better than wolf howls..." (p.11).

Further, Orange's characters expand and alter how we appreciate intergenerational identities. He discusses history through the crafting, urgency, and expression of new selves, not devoid of ancestral linkages, but inextricably bound—they just don't need to follow the categories, caricatures, and linear trajectories assigned to them. "We are the memories we don't remember, that live in us, that we feel, that make us sing and dance and pray the way we do, feelings from memories that flare and boom 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" (p. 10).

Orange's focus is on the liminal, the tension between worlds, cultural worlds, urban and suburban, and the realms of living and dying. His characters are stuck—in time, in dysfunctional yet functioning relationship patterns, in self-fulfilling prophecies and in between spaces. He explores the power, transgressions, forms, and social dynamics crafted in place and somehow humanizes and celebrates this dissonance, commotion, and unsettlement that we live in. His characters' unrest are simultaneously troubling and comforting for me as I reflect on the historicity of my parents' shifts in self, identity and sense of belongingness. I am reminded of modern day threats—from political persecution to gentrification—and the valid ways of being created in transit.

*\*I use the terms Indian and American Indian, though problematic, in respect of the American Indian Movement*

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