

Reading Borders in the Work of Louise Erdrich

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Abstract

This thesis examines Ojibwe writer Louise Erdrich's engagement with borders in her novels. I argue that Erdrich employs borders as manifestations and emblems of settler colonial hegemony in the United States, through and against which traditional Ojibwe senses of place and identity are explored and adapted. I contend that Erdrich's engagement with Ojibwe epistemological and cultural traditions in relation to reservation, state, national and metaphysical borders and other social boundaries revises Euro-American historical narratives of land and social settlement, thereby challenging the legitimacy and power of colonial hegemony.

Ojibwe and mixedblood identity and the Native reservation environment are two key themes throughout Erdrich's body of work. While these themes have been discussed at length by scholars, no full-length study has yet been devoted to Erdrich's presentation of borders as symbolic and thematic devices structuring and mediating Indigenous identity, experience, sense of place and historical narratives. By examining borders as points of intersection between Native identity and colonial hegemony, this thesis fills a gap in Erdrich scholarship. The epistemological complexity of Erdrich's engagement with borders necessitates an interdisciplinary framework incorporating Native studies, border studies and settler colonial theory; therefore this thesis performs theoretical as well as critical interventions.

This thesis examines representations of borders from the concrete, as constructed through surveys and maps, to the abstract, as arbitrary limits devised and imposed by western epistemology. Throughout, I argue that Erdrich's engagement with borders demonstrates continual social, cultural and epistemological decolonial resistance and constitutes a radical invocation of Indigenous sovereignty.

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Introduction

This thesis is a literary analysis of the use of borders in the work of writer Louise Erdrich, a member of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians.¹ Its primary contention is that borders are central to Erdrich's presentation of relationships between the Ojibwe and land in her novels, signifying a dramatic contrast between the Ojibwe sense of place and that of colonial Euro-American society as well as a substantial and problematic power differential between the two. Throughout this thesis, I argue that Erdrich uses borders to re-historicise settler colonialism from an epistemologically Anishinaabe perspective, advocating for decolonial resistance as both a principle and a practice. I trace this function in Erdrich's writing throughout a selection of novels which feature borders, in literal or figurative forms, from the local to the international.

As the first full-length study of borders in Erdrich's work, this thesis fills a gap in Erdrich scholarship. This thesis also performs timely theoretical interventions as the particular complexity of Erdrich's engagement with borders requires an interdisciplinary critical framework which incorporates the closely related but customarily separate scholarly fields of Native studies, settler colonial studies and border studies. This interdisciplinary approach reflects the meeting, interaction and embodiment of Indigenous sovereignty and colonial power at the reservation border, contextualising Erdrich's engagement with the themes of place, elided identities and

¹ Both legal designations, 'Chippewa' and 'Ojibwe' (or 'Ojibwa,' 'Ojibway') are used more or less interchangeably, while 'Anishinaabe' – also spelt 'Anishinabe,' 'Anishinawbe,' 'Anishinaubae' and 'Nishnaabe' – is how these nations traditionally identify themselves in the Anishinaabe language. 'Anishinaabe' translates into English as 'the Original People.' The plural noun is 'Anishinaabeg.' Of these terms, Erdrich tends to favour 'Ojibwe' in her writing. Therefore, I use 'Ojibwe' to refer to the people as a group and 'Anishinaabe' to refer to cultural or spiritual tradition. In keeping with common practice in Native studies, I note Indigenous writers' respective tribal affiliations at my first reference to each. When referring to Indigenous groups collectively, I interchange the terms 'Indigenous,' 'Native,' and 'Native American' or 'First Nations.'

histories and conflicting and unequal forms of power. This thesis demonstrates that critical interaction between the fields of Native studies, border studies and settler colonial studies produces a fuller understanding of the impacts of colonial power and social structures upon Indigenous peoples, identity in settler colonial and borderlands contexts, modes of decolonial resistance and Indigenous sovereignty.

In this thesis, drawing on the work of Joanne Barker (Lenape), Craig S. Womack (Creek-Cherokee) and Robert Warrior (Osage), I use the term ‘Indigenous sovereignty’ to denote an incontrovertible right to self-determination and self-government irrespective of dominant colonial powers’ recognition or accommodation, which Erdrich shapes, explores and conveys in her writing. However, the concept of Indigenous sovereignty is a contested one. Lakota scholar Vine Deloria, Jr. explains that sovereignty was “originally a theological term” and that the “king, or the sovereign, was thought to have inherited the authority to rule from God” (‘Self-Determination’ 22). The American and French Revolutions, Reinhold Göring and Johan Schimanski note, “replaced the sovereignty of the king with the sovereignty of the people” and the term has come to act as “a metonym for an indivisible territory (national sovereignty over a territory), within marked borders” (122). Thus, the term is rooted in western and colonial epistemological traditions, problematising Indigenous usages of the concept. Moreover, Barker points out that debates around sovereignty have often centred on “the relationship between the rights and obligations of individuals (citizens) and the rights and obligations of nations (states)” as “sovereignty seemed to belong to nations but was then understood to originate either from the people who made up those nations or as a character of the nation itself (nationhood)”; however, these nations were considered to possess “the full measure of sovereignty because they were the highest form of civilization; individuals roaming

uncultivated lands did not possess either civilization or sovereignty” (2). As such, the concept of sovereignty has developed to mean a people’s inherent power and right to self-government, but only in western democratic contexts, thereby serving to validate and strengthen the western, colonialist idea of the nation and to de-legitimise and disempower Indigenous peoples in colonial contexts. Taiaiake Alfred (Mohawk) contends that, as a fundamentally colonial concept, sovereignty is epistemologically inadequate and politically ineffective for decolonial movements, arguing that “For people committed to transcending the imperialism of state sovereignty, the challenge is to de-think the concept of sovereignty and replace it with a notion of power that has at its root a more appropriate premise” (47).

Yet other scholars assert that sovereignty bears potential for decolonialism. Sovereignty’s conceptual association with the nation has been appropriated to bolster a multiplicity of Indigenous nationalisms as well as what Silko terms “tribal internationalism” (Huhndorf 141). Womack argues that sovereignty “liberates tribes from anthropologically based cultural definitions by recognizing them as legally defined political entities, thus providing an alternative to the problem of ahistorical essentialist modes of analysis” (Weaver et al. 111). Sovereignty can therefore be put to work in the pursuit and protection of self-determination, constituting an important strategic tool for decolonial resistance.

Indeed, Indigenous scholars including Alfred have embraced Warrior’s term ‘intellectual sovereignty,’ which forms “part of the various sociopolitical movements toward sovereignty, self-determination, and self-government and is understood by its authors to be an integral aspect of the configuration and import of their intellectual work” (Barker 25). Warrior presents sovereignty not as a political condition in a fixed relation to a colonial power, but as something more active and autonomous; rather, it

is a “decision we make in our minds, in our hearts, and in our bodies” (123). Joshua D. Miner summarises Warrior’s conception of sovereignty as “a praxis” and a “process of enacting a conviction of self-determination” centred around balance and community instead of imperialism (‘Transgression and Sovereignty’ 179). Barker, meanwhile, highlights the fact that sovereignty has “been rearticulated to mean altogether different things by indigenous peoples” (26). This rearticulation is in itself a decolonial act, calling attention to the power of storytelling, particularly the revision of historical narratives, to bring about political change. Indeed, Miner remarks that “Native sovereignty exists, in part, through the sharing of stories” (‘Transgression and Sovereignty’ 179). In this sense, I use the term Indigenous sovereignty to express an assertion and enactment of decolonial power in Erdrich’s writing.

One of the most prominent and prolific Native American authors to date, Erdrich is a highly successful and internationally celebrated writer of novels, short stories, poetry and non-fiction. Her accolades include the 1984 National Book Critics’ Circle award for her debut novel, *Love Medicine*; a Pulitzer Prize nomination for *Plague of Doves* in 2009; and the 2012 National Book Award for *The Round House*. Erdrich’s father, Ralph Louis Erdrich, is of German descent and her mother, Rita Joanne Gourneau, is of French and Ojibwe heritage. Erdrich’s grandfather, Patrick Gourneau, was a former tribal chairman and a renowned storyteller (Rainwater 271). Drawing on her mixedblood Ojibwe heritage, much of Erdrich’s writing explores Ojibwe identity and relationships with land within the United States. Many of Erdrich’s novels are set on and around the fictive Little No Horse Ojibwe Reservation, situated in North Dakota. Consequently, critics have repeatedly compared Erdrich with such writers as William Faulkner and Gabriel García Márquez and, while somewhat hackneyed, such observations are nonetheless useful means by which to

convey the vivid particularity and geographical and topographical specificity of Erdrich's fictional, intertextual world. The reservation, Erdrich states, "is an emotional collection of places dear to me, as is the town called Argus. It is not the Turtle Mountain Reservation, of course" (*Last Report* 357). Thus, while far from autobiographical, Erdrich's novels are deeply expressive of her sense of identity and her experience as an Ojibwe and mixedblood woman.

This expression of identity and experience hinges on the holistic understanding of place and time intrinsic to Anishinaabe epistemology. In her non-fiction work *Books and Islands in Ojibwe Country* – the subtitle of which, "Traveling in the Land of my Ancestors," demonstrates this unity of history and land – Erdrich actively explores her Ojibwe sense of place. On the subject of Anishinaabe rock paintings, Erdrich explains, "One of the first questions people ask about the rock paintings is how old they are – complicated answer. There is no completely accurate way to date rock paintings. Some are hundreds of years old, and others thousands of years. The Anishinaabe have been in Lake of the Woods forever, according to [Anishinaabe traditionalist] Tobasonakwut" (*Books and Islands* 49). Erdrich describes the rock paintings as "spiritual geography ... meant to provide teaching and dream guides to generations of Anishinaabeg" and stresses, "The rock paintings are alive" (*Books and Islands* 50). Erdrich's statement refers to Indigenous traditions which hold that both land and stories are alive in their own rights. Erdrich implicitly rejects western approaches to place and time: the attempt to measure and define the age of the rock paintings is presented as futile and irrelevant. Although the island is categorised by the Canadian government as "Crown land," its significance to Erdrich lies entirely in Anishinaabe spiritual and cultural relationships to the island over time ('Painted Rock' 7). For Erdrich, then, 'place' means the constant and constantly evolving relationship

between people and land; between spirits, ancestors and descendants, regardless of historical ‘period’; between human and non-human life. More succinctly, Erdrich states, “People and place are inseparable” (Erdrich, ‘Where I Ought to Be’ 43).

Basil Johnston’s authoritative records of Anishinaabe traditions demonstrate that interaction and co-dependence between land and people underpin Anishinaabe creation stories. He writes:

The island where the Anishinaabe people were born continued to grow until it became a continent, the Land of the Great Turtle, as North America is commonly known to many North American Indians. By virtue of Sky Woman’s creation of an island that grew into a continent and then her giving birth to her children on it, the Anishinaabe people and other North American Indians believed that the continent was given to the first-born natives of this land. Kitchi Manitou and Sky Woman granted ownership and stewardship of the land to the natives in joint tenancy with the manitous, the birds, animals, insects, and generations still to be born. (xvi)

Johnston here conveys the belief passed down through stories that the Ojibwe and other Native and First Nations have *always* inhabited what are now called the Americas. Johnston notes that this belief is “a conviction that differs from that of conservative scholars, who maintain that the North American Indians’ place of origin is somewhere in Asia and that the Indians came to this continent via the Bering Strait anywhere from 10,000 to 25,000 years ago,” a theory which Johnston, Deloria and others dispute (xvi). Erdrich echoes Johnston’s view, remarking:

Traditional Anishinaabe people find the land-bridge theory a concept convenient to non-Indians and insist they’ve been here forever. And in truth, since the writing or drawings that those ancient people left still makes sense to people living in Lake of the Woods today, one must conclude that they weren’t the ancestors of the modern Ojibwe. They were and are the modern Ojibwe. (*Books and Islands* 6).

Erdrich’s sense of place, therefore, encapsulates Anishinaabe epistemology and the centrality of land to Ojibwe identity, positioning questions of land, identity and sovereignty as key concerns in her work.

Although Indigenous spiritual and cultural beliefs and traditions differ by nation and must be considered in tribal specificity, several Indigenous writers from various nations have expressed their respective senses of place in ways that resemble Erdrich's. N. Scott Momaday (Kiowa) writes, "All things are alive in this profound unity in which are all elements, all animals, all things" (51–52). This unity encompasses traditional Indigenous perceptions of temporality, Momaday explains: "For the Indian there is something like an extended present. Time as motion is an illusion; indeed, time itself is an illusion. In the deepest sense, according to the native perception, there is only the dimension of timelessness, and in that dimension all things happen" (53). Similarly, Paula Gunn Allen writes that, from her Laguna Pueblo perspective, relationships with land are familial: "the land, our mother, and all her children – the immortals, the non-human Persons, and all other species... – are primary and forever. Known as Turtle Grandmother to some, Grandmother Spider and her sacred sisters to others, Earth and her sisters, galaxy and her multitudes – it is for her we live, and by her will we make, do, pray, and seek" (56). Leslie Marmon Silko, also of Laguna Pueblo heritage, elaborates:

The ancient Pueblo people called the earth the Mother Creator of all things in this world. ... Rocks and clay are part of the Mother. They emerge in various forms, but at some time before, they were smaller particles or great boulders. At a later time they may again become what they once were. Dust. A rock shares this fate with us and with animals and plants as well. A rock has being or spirit, although we may not understand it ... In the end we all originate from the depths of the earth. ('Landscape, History' 31)

Thus humanity, non-human forms of life and the land belong to each other in an integral, non-hierarchical, constant relationship, and death is an essential, transitional stage within the land, rather than an ending or departure. The active presence of the past in the land simultaneously anchors the community in place and attaches the environment to the community. From this perspective, any sense of personal identity

is inalienable from one's sense of place and community.

Borders, then, as western spatial constructs imposed relatively arbitrarily to control land, people and resources for the benefit of the colonial state, threaten to contradict the profoundly important senses of place held by Indigenous peoples in North America. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the border essentially as a *line*, of division or containment – “A side, edge, brink, or margin; a limit, or boundary; the part of anything lying along its boundary or outline” – in direct relation to the modern construct of the nation state – “The district lying along the edge of a country or territory, a frontier” (‘Border, n.’). The borders which dominate the cultural geography of the United States both sustain the idea of the modern nation state, demarcating the limits of the US, Canada, Mexico and neighbouring countries, and embody the history and continued domination of Euro-American colonial powers, despite the illusory nature of such arbitrarily drawn boundaries as the US-Canada border along the 49th parallel and the southerly-inclined US-Mexico border. The border, therefore, functions to overwrite pre-existing Indigenous relationships with land in order to sustain the persuasive chimera of the United States as place.

In the context of Native American societies and histories, then, the idea of the border is complex, multiple and fraught. Most pertinently for this study, American borders, particularly those demarcating the limits of tribal land, are indicative of both colonial hegemony and ongoing disputes over tribal land. The very existence of reservations is simultaneously testament to the continued presence and dominance of colonial power and to the survival and inherent sovereignty of Indigenous peoples. As a point of meeting and exchange as well as of division and containment, the border is indispensable as a concept and construct through which to analyse representations of Native American senses of place and identity in contemporary Native literature.

In order to pursue this inquiry, my methodology consists of close readings of key passages in a selection of Erdrich's novels within an interdisciplinary critical framework incorporating the relevant fields of Native studies, border studies and settler colonial theory. My engagement with Native studies forms the critical anchor of this thesis. The production of Indigenous literary theory has been the subject of active debate within Native studies since the 1990s, epitomised by Kimberly M. Blaeser's (*White Earth Anishinaabe*) rejection of the habitual application of European and Euro-American literary theory to Native literature as colonialist. Blaeser argued that any "insistence on reading Native literature by way of Western literary theory clearly violates its integrity and performs a new act of colonization and conquest" (Armstrong 55). Although Blaeser identifies a difference between 'applying' and 'employing' western theory to Indigenous literature, nonetheless, she argues:

the implied movement is still that of colonization: authority emanating from the mainstream critical center to the marginalized native texts. Issues of Orientalism and enforced literacy apply again when another language and culture, this time a critical language and the Euro-American literary tradition, take prominence and are used to explain, replace or block an indigenous critical language and literary tradition. (Armstrong 56)

This desire for organic, apposite Native theory has been abundantly fulfilled in recent years and the field in its current form is led by ambitious and expansive theoretical work by a variety of Indigenous scholars. This thesis is informed first and foremost by the work of these Indigenous scholars.

Gerald Vizenor, a member of the *White Earth Anishinaabe*, is one of the most influential Indigenous theorists of recent decades. Vizenor explores elements of traditional storytelling, like continual narrative adaptation and the archetypal trickster figure, in relation to postmodernist theory. Vizenor states, "The postmodern opened in tribal imagination; oral cultures have never been without a postmodern condition

that enlivens stories and ceremonies, or without trickster signatures and discourse on narrative chance – a comic utterance and adventure to be heard or read” (Vizenor, ‘Preface’ x). Vizenor here positions Native theory as the broader context from which postmodernism extends, inverting the Eurocentric perspective criticised by Blaeser. Thus, Vizenor’s theory provides an Indigenous-centred, and indeed intellectually sovereign framework for the interpretation of Euro-American literary references within Native American literature.

Two of Vizenor’s neologisms underpin my research. The term ‘survivance,’ Vizenor states, is differentiated from survival by its emphasis on active, rather than passive, survival and the role of decolonial resistance in securing this survival. Vizenor describes survivance as:

an active resistance and repudiation of dominance, obtrusive themes of tragedy, nihilism, and victimry. The practices of survivance create an active presence, more than the instincts of survival, function, or subsistence. Native stories are the sources of survivance, the comprehension and empathies of natural reason, tragic wisdom, and the provenance of new literary studies. (*Native Liberty* 88)

Vizenor presents survivance as a stance of resistance against the “dominance” of Euro-American settler hegemony, which creates what Vizenor terms “manifest manners,” or the “notions and misnomers that are read as the authentic and sustained as representations of Native American Indians” (*Manifest Manners* 5-6). Blaeser aligns Vizenor’s manifest manners directly with manifest destiny, highlighting the extent to which Vizenor’s work is rooted in anti-colonial politics (Armstrong 11). Vizenor’s highlighting of the role played by survivance in storytelling is indicative of Native literature’s importance to Indigenous sovereignty. I argue in this thesis that survivance, represented and realised in story, is central to Erdrich’s artistic project.

The second Vizenor concept that informs my thesis is that of ‘transmotion.’ Vizenor explains transmotion as an “inspired sense of natural motion and singular,

visionary sovereignty” (*Native Liberty* 108). Elaborating, Vizenor writes, “Natives have always been on the move, by necessity of sustenance and over extensive trade routes. Motion is a natural right, and the stories of visionary *transmotion* are a continuous, distinctive sense of sovereignty” (*Native Liberty* 162). The autonomy, sense of identity and indelible connection with land contained in Vizenor’s term set transmotion in opposition to the claims for stasis, order and hierarchy embedded in colonial borders. Moreover, Vizenor’s emphasis on the inherent link between transmotion and survivance posit autonomy, community and mobility as vital elements of Ojibwe sovereignty, presenting colonial powers with a refutation of the hegemony implied and exerted over centuries of colonial settlement. I argue that Erdrich’s work presents transmotion as a challenge to colonial borders.

Vizenor’s concepts provide a language for the exploration of questions of mixed or multiple Native identities, experiences and narratives without privileging exogenous theories. Accordingly, when engaging with non-Indigenous theoretical concepts in this thesis, I attempt to critically appraise their relevance to Erdrich’s Ojibwe and settler colonial contexts and avoid transposing generalised concepts.

In particular, my approach to the concept of ‘hybridity’ has been informed by developments in Native studies such as the exchange between Elvira Pulitano, whose book *Toward a Native American Critical Theory* proved contentious, and Womack, Warrior and Jace Weaver’s (Cherokee) collective response in *American Indian Literary Nationalism* (Pulitano; Weaver et al.). Pulitano argued that, due to the confluence of intercultural influences including, but not limited to, the expression of Indigenous stories in literary forms, the genre of Native American literature is essentially a hybridised one. The concept of hybridity in postcolonial theory denotes and interrogates the processes and effects of intercultural development with regard to

implicated power dynamics in colonial and postcolonial contexts. The term also has purchase in border studies. However, the term's potential to flatten and sanitise the nuances of intercultural mixing in settler colonial contexts makes the concept unsuited to analyses of Indigenous cultures, and my consideration of interactions between Ojibwe, mixedblood – or what Vizenor would call 'crossblood' – and non-Native identities in Erdrich's work is predicated instead on Vizenor's presentation of adaptation and multiplicity as inherent aspects of Ojibwe identity. Indeed, in Womack's direct riposte to Pulitano (in a chapter drolly subtitled, "How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love My Hybridity") he forcefully argues that such a view of the concept of hybridity as that evinced by Pulitano means that as "soon as it can be established that any given tradition originated outside a community or was influenced by external factors, it can no longer be claimed as anything but hybrid. This, of course, makes tradition virtually impossible for any culture since all cultural traditions exist in relation to their surrounding environments. Only hybridity is possible" (140). Womack eloquently dispels Pulitano's argument to expose her Eurocentric perspective and tendency to apply essentialist standards of 'authenticity' to Native nations, while alleging that claims for Native identity are based on essentialism. Like Blaeser, and more recently Niigaanwewidam James Sinclair (Anishinaabe) and Daniel Heath Justice (Cherokee), Womack advocates a critical position which does not deny or reject cross-cultural interaction but rather centres tribal identity and sovereignty in discussions of intercultural dynamics.

Native scholars have explored other critical terms to express ideas of Native American identity and experience while taking account of multicultural and colonial influences without diminishing Indigenous sovereignty. Asserting that "nation-specific analyses needn't be exclusivist in approach," Justice proposes the term

“nationism” as an alternative to hybridity less steeped in associations with the modern nation state and essentialism (‘A Relevant Resonance’ 62, 64). Weaver’s term “communitism,” which, he explains, marries the ideas of “*community* and *activism*,” forms a useful counterpart to ‘nationism’ to express the relationship between land, community and sovereignty with tribal specificity on a more local level (Weaver, *Other Words* 49). Crucially, Justice’s more expansive and inclusive view of Indigenous “nationism” envelops otherwise marginalised Native groups including the Métis, who, Métis scholar Lorraine Mayer notes, embody a liminal identity rarely attended to in the US context (98). Thus the debate around hybridity illustrates that there is scope for substantial and fruitful interaction between Native studies and other fields to explore critical concepts at points of cultural and scholarly intersection, but that it is imperative to work from a Native studies-centred perspective.

It is my contention in this thesis that Erdrich’s writing embodies and expands the potential for political and social change explored by Native Studies theorists through such concepts as communitism and nationism. Not only does Erdrich rehistoricise colonisation and Indigenous history in the United States and Canada from an Ojibwe perspective, but she also uses literary fiction as a radical space and tool in and with which to open up present and future radical epistemological and cultural possibilities, thereby refuting American colonial hegemony. Erdrich’s writing foregrounds Ojibwe presence and traditional relationships with land, emphasising both Indigenous survival of genocide and the lasting structural effects of settler colonialism. Erdrich’s work therefore delegitimises the colonial American state while asserting Indigenous sovereignty. Erdrich’s focus on borders in particular deconstructs US hegemony and colonial western epistemological dominion. By fictionally rehistoricising reservation, state and national borders as destructive and exploitative

but ultimately arbitrary racist, colonialist, capitalist constructs, Erdrich calls our attention to the fact that the founding narratives of the US are indeed narratives. As Miner writes, “Much as oral tales may transform in the retelling, the ‘story’ of an imaginary border may also be transformed through such a paradigm. The international boundary was once drawn on the land by colonial surveyors and mapmakers – it can be redrawn, and even undrawn, by authors and other cultural workers” (‘Transgression and Sovereignty’ 176-177). Erdrich’s depiction of borders thus undermines both their legitimacy and their power, and creates the possibility of their dissolution. In this sense, I present Erdrich’s work as literary activism, enacting Indigenous empowerment and decolonial resistance. My intervention in this project is to analyse the literary techniques Erdrich employs to achieve this end in order to more fully recognise, understand and support the radical power literature bears to examine, explore, demand and create political change.

Like Native studies, the field of border studies has undergone substantial developments in recent years, progressing from a relatively narrow political and geographical topic to a wide and varied interdisciplinary field in which questions of identity, experience, social movements, political influence, nation, rights and culture are developed and explored. Recent exchanges between Native studies and border studies have developed connections between these fields which bring critical assessments of the specific roles played by borders in creating and sustaining colonial narratives of the nation into conversation with anti-colonial representations and analyses of place, history and identity in Indigenous literature. Miner summarises what is at stake in such interactions for Native literature:

story(telling) serves as a locus of discourse by which [Indigenous people] have long positioned themselves against colonial empires and neo-colonial institutions. Native writers show the possibility to effect change through this narrative dialogic. Here, they may destabilize the

national narratives that have subordinated and marginalized them for so long. ('Transgression and Sovereignty' 171)

Thus, border studies intersects productively with Native studies by expanding the context around the oppression of individual Indigenous groups enacted and perpetuated by local borders to the global forces and networks of colonisation, imperialism and capitalism that underpin those borders, in their broadest political, social, cultural, environmental and economic scope.

Indeed, contemporary border studies is concerned with interrogating concepts and processes which largely shaped global political and social developments throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, but which have not received sufficiently critical attention in the past, as Thomas Nail stresses: "A history of the border cannot be reduced to the history of states or walls. Accordingly, there remains a rich history of the border that has been overshadowed or entirely ignored by the exclusive study of state borders and abstract lines" (14). Further, Victor Konrad recounts:

Borders would receive limited attention except from a few specialists in political geography, political science and anthropology until the emergence of a post-modern order, and a call for "reterritorialization" of old Cold War and colonial "orders" on the land became evident in the 1980s ... In the late 20th century, the study of borders and borderlands grew from relative obscurity in the field of geography, to engage a widening circle of social scientists and humanists in most disciplines. (21)

Certainly, the field in its current form is expansive, as signalled by such multi-disciplinary texts as José David Saldívar's *Border Matters*. The field is also highly dynamic and politically engaged; indeed, Konrad goes on to explain that the twenty-first century presents a more urgent imperative for border theory than ever before: "In the post-modern world ... boundaries have been transcended in many ways, and new zones, reminiscent of the marchlands in their transitional capacity, but more complex

and integrative in their nature, have emerged to expand and extend border definition in a globalizing world” (24). Twenty-first-century borders are also “among the most effective bridge points in contemporary global interaction” (Konrad 29). Thus, borders have become more ubiquitous, complex and powerful during globalization. Within this context, Nail’s succinct overview of his aims in his 2016 book *The Theory of the Border* sets out the crucial significance of border theory and border studies today:

the diagnosis of historical and contemporary border regimes also provides the strategic tools necessary for changing the current regimes. Understanding how a border works allows one to make more effective tactical interventions into its modification or abolition. The kinetic thesis of this book argues that borders have no ahistorical or universal social necessity and are thus open to further change or destruction. (16)

In this sense, border studies is profoundly concerned with social justice and global change, and is indispensable to the study of literature produced by members of those (especially Indigenous) groups marginalised, elided or otherwise harmed by colonial borders.

One of the key ways in which border studies has contributed to the reframing of American studies in recent decades has been in its recognition and analysis of ‘borderlands’ and the impact of borderland experience on groups and individuals as well as on senses of cultural and national identity. Using the term ‘borderscape’ to denote the border’s extended impact on senses of identity and place, Johan Schimanski and Stephen F. Wolfe explain that this focus has initiated “a broad shift in this already interdisciplinary field, from political and social geography towards anthropological and cultural sciences, and simultaneously from the macro relations of ‘hard’ geopolitics and economy to the micro narratives of borderland communities and border-crossers” (9). Mary Louise Pratt’s nuanced concept of the ‘contact zone’ – defined as “social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination – such

as colonialism and slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today” (7) – has been particularly influential in this regard as, in addition to national border contexts, Pratt’s definition is applicable to intranational spaces. These contact zones are defined by “Transculturation,” meaning the interaction of different cultures on unequal terms, although Pratt avoids denying the agency of the disempowered culture (7). This emphasis on the lived experiences of people affected by borders has facilitated greater cultural awareness of marginalised and migrant communities, especially in the US, as well as renewed critical engagement with the physical infrastructure and socio-political functions performed by borders.

Much recent border theory builds on Gloria Anzaldúa’s germinal work *Borderlands/La Frontera*, published in 1987. Anzaldúa’s powerful elucidation of the ‘borderland’ simultaneously acknowledges the extreme force of the border as a presence and as an idea, and challenges it. She defines the border as “a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants” (*Borderlands/La Frontera* 25). Anzaldúa’s text not only redefines understandings of borders and introduces the concept of the borderlands, but also signals an important change in cultural studies. Writing soon after the publication of *Borderlands/La Frontera*, anthropologist Renato Rosaldo reflects, “Ethnographers look less for homogenous communities than for the border zones within and between them. Such cultural border zones are always in motion, not frozen for introspection” (217). Thus, Anzaldúa’s work illustrates the cultural, emotional and political implications of borders as well as, crucially, highlighting the power dynamics at play within and around ‘hybrid’ cultures.

Moreover, Anzaldúa's concept of '*mestiza*' consciousness conveys the influence of the border as an absorbed and inhabited phenomenon; she observes, "Living on borders and in margins, keeping intact one's shifting and multiple identity and integrity, is like trying to swim in a new element, an 'alien' element. There is an exhilaration in being a participant in the further evolution of humankind, in being 'worked' on" (*Borderlands/La Frontera* 19). Thus, Anzaldúa usefully presents borderlands as a site of transition and energy under a pretence of stasis and control signified by an incongruous border, and attributes the strength of the border woman to the plurality engendered by *mestiza* consciousness. In this sense, Anzaldúa's *mestiza* consciousness generates possibilities to consider spatially delimited, politically and socially oppressed and culturally distinct areas within the settler colonial state, such as the reservation, in terms of borderlands experience.

Since Linda Martín Alcoff pointed out that Anzaldúa is "often cited" but "undertheorized," and that as a result her "effect remains to be developed," Anzaldúa's position in relation to Native studies has come under scrutiny (256). Domino Renee Pérez summarises this advance:

For many, *Borderlands* is revelatory for the way it affirms a self that is often erased or pushed, sometimes violently, into the margins of dominative or competing hetero-patriarchal cultures, whether Anglo or Chicano. Anzaldúa addresses these and other issues in her theory of the borderlands, a physical and intellectual locale where she is an agent of change for herself and others ... Her place in Indigenous studies, however, is more vexed. Indeed, Anzaldúa struggled to account for what she understood as the Indigenous part of Chicana/o identity. (489)

Anzaldúa claims Indigenous heritage as part of her sense of identity, stating, "I am a border woman. I grew up between two cultures, the Mexican (with a heavy Indian influence) and the Anglo (as a member of a colonized people in our own territory)" (*Borderlands/La Frontera* 19). However, Anzaldúa's engagement with Indigeneity as part of an identity defined by hybridity is problematic, partly because she presents her

sense of Indigeneity as being rooted in a pre-colonial past. Perhaps the most critical reading of Anzaldúa's presentation of her Chicana Indigeneity is Benjamin Alire Sáenz's, who considers Anzaldúa's position "an escape, *not a* [decolonial] *confrontation*. To return to the 'traditional' spiritualities that were in place before the arrival of Cortés and company makes very little sense. The material conditions that gave rise to the Aztec's religion no longer exist" (86). Anzaldúa's concept of the *mestiza*, like that of postcolonial hybridity, causes further concerns in Native studies due to its potential to cause Indigenous erasure, as Nicole Guidotti-Hernández explains:

The common reading of Anzaldúa as taking up the mantle of *mestizaje* as a theory of Chicana/o liberation in some ways denies the violence, both physical and epistemic, that occurs when the essentialized Indian – who cannot pass for mestizo or cannot celebrate a mestizo/a cultural heritage and is in fact Indian in the eyes of the U.S. and Mexican nations – is eliminated from the conversation. (19)

Moreover, this claim for Indigenous heritage as part of Chicana identity as distinct from a tribal Indian identity, Pérez suggests, represents a "turn away from nationalism," arguably constituting a conflict with the cause of Indigenous sovereignty (497). Anzaldúa makes clear, however, that she is both aware and wary of this reading of *mestiza*: "I'm afraid that what I say may unwittingly contribute to the misappropriation of Native cultures, that I (and other Chicanas) will inadvertently contribute to the cultural erasure, silencing, invisibility, racial stereotypes, and disenfranchisement of people who live in real Indian bodies" (Anzaldúa et al. 12). Here Anzaldúa illustrates her view that Chicana Indigeneity does not reflect Native identity and cannot claim a stake in tribal nationalism; she also demonstrates that *mestiza* identities should not be presented as products of neutralised intercultural exchange, as associated with postcolonial hybridity. Yet Anzaldúa's formulation of an empowered, feminist, mixed-heritage borderland experience and identity remains an

important and relevant touchstone in border and mixedblood writing. In this thesis, therefore, I set Anzaldúa's borderlands and *mestiza* in dialogue with Vizenor's survivance and transmotion, Owens's frontier and Indigenous decolonial resistance with a recognition that Anzaldúa's work is adjacent to but distinct from Indigenous theory and that her political aims as well as her cultural contexts cannot be conflated with Erdrich's.

Anzaldúa's work has been built on and bridged with Native studies by such writers and scholars as Paula Gunn Allen and Louis Owens (Choctaw/Cherokee). Allen and Owens have both identified the border and borderland as key concepts in their representations of Native experience and identity. In her essay collection *Off the Reservation*, Allen explicitly relates the reservation environment to colonial border and borderland Indigenous and mixedblood identity, presenting "borders as both liminal and transformational" (7). Owens has been criticised by scholars including Womack for his fidelity to the notion of hybridity; as Owens puts it, he is viewed as "Not a real, essential Indian because I'm not enrolled and did not grow up on a reservation ... I have learned to inhabit a hybrid, unpapered, Choctaw-Cherokee-Welsh-Irish-Cajun mixed space in between. I conceive of myself not as an 'Indian,' but as a mixedblood, a person of complex roots and histories" (*Mixedblood Messages* 176). Criticism of Owens's engagement with hybridity formed part of a broader movement within Native Studies, which, as James H. Cox and Daniel Heath Justice explain, sought important ends: "Although identity and representation continue to be issues with significant political components, in the 1990s, some critics began to argue that creative writers and literary critics interested in these issues often neglected history, political crises, and the complexities of cultural identity in Indian country" (3). However, a dominant scholarly commitment to literary nationalism, as held

notably by Elizabeth Cook-Lynn (Crow Creek Sioux) resulted in an exclusivist attitude to mixedblood writers such as Owens, as Cheryl Suzack elaborates:

An ethical turn in Native cultural criticism must also ask what implications an imposed colonial past has for Native identity that is increasingly determined according to demands for its expression of 'authenticity.' ... Cook-Lynn appears to be complicitous with her own critique insofar as her discussion of 'mixed-blood identity' foregrounds identity categories instituted through federally imposed blood-quantum distinctions, thus lending critical weight to the terms, rather than through other categories of social enablement that might include tribal identity or political affiliation. (173-174)

Thus, while a critical approach to the notion of hybridity discourse is important, so too is a recognition of mixedblood identity as one of many expressions of Indigenous identity in the US as a direct result of, and valid stance of resistance against colonial oppression.

Owens expresses and explores his mixedblood Indigenous identity and experience, and develops the connections between Native studies and border studies, through a revised conception of the frontier from an Indigenous sovereignty-orientated perspective. Owens explains:

Cultures can and indeed cannot do otherwise than come together and deal with one another, not only within the transcultural regions of frontiers or borders but also within the hybridized individual, Vizenor's 'crossblood,' who internalizes those frontier or border spaces. As conceived by Vizenor, and by Native American authors generally, however, the mixedblood is not a cultural broker but a cultural breaker, break-dancing trickster-fashion through all signs, fracturing the self-reflexive mirror of the dominant center, deconstructing rigid borders, slipping between the seams, embodying contradictions, and contradancing across every boundary. The Indian has appropriated and occupied the frontier, reimagining it against all odds. (*Mixedblood Messages* 40–41)

In Owens's formulation, the frontier both refutes the idea of the border as an unshakeable icon of settler history and colonial power and reclaims intercultural identity as a quality inherent to Indigenous identity through the archetypal figure of the trickster. Owens's reimagined, internalised frontier therefore provides a critical

concept with which we can consider the border from an Indigenous-centred critical perspective and include Indigenous identities otherwise excluded from Native studies and overlooked in articulations of Indigenous sovereignty. Owens's frontier remains problematic for Indigenous studies, particularly from a nationalistic perspective, not least because the concept evinces an Indigenous identity which is largely disconnected from the issue of tribal land. Moreover, the term's indelible colonial connotations preclude any true recuperation; we could infer that Owens's purpose in engaging the idea of the frontier as a Native studies concept was at least partially provocative. However, Warrior speaks to the decolonial power of such an act when he writes, "At its best, Native writing (and sometimes Indigenous studies scholarship) gives voice to ... ungovernability and succeeds in unsettling a history that in the minds of many is already complete" ('Transnational Turn' 127). Further, Chris LaLonde draws out the radical potential of Owens's revision of the frontier and its role in Native American literature:

Fictionalizing produces a space between from which to counter and supplement the violence and violation done to the Native. From the in-between, both/and space of the literary text metaphorized by the treeline, then, Owens is able to tell his other story and articulate an other destiny. The act of cutting the pages of the bound book, a Native American novel with an(other) discourse, produces and allows to be revealed the remainder and excess that the nation cannot master. (18)

Thus, Owens's radical frontier opens up greater possibilities for Indigenous literature and identities to be "both/and" rather than 'either/or,' enhancing autonomy and Indigenous sovereignty and defying colonial disempowerment and categorisation.

More recently, another significant shift in cultural border studies has seen the US-Canada border become a primary focus of critical attention. Konrad states that the "Canada-U.S. border was considered as an area of interest only when it became clear that free trade initiatives would have an impact on this rarely acknowledged boundary"

(45). However, Rachel Adams and Sarah Phillips Casteel point out that research on the US-Canada border not only advances American border studies and complicates the concept of the borderland, but also calls renewed critical attention to the United States' foreign policy, international influence and cultural role in the American continents:

The US-Canadian border provides an opportunity to expand the borderlands paradigm from encounters between Mexican and Anglo cultures to a comparative view of contact zones across the Americas ... 'the borderland' has become virtually synonymous with the southwestern USA. This conflation is enabled by forgetting the USA's border with Canada. Scholarship that takes both borders into account is urgently needed to assess the cultural consequences of neoliberal economic policies such as NAFTA and its slated extension throughout the Western Hemisphere with the implementation of the FTAA (Free Trade Area of the Americas). (10)

This greater recognition of the US-Canada border is important not least because it challenges the neo-imperialist tendencies of the US to dominate and homogenise cultural representations of North America. Erasure of the Canada-US border legitimises colonial borders, minimises their harmful significances and elides Indigenous peoples from view in both domestic and foreign cultural and political contexts. Therefore, a positive outcome arising from interdisciplinary border studies is the potential for greater recognition, support and protection of Indigenous presence, identity and sovereignty.

In her instrumental book *Border Fictions*, Claudia Sadowski-Smith expands the borderland paradigm further by exploring a diverse range of inter- and intranational border-focused American literatures with a hemispheric focus. The transnational and hemispheric turns, as well as the growth of New World studies and Caribbean studies, have, as Adams and Casteel write, "begun to unsettle the traditional insularity of US American Studies," resulting in "alternative visions of America" (6). Indeed, Sadowski's chapter on "Native Border Theory" investigates Indigenous

experience of borderlands at both US national frontiers in the writing of Leslie Marmon Silko and Thomas King (Cherokee), highlighting Native senses of place and tribal specificity as important considerations within border studies. While my focus in this thesis is on the local and tribally-specific as opposed to the hemispheric, Sadowski-Smith's nuanced and innovative analysis of differing relationships to borders and border zones is instructive.

Gillian Roberts and David Stirrup's important edited collection *Parallel Encounters* makes further developments in this area by applying a focus on colonial power to their studies of American borderlands. In her chapter 'Discursive Positioning: A Comparative Study of Postcolonialism in Native Studies Across the US-Canada Border,' Maggie Ann Bowers argues:

In terms of discourse, the border can be considered either as existing in terms of colonialism using a postcolonial theoretical framework, or as an imaginary concept lacking legitimacy in tribal thinking. But to express this paradox, a critical approach needs to be adopted that reflects this duality – both specifically Native American and postcolonial. (122)

While Roberts and Stirrup's focus on this discursive "duality" throughout the book is well supported by their deft employment of postcolonial concepts, the field of postcolonial theory has historically failed to provide a comfortable or fruitful environment for Native American studies, as exemplified by the debate around hybridity. Eric Cheyfitz considers it "surprising ... if not a complete scandal, that postcolonial studies have virtually ignored the predicaments of American Indian communities in that territory known ... as the United States" ('(Post)Colonial Predicament' 406). In his essay 'Godzilla vs. Post-Colonial,' Thomas King rejects the application of postcolonial theory to Native literature on the basis of what he identifies as "assumptions" of "progress and improvement" (11–12). He concludes that "Post-colonial might be an excellent term to use to describe Canadian literature, but it will

not do to describe Native literature” (T. King 12). The development of settler colonial studies in the mid-2000s provides Native studies with a more apposite theoretical framework with which to analyse US and Canadian colonialism.

Although its roots lie in twentieth-century Marxist and postcolonial theory, settler colonial studies coalesced as a distinct field in 2006 under Patrick Wolfe’s paradigmatic summary: “invasion is a structure not an event” (388). This formulation acknowledges crucial distinctions within different forms of colonialism and avoids the implications of Eurocentric temporality and ‘progress’ embodied in the ‘pre’ and ‘post’ designations which King rejects. Discussing what he terms the genocidal “logic of elimination” in settler polities in relation to the American frontier specifically, Wolfe observes, “The frontier had become coterminous with reservation boundaries” (387, 399). This unsettling point of analysis serves to highlight the fact that the border, from a Native American perspective, is far from limited to national and state boundaries; rather, the border can be found wherever the current, ever encroaching limits of colonial sovereignty rest. Lorenzo Veracini has built substantially on Wolfe’s seminal work; he summarises that settler colonialism “is premised on the domination of a majority that has become indigenous (settlers are made by conquest *and* by immigration) ... and, even more perplexingly, indigenous people only need to become a minority in order to cease being colonised” (Veracini 5). In the American context, therefore, the construct of the border is inextricable from both the social and political influences of settler colonialism and the state of Indigenous sovereignty.

The interventions of Indigenous scholars, most notably Glen Sean Coulthard (Yellowknives Dene) and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg), have served to re-orientate the field of settler colonial studies to centre Indigenous political thought and activism and anchor theoretical developments in

tribal specificity. Coulthard engages with Frantz Fanon to produce a definition of settler colonialism relevant specifically to First Nations contexts:

A settler-colonial relationship is one characterized by a particular form of *domination*; that is, it is a relationship where power – in this case, interrelated discursive and nondiscursive facets of economic, gendered, racial, and state power – has been structured into a relatively secure or sedimented set of hierarchical social relations that continue to facilitate the *dispossession* of Indigenous peoples of their lands and self-determining authority. (6-7)

With this aim in mind, Coulthard formulates an anti-capitalist principle marrying self-determination with a traditionalist respect for and urge to protect tribal land, which he terms ‘grounded normativity.’

Similarly, Simpson advocates for a decolonialism which recognises the threat of “the more insidious decentralized post-colonial-colonialism” and privileges Indigenous identity and concerns above rebalancing the binary colonial relationship; she urges, “we need to not just figure out who we are; we need to re-establish the processes by which we live who we are within the current context we find ourselves ... We must move ourselves beyond resistance and survival, to flourishing and *mino bimaadiziwin* [“living the good life”] (*Dancing on Our Turtle’s Back* 20, 17)”. Simpson and Coulthard’s respective interventions thus provide conceptual means by which to analyse literary representations of borders as colonial constructs and challenge the colonial hegemony they represent without decentring Indigenous theory or displacing Indigenous sovereignty as a practical aim.

The themes and concerns of Erdrich’s fiction allow for a reading which engages the fields of Native literary studies, border studies and settler colonial studies by depicting and challenging the history, presence and effects of colonial borders upon the Ojibwe and tribal lands. In this sense, Erdrich’s work fulfils Simpson’s view of the purpose of storytelling in First Nations and Native American cultures:

Storytelling is at its core decolonizing, because it is a process of remembering, visioning and creating a just reality where Nishnaabeg live as both *Nishnaabeg* and *peoples*. Storytelling then becomes a lens through which we can envision our way out of cognitive imperialism, where we can create models and mirrors where none existed, and where we can experience the spaces of freedom and justice. (*Dancing* 33)

This study of Erdrich's work therefore brings to fruition a network of interactions between the fields of Native literature, border studies and settler colonial studies.

A number of studies have illuminated the multiple and complex links between Ojibwe and mixedblood identity, sense of place, re-historicising of colonial narratives and Indigenous sovereignty as key concerns in Erdrich's texts. Presently, the majority of a considerable body of monographs and edited collections on Erdrich focus on *Love Medicine* and other early novels, while Erdrich's recent, more overtly political texts have provoked a resurgence in critical attention. Edited collections such as Allan Chavkin's collection *The Chippewa Landscape of Louise Erdrich*, Hertha D. Sweet Wong's collection *Love Medicine: A Casebook*, and *Approaches to Teaching the Works of Louise Erdrich*, edited by Greg Sarris (Miwok and Pomo), Connie A. Jacobs and James R. Giles, provide valuable insights into the traditional Anishinaabe historical and cultural context of Erdrich's works. Other studies, including David Stirrup's indispensable *Louise Erdrich*, trace selected threads throughout Erdrich's oeuvre to draw out important thematic fulcra. Stirrup's focus on "boundaries," the "between" and "splitting" in Erdrich's novels is foundational to my research (3, 10). Similarly, Joni Adamson's *American Indian Literature, Environmental Justice, and Ecocriticism: The Middle Place* employs Native studies and ecocritical theory to analyse liminal space and identity in Erdrich's and other Indigenous writers' work. Additionally, among the extensive collection of scholarly articles published on Erdrich, Rita Ferrari, Jeanne Smith, Joshua D. Miner and Nora Baker Barry have respectively explored decolonial resistance and social and cultural boundaries in

Erdrich's earlier work in relation to Anishinaabe tradition, autonomy, transmotion and sovereignty, while Eileen M. Luna-Firebaugh's article "The Border Crossed Us" offers an illuminating discussion of borders in relation to Indigenous sovereignty. Thus, this thesis builds on an existing body of scholarship to examine Erdrich's use of borders specifically, explicitly, in depth and at length for the first time.

Erdrich's body of work is extensive, and her pace of publication shows no sign of abating. At the time of writing, Erdrich has published sixteen novels, two works of non-fiction, a book of short stories and three poetry collections, as well as children's books and co-authored works. Erdrich's collected works are therefore clearly beyond the scope of this thesis. However, in my selection of primary texts I have endeavoured to trace the thematic thread of borders from Erdrich's earliest work to her recent novels. The persistence of the theme of borders throughout her writing is indicative of its importance to her work.

Because of the intertextual qualities and historical angle of Erdrich's novels, I have organised my choice of primary texts in correspondence to the chronology of Erdrich's fictional world. Therefore, my thesis begins with *Tracks*, published in 1988, as the novel with the earliest primary setting in Erdrich's body of work, and ends with 2012's *The Round House*, with reference to other novels with more contemporary settings. This arrangement avoids imposing a rigid, linear approach in favour of centring Erdrich's storytelling voice and attempting to preserve an element of the constant-present effect of Erdrich's historical narratives' Anishinaabe temporality. Progressing according to the chronology of the novels, then, this thesis is structured into three parts of two chapters each. Each part deals primarily with closely-related or companion novels in which borders are a central theme in a certain period.

Part 1: “Theft of the sacred”: Borders, Land and Cultures’ discusses the use of borders in *Tracks* and its companion text *Four Souls*, published in 2004. These novels contiguously portray the imposition and effects of the US government’s allotment policy on the Little No Horse Reservation in the early twentieth century. The novels are principally narrated by Ojibwe elder and archetypal trickster figure Nanapush, whose charting of Ojibwe history, concerns over social and cultural developments caused by the government’s campaign of assimilation, and decolonial resistance, position borders as the epitome of settler hegemony.

In Chapter 1 I discuss Erdrich’s use of vernacular landscape, focusing on Nanapush and fellow sacred archetypal figure Fleur Pillager, in contrast to the western, colonialist view of landscape, as an expression of Ojibwe sense of place and a mode of decolonial resistance. I employ Vizenor’s concepts of survivance and transmotion to argue that Erdrich presents borders, through the themes of surveying, maps and construction, as emblems of settler power and legitimacy which are undermined through a continued engagement with Anishinaabe epistemology, and consider Owens’s re-envisioned frontier as a concept through which Indigenous peoples can protect traditional senses of place and community and challenge colonial power.

In Chapter 2 I examine Erdrich’s presentation of colonial institutions as an extension of borders and, therefore, of settler hegemony. Connecting Anzaldúa’s concept of *mestiza* with Owens’s frontier and Coulthard’s grounded normativity as a formulation of land-based Native sovereignty, I argue that Erdrich sets Anishinaabe traditions and social practices in contrast to (trans)national colonial institutions devoted to Indigenous assimilation and elimination. Analysing the institutions of the western family home, government boarding school, Catholic Church and tribal

council, I argue that Erdrich evokes autonomy, protection of the community and adaptation as modes of decolonial resistance.

Part 2: “‘Creation, emergence, migration’: Cycles and Survival’ explores the enduring effects of borderlands experience on the Ojibwe community in the novels *Love Medicine* (Erdrich’s 1984 debut novel), *The Bingo Palace* (published in 1994) and *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse* (2001), which collectively span the early to late twentieth century on the Little No Horse Reservation. These novels continue stories rooted in the *Tracks* era, following the lives of Fleur Pillager and her descendants. *Love Medicine* introduces the reader to the reservation environment, several clans and the difficult economic and social conditions which shaped many Native reservations in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Erdrich has published three editions of *Love Medicine*; the 1984 edition was followed by a revised edition in 1993, containing four extra chapters, and a third was released in 2009, from which two of the new chapters were omitted. As the 1993 edition offers additional pertinent material, I will refer to this edition throughout this thesis. *The Bingo Palace* takes up many of the characters and plots introduced in *Love Medicine*, primarily from the perspective of Lipsha Morrissey, an adopted member of the Kashpaw clan and descendant of Fleur Pillager who functions as a potential future Ojibwe leader. The novel *Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse* bridges the *Love Medicine* period with the *Tracks* era and explores decolonialism from the contrasting perspective of Father Damien Modeste, a subversive, liminal figure concealing his female sex and former identities as Agnes De Witt and Sister Cecelia in order to serve the Little No Horse community as an anti-orthodox Catholic priest. Throughout these novels Erdrich charts the irreparable damage caused to the Ojibwe community by successive government policies and colonialist capitalism.

Home and mobility are intimately related to senses of place and identity and are therefore vulnerable to disruption in borderlands environment. In Chapter 3 I argue that Euro-American concepts of home and mobility, as defined by borders and hierarchical authority, run counter to Anishinaabe traditions and Ojibwe sovereignty, and that Erdrich presents alienation, displacement and restricted mobility as outcomes of colonial hegemony. I examine the Kashpaw home and the Senior Citizens' home, the eponymous Bingo Palace, the van which Lipsha wins playing bingo, and the prison cell within which his father Gerry Nanapush is incarcerated as microcosms of colonial borders, and find that Erdrich invokes grounded normativity as a means of pursuing survivance.

In addition to home and mobility, colonial oppression and borderlands experience influence familial relationships and traditional relationships with land. In Chapter 4, therefore, I analyse the relationship between the Ojibwe, the land and conflicting epistemological influences in these novels in greater depth through the themes of motherhood and water. Positing water as an inherently maternal space in which characters seek comfort and acceptance, I align Erdrich's presentation of water with mixedblood identity, Anzaldúa's *mestiza* and Vizenor's transmotion, arguing that Erdrich's water/mother dynamic connotes a rejection of false divisions embodied in Euro-American borders.

Part 3: "A tangle of red tape": Permeability and Voice' considers borders in Erdrich's more contemporary settings. This part focuses primarily on *The Round House*, set in 1988 and published in 2012. *The Round House* extends the senses of place and history Erdrich establishes in earlier texts into the context of late capitalism, affirming that government policy continues to have destructive consequences on Native reservations in the post-termination era. I examine Erdrich's depiction of the

violent rape and attempted murder of Geraldine Coutts, the mother of thirteen-year-old narrator Joe, and the murder and disappearance of another young Native mother, Mayla Wolfskin, in relation to the permeable reservation border and the ongoing attrition of Indigenous sovereignty in the United States. In this novel, as in its partner text *The Plague of Doves* (2008), 2016's *LaRose* and 2018's *Future Home of the Living God*, Erdrich exposes the relentlessness of settler colonialism as a continuous assault on Indigenous sovereignty, particularly targeting Native women and children.

In Chapter 5, I discuss the relationship between borders and jurisdiction. I utilise Wolfe's analysis of settler colonialism's "logic of elimination" and Rob Nixon's concept of "slow violence" to examine the ways in which systems of law and justice in the United States facilitate violence against Native women on reservations and how this diminishes Native sovereignty (Wolfe 387; Nixon 3). Drawing parallels with Erdrich's other texts, I explore the impact of the attack upon Ojibwe identity. I also consider Erdrich's engagement with the idea of wiindigoo justice as a response to the systemic failings of the Euro-American justice system and an exploration of decolonial methods of achieving justice and sovereignty.

Finally, Chapter 6 explores the symbol of the border at a greater level of abstraction, investigating Erdrich's use of storytelling, voice and testimony in relation to decolonial resistance. I argue that Geraldine's initial withholding of her testimony from the authorities constitutes a reclamation of voice and autonomy, and illustrates a dramatic contrast between the treatment of Indigenous women's voices in patriarchal settler colonial society and the position of storytellers in Anishinaabe tradition. I present the novel as an evocation of Native survivance, positing that the Anishinaabe oral storytelling tradition dismantles the illusion of colonial hegemony constructed by spatial and social borders by demonstrating the power of the Ojibwe to traverse

metaphysical ‘borders’ which shape Euro-American concepts of life, death, consciousness, physicality and spirituality through the practice of transmotion. I conclude by noting opportunities for further research opened up by this thesis.

Although Erdrich’s writing is widely read by non-Native readers, and presumably written and marketed with a large non-Native readership in mind, it is imperative for me in this study to maintain an awareness of my own perspective as a white, Irish, UK-based scholar and avoid decentring Erdrich’s identity, experience or intentions, as far as possible. Indeed, I endeavour in this thesis not to speak on behalf of any Indigenous group or issue, but rather to anchor my research in the work of Indigenous scholars. Moreover, while this thesis makes theoretical interventions, my primary purpose is a critical one: to contextualise and deepen our understanding of the cultural and political significance of Erdrich’s use of borders in her writing.

Part 1

“Theft of the sacred”²

Borders, Land and Cultures

² Momaday, *The Man Made of Words*, 76.

Chapter 1

Maps and Landscape

Louise Erdrich is celebrated as a writer of place. Tim Cresswell defines place as “a meaningful location” and sense of place as “a way of seeing, knowing, and understanding the world” (12, 18). These definitions are expressive of the role that sense of place plays in literature, including in Erdrich’s work. More specifically, Erdrich’s Ojibwe heritage is foundational to her presentation of the relationships between characters and the land they inhabit, imbuing the sense of place evoked in her writing with a focus on community, identity and sovereignty. This sense of place is conveyed through a radically subversive engagement with the themes of borders, maps and landscape in her writing. This chapter analyses the connections between these themes in the novels *Tracks* and *Four Souls*, two companion texts set in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, which establish the senses of place, history and identity underpinning Erdrich’s fictional world.

Erdrich endows the fictional Little No Horse Ojibwe Reservation, set in North Dakota, with “landscapes and features similar to many Ojibwe reservations” (*Last Report* 357). Erdrich’s use of the word “landscapes” is intriguing as depictions of landscape in the conventional sense are not prominent in her writing. Like Faulkner, Erdrich creates a distinct fictional world in which sense of place is paramount without directly describing the landscape. Erdrich’s designation of the Little No Horse Reservation as a specifically “emotional” assemblage of places of personal and cultural significance to her alerts us to the fact that, in her work, landscape functions not as a way to simply convey geographical context or the appearance of the

environment, but as an evocation of the ways in which the Ojibwe relate to and live within the land (*Last Report* 357).

Erdrich's use of landscape closely reflects Silko's perspective on land, informed by her Laguna Pueblo heritage:

The land, the sky, and all that is within them – the landscape – includes human beings. Interrelationships in the Pueblo landscape are complex and fragile. The unpredictability of the weather, the aridity and harshness of much of the terrain in the high plateau country explain in large part the relentless attention the Pueblo people gave the sky and the earth around them. Survival depended upon harmony and cooperation not only among human beings, but among all things – the animate and the less animate, since rocks and mountains were known to move, to travel occasionally. ('Landscape, History' 33)

For Silko, the Pueblo relationship with land is characterised by motion, interconnection and proximity. Her outline of this relationship emphasises the agency and power of the environment and the Pueblo people's profound connection with the land. Elaborating, Silko describes the natural world as a living system undergoing constant and infinite cycles of transference and renewal on varying scales; she writes, "You see that after a thing is dead, it dries up. It might take weeks or years, but eventually if you touch the thing, it crumbles under your fingers. It goes back to dust. The soul of the thing ... may have already been borne back into bones and blood or thick green stalk and leaves" (30). The alliterative association between the thing's crumbling "back to dust" and its soul being "borne back into bones and blood" implies not simply a routine passage between life and death, but constant cycles of transference between living and dead things, incorporating Silko's listener in the immediate present. The equivalence of "bones and blood" with "thick green stalk and leaves" parallels Silko's listener with non-human life, suggesting a radical sense of equality across the human and natural worlds. The Pueblo relationship with land for Silko, then, is constant, intimate and interactive.

This traditional Native understanding of land is fundamentally incongruous with the conventional western understanding of landscape.³ The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines ‘landscape,’ derived from technical painting terminology, as a “view or prospect of natural inland scenery, such as can be taken in at a glance from one point of view” (‘Landscape’). In this sense, landscape is concerned with the singular gaze of a viewer and their representation of the land. In contrast, Silko argues, “This assumes the viewer is somehow *outside* or *separate from* the territory he or she surveys. Viewers are as much a part of the landscape as the boulders they stand on” (32). From an Indigenous perspective such as Silko’s, the stance assumed by the viewer of land as landscape is essentially illusory because it denies the location of human consciousness within the land. By estranging one’s “human consciousness” from the land, one substitutes the western idea of landscape – defined by individualism, distance and stasis – for an interactive relationship with the land itself.

In *Tracks* and *Four Souls*, Erdrich demonstrates a nuanced and specific understanding of landscape closely related to her engagement with traditional oral storytelling, signalled by her acknowledgement of her fictional world’s resemblance to “many Ojibwe reservations” and “places dear to me” (*Last Report* 357). Erdrich creates impressions of the Little No Horse Reservation not through direct, explicit description but through characters’ experiences within the environment. Characters’ own stories also contribute to our understanding of the reservation. Erdrich enacts this approach in her travelogue-like work of non-fiction, *Books and Islands in Ojibwe Country*, when she remarks casually, “[my] daughter and I will pop over the Canada-U.S. border and visit Lake of the Woods and the lands of her namesake, her

³ I do not wish to present Silko’s conception of landscape, specific to her Laguna Pueblo heritage, as representative of all Indigenous views of landscape, but rather as one to which Indigenous identity and experience are indispensable as well as one which in some ways closely aligns with Erdrich’s use of landscape.

grandmother. Then we'll dip below the border and travel east to Rainy Lake" (4). Here, the national border is diminished by the flippant verbs "pop" and "dip"; places are defined by natural elements; the journey is orientated by human relationships and the cardinal directions; and Erdrich relates her experience and gives meaning to the land she describes in informal language evocative of oral storytelling. Nixon relates such representations of land to the vernacular, stating, "A vernacular landscape is shaped by the affective, historically textured maps that communities have devised over generations, maps replete with names and routes, maps alive to significant ecological and surface geological features" (17). Like vernacular language, this traditional conception of land is rooted in local, shared experience and communal assent. This emphatically land- and community-centred perspective minimises official, impersonal ascriptions of the land – most notably here, the national border – to a level of negligible detail.

Nixon's description of "historically textured" and "alive" maps suggests a greater degree of mutability, multiplicity and subjectivity in the design and interpretation of these maps than in traditional cartography. Like Erdrich's description of her travels, Nixon's evoked maps emphasise personal relations and narratives, challenging the hegemony of western cartography in defining and representing land. In this sense, vernacular landscape corresponds to traditional Native American styles of mapping. Gordon Brotherston explains that "Fourth World maps ... trace process and formation, like histories, setting politics into cosmogony" (82). The concept of a map as a depiction of relationships between people and land allows us to read Erdrich's novels as vernacular landscapes of places of significance to Ojibwe culture. As Adamson writes, "Although words and stories are ill-suited for the precision of the cartographer's enterprise, they eloquently reveal the depth of a people's sense of the

place in which they live” (*American Indian Literature* 7). In *Tracks* and *Four Souls*, Erdrich sets Ojibwe-centred vernacular landscapes in contradistinction to non-Native interpretations and representations of the Little No Horse reservation through images of maps and other instances of land development. Thus Erdrich’s novels challenge the hegemony of “the cartographer” and revise official narratives of Native American relationships with land.

In contrast with the Ojibwe-centred spatiality conveyed by Erdrich’s vernacular landscapes, critics have utilised more conventional maps to visualise the geography of Erdrich’s fictional world. Peter G. Beidler and Gay Barton’s map, for example, presents the Little No Horse reservation within a national context (8).⁴ Beidler and Barton discuss the location of certain sites of importance in the novels and surmise distances between them in order to provide readers with a visual depiction of the reservation’s spatial context, drawn up in stark, black lines with real places noted in staid typeface and fictional locations in italics. The differences between this map and the family tree that prologues *Four Souls* are telling: Erdrich details her characters in a cursive-effect font; she includes characters’ other names; both traditional Anishinaabe and Catholic marriages are defined; adopted children are linked with their adoptive families as well as their biological parents.⁵ In short, the scholars’ map of Erdrich’s fictional world adheres to official, realistic boundaries, in contrast with Erdrich’s more sensorial, subjective approach. As Stirrup remarks, “As critics seek to ‘map’ what is often referred to as a ‘Chippewa landscape’, so the topography of Erdrich’s fiction resists such literal mapping” (76). A fundamental feature of what Stirrup presents as critics’ failure in this regard is their conformity to official

⁴ See Appendix 1.

⁵ See Appendix 2.

classifications of land, dispensing with Erdrich's attention to natural elements and human relationships.

This conformity to western conventions places Beidler and Barton's map within the tradition of colonial cartography. Throughout the era of colonisation, European and Euro-American maps sought not only to record and represent the world according to European conceptions of space, but also to facilitate colonial projects. Peta Mitchell explains, "The concept of space that emerged in the Enlightenment is a global and passive one of pure extension. The formalization of this spatial practice, moreover, fed neatly into the expansionist drive to conquer land – conceived of as 'empty,' 'unclaimed,' or 'unknown' extensive space – that characterized the Age of Empire" (28). The concept of space as passive and subject to ownership both aligns with the conventional western concept of landscape and contradicts traditional Native American senses of place. It also posits land as mouldable through mapping, as Denis Cosgrove elucidates:

Heirs to the Renaissance reworking of classical knowledge, the New World's European discoverers were fired by its belief in the powers of geometry and mathematical measure ... Geometry united macrocosm and microcosm; it was the secret measure by which creation had been ordered and was sustained. It thus behoved God's highest creatures to employ that same measure in making their own, lesser worlds. (90–91)

By charting and representing the world through "geometry and mathematical measure," then, colonial maps simultaneously offer a 'true' representation of the world and allow cartographers and colonisers to (re-)organise space and place, regardless of pre-existing traditions of human interaction with the land. Thus the western conception of landscape and colonial strategies to organise and control expanses of land form normative and dominant approaches to land in the colonial United States. This hegemony necessarily and deliberately disrupts Indigenous relationships with land, both physically – through the imposition of borders where none previously

existed – and epistemologically – by overwriting long-held and important cultural narratives inextricably situated within the land.

Moreover, in contrast with many traditional Native American societies, the rights and duties of the individual and the nature of private property were important concerns during the Enlightenment in Europe, concurrent with the early period of settlement in what would become the United States. Consequently, the rise of early capitalism shaped and propelled the colonisation of the Americas. John Locke’s highly influential *Second Treatise* considers in depth the idea of private property in relation to government at this time:

God, who hath given the World to Men in common, hath also given them reason to make use of it to the best advantage of Life, and convenience. The Earth, and all that is therein, is given to Men for the Support and Comfort of their being. And though all the Fruits it naturally produces, and Beasts it feeds, belong to Mankind in common, as they are produced by the spontaneous hand of Nature; and no body has originally a private Dominion, exclusive of the rest of Mankind, in any of them, as they are thus in their natural state; yet being given for the use of Men, there must of necessity be a means to *appropriate* them some way or other before they can be of any use, or at all beneficial to any particular Man. (287)

Locke here not only argues that an individual man has the right to “*appropriate*” land and resources for his personal benefit, but further that he must do so because natural resources cannot be “beneficial” without a man’s individual intervention and personal claim. Locke thus implicitly dismisses any notion of communitarian society in spite of England’s own rich tradition of commons, a tradition which, Peter Linebaugh points out, “is primary to human life” (13). Locke’s perspective ultimately reached its logical conclusion with the advent of enclosure throughout England and beyond in the eighteenth century; as Linebaugh continues, “the system of enclosure applied to land where enclosure became commodification. In 1790 there were 25 Parliamentary enclosure acts, and in 1811 there were 133. England became a country of fences, stone

walls, ditches, and hedges” (80). The individualism associated with the conventional idea of landscape thus goes hand-in-hand with the concept of borders.

Locke proceeds to apply his theory specifically to Native American people, stating, “The Fruit, or Venison, which nourishes the wild *Indian*, who knows no Inclosure, and is still a Tenant in common, must be his, and so his, *i.e.* a part of him, that another can no longer have any right to it, before it can do him any good for the support of his Life” (287). Locke suggests here that Native American relationships with land in fact mirror European attitudes, or – inferring from his use of the word “still” – that they will do in the near future. This misconception would contribute to the ‘rational’ justification of the imposition of borders across Native lands.

Locke pursues the idea of property as divinely sanctioned by arguing that it goes against God’s wishes to leave the land in its natural state; he argues, “God gave the World to Men in Common; but since he gave it to them for their benefit, and the greatest Conveniences of Life they were capable to draw from it, it cannot be supposed he meant it should always remain common and uncultivated” (291). Thus, when an individual appropriates land, he pleases God and benefits the wider community. According to this hypothesis, colonial settlers are faultless in taking advantage of the opportunity to claim and cultivate land in the Americas; indeed, the ‘divine right’ driving ‘manifest destiny’ is transmuted into a divine duty.

The idea of the border is essential to Locke’s property-driven approach to land and yet directly contradicts traditional Indigenous relationships with land, as Cheyfitz explains:

I want to emphasize that the more flexible boundaries of kin-ordered societies are grounded in a relation to the land (as place) that is opposed to that contained in the term *property*, which is grounded in a notion not of shifting and open boundaries, but of fixed and closed ones, both of the self and physical property ... For Locke, who summarizes the history of Western thought on the subject, the very mark of property is

the enclosure: the defining, or bounding, of a place that signals the *perceived* settling, or cultivation, of that place. (Cheyfitz, *The Poetics of Imperialism* 54-55)

In this sense, colonial maps, seeking to impose fixity through private property, depend on the concept of borders not only to physically demarcate spatial limits, but also and especially to reproduce the “*perceived* settling, or cultivation” of the Americas in humanised, localised contexts. This emphasis on perception highlights the importance of borders and maps to the production of colonial narratives, and is reflected by the twentieth-century development of the word ‘landscape’ as a verb, meaning to “conceal or embellish” features of an expanse of land in order to create a more “continuous and harmonious landscape” (“landscape”). Mark Warhus’ comment that “Western maps describe land as an object” neatly expresses the incongruity of this approach to land with Native senses of place (139). Indeed, Geoff King notes that “The power to map or to narrate, or to keep other forms of mapping at bay, is a key element in the ability to claim a territory” (139). King’s phrase recalls Silko’s pointed use of the word “territory,” so steeped in colonial associations, in her description of landscape. Thus the contrast between Native senses of place and vernacular landscape on one hand, and conquest-driven colonial conceptions of land on the other, posits borders as a crucial, epistemological difference between Native and colonial approaches to and understandings of landscape and mapping. Erdrich’s vernacular landscape, privileging the subjective, oral storyteller’s perspective with minimal regard to borders, can therefore be aligned with decolonial resistance.

In the first two sections of this chapter, I examine Erdrich’s presentation of the Little No Horse Reservation environment as a vernacular landscape, asserting the continuing Ojibwe presence at Little No Horse and the surviving traditional relationship with the land in defiance of settler colonial authority. In the subsequent

sections, I discuss Erdrich's critique of the themes of surveying, cartography and construction as settler colonial practices which impair Ojibwe senses of place and identity, and I consider the ways in which Erdrich invokes resistance to the borders imposed through those practices.

“Leaving tracks” ⁶

Erdrich engages directly with the role played by maps in the erasure of Indigenous presence from the American landscape, literally and representationally, in *Tracks* and *Four Souls*. Chronologically contiguous, the novels follow Fleur Pillager's struggles to protect her ancestral lands, rich in both resources and Anishinaabe cultural significance. Nanapush, the primary narrator of both novels, presents the loss of Fleur's land as a crisis for the tribe as a whole, as the protection of tribally held land is vital to the physical and cultural survival of the Ojibwe as a community.

Preceding the period in which the novels are set, the US government had pursued Indian removal policy, devised to clear land for settlers by displacing tribes from their homelands and relocating them further west. A key feature of removal was the creation of the Indian reservation system, which gathered tribal communities – already severely depleted by violence, disease, exposure and poverty – onto relatively small expanses of land with inadequate resources (Wunder 24–25). As a result, Native peoples faced further insecurity and deprivation, as Geoff King's summary elucidates:

The remnants of Native American groups were remapped onto the landscape within the confines of officially sanctioned reservations. They were often subjected to further removals, erasures from the map and reinscriptions elsewhere as former reservation land was sought by white settlers. As the geometric outlines of the reservations suggest, the aim of official United States policy was to assimilate their

⁶ Erdrich, *Tracks*, 215.

occupants to the ways of the dominant power rather than to recognize their difference. (147)

King's reference to "reinscriptions" draws a sinister link between Indian removal and Silko's remark that, "Pueblo potters, the creators of petroglyphs and oral narratives, never conceived of removing themselves from the earth and sky" (32). Indeed, the sense of separation and pretence of objective, omniscient vision implied by the concept of 'landscape' create the conditions for the imposition of maps and borders upon Native lands. Erdrich's engagement with borders in relation to colonial and Indigenous types of maps and landscapes challenges the validity of these "erasures" and "reinscriptions" of Native peoples.

Erdrich opens *Tracks* with a charting of the Ojibwe's geographical movements and recent history from Nanapush's perspective, reflecting Anishinaabe epistemology and elements of oral storytelling through his language. Nanapush is a respected tribal elder as well as the primary narrator of both *Tracks* and *Four Souls*, lending his narrative considerable weight. Nanapush is one of the few remaining members of his generation of the Ojibwe, having survived the removal period during which so many of his friends and family die. His account of the tribe's harrowing experiences of migration, poverty and disease positions him as a surviving witness, endowing his narrative with further significance as the story not only of one person, but that of the whole tribe.

Nanapush's story, addressed to his adoptive granddaughter Lulu, firmly roots their respective senses of identity in the environment of the reservation, evoking vernacular landscape. His statement, "We started dying before the snow, and like the snow, we continued to fall" indicates the time of year and relates his people's desperate struggles to the natural world, in keeping with traditional Anishinaabe epistemology (*Tracks* 1). This alignment of temporal context with the natural world

reminds us that, from a traditional Indigenous perspective, the past is ever-present in the land. Nanapush further demonstrates his Anishinaabe epistemology by describing the devastation caused to the Ojibwe by smallpox, forced migration and destructive government policy in relation to the cardinal directions and a traditional Anishinaabe sense of spatiality: he has “survived the spotted sickness from the south, our long fight west to Nadouissioux land where we signed the treaty, and then a wind from the east, bringing exile in a storm of government papers” (*Tracks* 1).⁷ He goes on to demonstrate the respect accorded to natural forces in Anishinaabe tradition, lamenting, “we thought disaster must surely have spent its force” and acquiescing to “limitless” luck as an unpredictable and uncontrollable natural power. Playing on the idea of the border as a corruption of balance, Nanapush suggests that the world has breached natural boundaries and entered a new era: “we thought ... disease must have claimed all of the Anishinabe that the earth could hold and bury. But the earth is limitless and so is luck and so were our people once” (*Tracks* 1). The image of the earth as an inexhaustible grave perverts the idea of “limitless” land, in relation to both traditional Anishinaabe ideas about interconnection and balance and colonial narratives of ‘virgin’ land. Colonial settlers’ conceptualisation of the ‘new world’ as “limitless” in terms of property and resources undermines Anishinaabe spatiality, before literally bringing an end to this limitlessness from Nanapush’s perspective through the imposition of spatial boundaries and colonial epistemology. Anishinaabe tradition teaches Nanapush to accept the outcome of natural forces, but disease and migration cause such devastation to the Ojibwe that Nanapush is ultimately forced to reassess his understanding of the Ojibwe’s place in the world.

⁷ Beidler and Barton explain that the term “Nadouissioux land” describes an area inhabited by Sioux or Ojibwe people.

Accordingly, Nanapush supplements his Anishinaabe epistemology with non-Indigenous temporality, telling us, “what descended from the north in 1912 seemed impossible” (*Tracks* 1). Michael D. McNally points out that the north is associated with aging and winter in Anishinaabe tradition, framing Nanapush’s identification of the winter of 1912 as the beginning of the tuberculosis outbreak on the reservation within Ojibwe epistemology (54-56). The year 1912 is crucial to the narrative of *Tracks* on a much broader scale, however, as it marks twenty-five years since the passing of the 1887 General Allotment Act, also known as the Dawes Act. This Act was intended “to provide for the allotment of lands in severalty to Indians on the various reservations, and to extend the protection of the laws of the United States and the Territories over the Indians” (Otis 177). The two principal aims of the Act were to divide tribal lands held in common into individually owned tracts, and to cement the authority of the US government over tribal groups and lands. The Act did not grant ownership of these lands to tribal members in perpetuity; allotment simply decreed that “the United States does and will hold the land thus allotted, for the period of twenty-five years, in trust for the sole use and benefit of the Indian to whom such allotment shall have been made, ... and that at the expiration of said period the United States will convey the same by patent to said Indian, or his heirs as aforesaid, in fee” (Otis 180). After twenty-five years – in 1912, the year specified and repeated by Nanapush in his opening words – the land could be sold out of tribal ownership. This approach aimed to instil a sense of individualism among members of traditionally community-orientated tribes, ensuring the continual fragmentation and reduction of tribally held land. By explicitly situating Nanapush’s charting of the history of the reservation with reference to this pivotal year, Erdrich emphasises the Dawes Act as a

critical moment in Ojibwe history and indicates a correlation between events local to the reservation and colonial strategy on a national scale.

Throughout *Tracks*, Nanapush is wary of the individualism introduced by allotment as a destructive influence on Ojibwe senses of identity and place. Erdrich presents individualism as a negative force through Nanapush's isolation; he moves from the first person plural at the beginning of his narrative – “We started dying before the snow”; “On the reservation, where we were forced close together” – to the first person single: “My own family was wiped out one by one, leaving only Nanapush. And after, although I had lived no more than fifty winters, I was considered an old man” (*Tracks* 1–2). Having been brought up as a member of a clan, Nanapush is left to continue his life as an individual due to the loss of his family and friends. Nanapush reinforces the pain of his loss later, when Fleur's daughter Lulu is being baptised: “I thought about my wives, especially White Beads and our daughter” (*Tracks* 61). The early death of Nanapush's daughter is disturbing, and makes his relatively long life all the lonelier. Similarly, allotment has served to separate Nanapush's wife, Margaret, from her family: “Since her older children were all gone, moved to their allotment land in Montana, she wanted a place right here that she could trust for her old age” (*Tracks* 57). Erdrich's use of the word “trust” here subverts the government's claim to hold land “in trust” for the benefit of Native individuals, belying allotment as a manipulation and betrayal of Native peoples. The fragmentation of her family leaves Margaret more isolated and vulnerable in her old age, making the precariousness of allotment all the more urgent. Nanapush strives to combat his isolation, however, by acting as a father figure to Fleur Pillager, and later to Fleur's lover and Margaret Kashpaw's son Eli, as well as giving Lulu the Nanapush clan name to re-establish his

lineage. In this way, reflecting the unconventionality of Erdrich's family tree, Nanapush resists the individualism that allotment aims to establish among the tribe.

Erdrich emphasises the importance of vernacular landscape to Nanapush by explicitly linking his personal and tribal senses of identity with the land in his retelling of the story of the character Under the Ground, Fleur Pillager's ancestor, in *Four Souls*. Nanapush tells us:

I'm going to lay down the roots here. I'm going to explain things. This is where the story fills in deeper, where you see through the past ...

In the time before the last treaty came about, there was a great healing that took place in the camp of Under the Ground. It made us weep, it made us sorry, it made us wonder who we are. It made confusion between the dead and the living, this world and the other alongside our ordinary life. And yet, in spite of those conflicts, what happened that night gave slender hope on the reservation land that the old ones called ishkonigan, leftover, scraps so poor even the greediest would cast these bits aside. (*Four Souls* 48)

Nanapush's references to the ability to "see through the past" and "confusion between the dead and the living" evoke an Indigenous vernacular landscape, defying western epistemological boundaries between and within time and space. The spiritual realm and fluid temporality that Nanapush refers to envelop and contextualise the reservation in the present. However, the fact that the "great healing" occurs prior to the settlement of the "last treaty" suggests, like Nanapush's opening story in *Tracks*, that settler expansion has ushered in a new era for the Ojibwe. Even at that time the tribe could muster only "slender hope" for the future. Yet despite Euro-American society's ongoing attempts to divest the Ojibwe of even their "leftover" land, Nanapush's use of this story to "lay down the roots," to connect himself and the community with the past, the land and the spirit world, testifies to the continuing existence of "the other [world] alongside our ordinary life," and therefore to the endurance of Ojibwe sovereignty.

Under the Ground performs the audacious act of being buried alive, searching for help after losing her mother and many other tribal members to illness. She spends four days and four nights buried with a straw to breathe through, and is close to death when she is removed. This, Nanapush tells us, “was how she got her power and her name changed from Fanny Migwans to Anamaiikiikwe, Under the Ground” (*Four Souls* 50). The burial places Under the Ground in physical communion with the earth, and therefore also with her ancestors and both the past and the future of the Ojibwe. This communion results in Under the Ground gaining sacred knowledge in order to become a healer; “That was how she got her chance to doctor. She was told the names of plants down there” (*Four Souls* 50). Nanapush clearly accords Under the Ground’s experience with greater significance: her sacred healing ability allows the Ojibwe to nurture greater hope for their survival. In this sense, Erdrich suggests that hope for the Ojibwe literally lies within the land.

Nanapush emphasises Under the Ground’s importance to the Ojibwe by reflecting Anishinaabe epistemology through the trope of the number four: he describes Under the Ground as having been “born upon the great red island, fourth daughter of a fourth daughter in a line of dawn woman healers going back across the miigis water and farther yet, back before the oldest remember” (*Four Souls* 48). In her forties, Under the Ground gives birth to a daughter, Anaquot, who, at the age of eleven, becomes gravely ill with what seems to be tuberculosis (*Four Souls* 53). Under the Ground heals Anaquot by cutting each of her arms deeply four times and then, according to Nanapush’s testimony, throwing out “one of her daughter’s souls ... I saw her grab an animal struggling in the girl’s blankets and then she threw it hard at the western wall – through the wall – it was gone” (*Four Souls* 56). Anaquot is then given the name Four Souls and goes on to become Fleur’s mother and namesake.

Erdrich's linking of the number four with the healer figure is of great significance. The Medicine Wheel, as Lisa Monchalin (Algonquin-Huron-Métis) explains, is common to Ojibwe and other Indigenous peoples and represents a set of teachings that emphasise interconnections between all aspects of human and natural life, cyclicity and balance. The Medicine Wheel is divided into four quadrants and teaches that the number four is sacred in Anishinaabe tradition, representing the cardinal directions, seasons, stages of life and moon phases, among other phenomena (34). Erdrich clearly positions Nanapush's narrative within an active Anishinaabe epistemological tradition and highlights the enduring significance and power of Anishinaabe place-based spirituality.

Moreover, as Under the Ground interacts with the earth, so Nanapush enters into the story by detailing his own relationship with Under the Ground, having witnessed the healing of her daughter when he accompanied his uncle, another healer, to Under the Ground's house. Erdrich's use of traditional Anishinaabe temporality brings the story into a constant present, reminding us that the spirit world is intrinsically connected with both the ancestors of the Ojibwe and the land. As Nanapush states, "the other Four Souls lived beneath the life of Fleur Pillager" (*Four Souls* 57). His telling of the story not only evokes the omnipresence of the spiritual realm, therefore, but also allows him to cross between his present reality and the past world of the story. Thus, Nanapush's story functions as a literal enactment of the intertwining of Native human consciousness with the land, demonstrating the paramount importance of Erdrich's vernacular landscape.

Such stories, in which Nanapush attempts to guide the tribe by channelling the experiences and wisdom of past generations in communion with the earth, gain further

significance in relation to Nanapush's functioning as an iteration of the traditional trickster figure Nanabush. According to Armand Garnet Ruffo (Ojibwe):

What is most obvious to those familiar with Anishinawbe culture is Erdrich's variation on the name Nanabush ... Erdrich playfully changes the name of Nanabush to Nanapush (in good old trickster fashion) and injects her story with another layer of meaning. Perhaps the most significant fact is that in his (or her) role as 'trickster' he is both a cultural hero and a teacher of human nature -- and existence in general -- among the Anishinawbe people. (Armstrong 166)

The trickster helps inform and guide the tribe, and accordingly Nanapush frequently helps the community to maintain an awareness of and connection with Anishinaabe tradition. The trickster figure has additional significance, as LaLonde explains: "The figure of the trickster introduces chance and possibility, upsets binaries, counters terminal creeds, and establishes the primacy of humor over tragedy ... Active and subversive, trickster shimmers at the treeline, cavorts and beckons from the limen, and shocks, tricks, and teases us into an(other) awareness of the Native" (19). LaLonde here emphasises that the trickster functions as a conduit between the immediate, physical world and the spirit world. Nanapush fulfils this function by allowing other characters to engage with history, tradition and identity through his stories, encouraging them to maintain a strong sense of place and to protect the land. Nanapush's overarching function in the novels is best expressed by LaLonde's statement, "Trickster stands against the law of authority and the dominant culture" (141). In this sense, Nanapush's vernacular landscape -- evoking the spiritual realm and fluid temporality that defy the parameters of colonial epistemology -- can be interpreted as a subversive, specifically Ojibwe-centred form of decolonial resistance.

Nanapush's role as an anti-authoritarian trickster figure and his expression of decolonial resistance through vernacular landscape in *Tracks* and *Four Souls* form a

link between Erdrich's challenging of the colonial landscape and Owens's radical reimagining of the frontier from an Indigenous perspective. Owens argues:

‘Frontier’ stands ... in neat opposition to the concept of ‘territory’ as territory is imagined and given form by the colonial enterprise in America. Whereas frontier is always unstable, multidirectional, hybridized, characterized by heteroglossia, and indeterminate, territory is clearly mapped, fully imagined as a place of containment, invented to control and subdue the dangerous potentialities of imagined Indians. (*Mixedblood Messages* 26)

Due to its connotations with European conquest and colonial historical narratives, the term ‘frontier’ is clearly and deeply problematic in relation to Native American literature, but Owens's interpretation emphasises the fluid and uncontrollable nature of the frontier, in contrast with the fixed borders that attend territory. Owens reclaims the concept to express the movement, subjectivity and interrelation that characterise Indigenous relationships with land. This reappraisal undermines the perception that the frontier definitively closed in 1890, as Frederick Jackson Turner famously declared, and, by extension, colonial narratives of American landscape and history more generally (Turner 22).

Wolfe points out that the conventional narrative of the frontier, when examined in relation to the development of Native American reservations, effectively situates the end of the frontier at the foot of tribal reservations:

Repeat removals, excisions from reservations, grants of the same land to different tribes, all conducted against a background of endless pressure for new or revised treaties, were the symptoms of removal's temporariness, which kept time with the westward march of the nation. In the end, though, the western frontier met the one moving back in from the Pacific, and there was simply no space left for removal. The frontier had become coterminous with reservation boundaries. (399)

While Wolfe's summary makes for sobering reading, Owens raises the possibility of a frontier that does not terminate at reservation boundaries, but rather meets and interacts with them, conferring agency upon the reservation environment. This

premise converts reservation boundaries from fixed borders back into a frontier; from stasis and structure to flux and movement. On a more local level, the reinterpretation of the frontier subversively empowers intersectional figures like Nanapush, whose ability to transcend and mediate across spatial and spiritual boundaries through the vernacular landscape of his stories makes a mockery of colonial spatial markers like allotment borders.

“Elusive warriors/ at the tree line” ⁸

While Erdrich evokes the landscape of the reservation and recounts the effects of the Dawes Act on the Ojibwe primarily through Nanapush’s narration, it is Fleur’s relationship with land that drives these novels. Fleur lives alone on ancestral Pillager lands, designated by the government as four individual allotments, on the shore of Lake Matchimanito, after her parents and siblings die of smallpox. Fleur cannot pay the allotment fees levied to maintain her title to the land and it is sold to John James Mauser, a settler whom Fleur later marries in order to exact revenge and reclaim her land. The importance of the Pillager lands to both Fleur and the tribe is heightened due to her role as sole survivor and protector of the Pillager legacy.

Moreover, Lake Matchimanito is vital to the Ojibwe of Little No Horse. Members of the tribe fish its waters and hunt in the surrounding forest, and the lake is inhabited by the water manitou, or spirit, Misshepesu. Melissa K. Nelson (Turtle Mountain Chippewa) describes an Anishinaabe water manitou called “*Mizhi-Bezheu*, the ‘Great Lynx’, who lives at the bottom of the sea and any water body. It is thought that this spirit causes drownings and other water accidents” (71). Closely resembling

⁸ Vizenor, *Bear Island*, 15.

“*Mizhi-Bezheu*,” in addition to being deadly, Misshepeshu is unknowable; he changes form and behaves unpredictably. The co-narrator of *Tracks*, Pauline, tells us that Fleur is acknowledged to have a special connection with Misshepeshu, who is feared by other members of the tribe. Nelson points out, however, that “More than being feared, these spirits need to be respected to help keep people careful and humble” (Nelson 71). This context illuminates Fleur’s extraordinary ability to survive what should be death by drowning as a unique power derived from her deep spiritual connection with and respect for the land.

Fleur’s connection with Misshepeshu grants her access to a realm that most can only enter once, without return; having survived drowning three times, Fleur is able to cross into the spirit world, or afterlife, and back into the world of the living. Thus, Fleur’s profoundly important relationship with the spirit world at Matchimanito endows her with a uniquely powerful mobility that reflects Anishinaabe teachings about land and water. According to Nelson, “Water is so essential to the Anishinaabeg that it infuses our worldviews and language. In *A Concise Dictionary of Minnesota Ojibwe* ... there are twenty-six separate entries for the definition of water. Most of these words refer to things coming in and out of the water” (Nelson 70). What’s more, in addition to providing sustenance through plant and animal life, Nelson notes that “the Anishinaabeg traditional territory is infused with major water ways,” and therefore, “Water was our primary form of transportation” (Nelson 72). In stark contrast with the prescription, fixity and commodification associated with allotment, then, Fleur’s connection with the lake illustrates the inherent, fluid and uncontainable power of the environment in Anishinaabe tradition.

This dynamic reflects Erdrich’s experience of the links between people and place in Ojibwe culture. In *Books and Islands*, Erdrich relates an encounter with a

traditional Anishinaabe healer whose sense of identity is defined by his relationship with the lake by which he lives: his “people were the lake, and the lake was them. At one time, everyone who lived near the lake was essentially made of the lake. As the people lived off fish, animals, the lake’s water and water plants for medicine, they were literally cell by cell composed of the lake” (34). Such a profound relationship with the land reinforces the indivisibility of the Ojibwe people from their surroundings expressed by vernacular landscape. Indeed, when Fleur recognises that in order to reclaim her land she must first leave it, she takes with her, “weed-wrapped stones from the lake-bottom, bundles of roots, a coil of rags, and the umbrella that had shaded her baby. The grave markers [Nanapush] had scratched, four crosshatched bears and a marten, were fastened on the side of the cart” (*Tracks* 224). Tokens from the lake and land are as important as familial objects of remembrance, and each gains significance in relation to the other. As Adamson elaborates:

For the Shoshonean and other American Indian peoples, the fight for sacred places and traditional homelands is not simply about preserving valued environmental qualities in specific locations or gaining deep experiential knowledge of nature. For them, unique geologic features within their homelands are often alive with the mythic, historic, and sacred meanings of their cultures; these places are expressive of a particular way of life, and when threatened, they become symbols of the threat to distinctive cultural identities. (*American Indian Literature* 71)

In this way, the imposition upon Pillager lands disrupts Fleur’s relationship with the land and her ancestors. Thus Fleur’s devotion to Matchimanito reflects the importance of the land to both her sense of identity and the cultural survival of the tribe.

In addition to Fleur’s staunch traditionalism, her role as the novel’s non-narrating protagonist positions her as a sacred archetypal figure. This accords Fleur significant power and lends a greater, community-orientated impetus to her personal mission. As Pauline tells us, “She was the one who closed the door or swung it open.

Between the people and the gold-eyed creature in the lake, the spirit which they said was neither good nor bad but simply had an appetite, Fleur was the hinge” (*Tracks* 139). Fleur’s control over movement between the natural and spirit worlds suggests that Fleur’s mission to reclaim her land is of much broader significance than any personal vendetta. Thus, we can infer that Erdrich’s depiction of Fleur as a powerful survivor with sovereign authority of the lake is a direct challenge to settler colonial conceptions and (ab)uses of land and Native identity.

Erdrich demonstrates the radical power Fleur derives from the land in more detail when she embarks upon a journey along the three-day road. The three-day road is normally only accessible to people as they die – a single, one-way journey – but Erdrich’s engagement with the concept challenges conventional non-Native understandings of the relationship between death and our environments. The three-day road reveals the continuing existence of the dead in the world, both as a physical part of the land and as a spiritual presence to whom living characters can appeal.

Erdrich first makes reference to the three-day road early in *Tracks*, when Nanapush rescues Fleur and mourns her deceased family: “I touched each bundle in the gloom of the cabin, and wished each spirit a good journey on the three-day road, the old-time road, so well-trampled by our people this deadly season” (*Tracks* 3). Nanapush presents the three-day road as a physical journey towards death. Later in the novel, we return to the three-day road as Fleur enters catastrophic premature labour in her second pregnancy and Pauline attempts to help her. Erdrich presents Fleur and Pauline’s journey along the three-day road as distinctly physical. Pauline details the sensory experiences of the walk, highlighting the pain and effort involved:

She was barefoot, with no real coat. My clothes were newly washed and heavy. Yet I was cold. The ice on the crust of snow cut my ankles through my stockings, and the wind shook needles against my face. I thought I’d turn back but then the trees groaned and whined, almost

covering the baby's cries, and my steps quickened to find if it would stay alive ...

I had been everywhere on the reservation, but never before on this road, which was strange because it was so wide and so furiously trodden that the snow was beaten to a rigid ice. I imitated Fleur when she pulled two pieces of bark off a tree, tied them around her feet with a strip of her skirt. (*Tracks* 159)

The three-day road draws Fleur and Pauline into a position of vulnerability in relation to the land. They feel the effects of exposure to the elements, they utilise the physical resources around them to enable their journey, and their existence and emotions – exemplified by the baby's cries – are equated with and overshadowed by the natural world in the form of the waving trees. The spirit world of the reservation is thus explicitly rooted within the physical realm, and the characters' passage into the spirit world emphasises the essential parity between human life and the physical world.

The passage along the road undertaken by the characters depends on Ojibwe identity; not only would the road be inaccessible to a non-Native character unfamiliar with Anishinaabe traditional knowledge and spirituality, but its very existence would not be recognised. Fleur and Pauline's emphatically physical journey and the sensorially rich description of the road are testament to the presence and influence of Anishinaabe culture on the reservation. The interactions between characters and the land – the pine needles in the wind, the "beaten" snow, the use of the bark as snow shoes – demonstrate reciprocity between the land and the characters.

The three-day road, inherent in the earth from the Ojibwe perspective, further challenges the authority of colonial borders. The three-day road is clearly uncharted; it is unknowable to non-Native authorities, including those who measure and map the land. The three-day road also disrupts non-Native temporality; characters known to be dead are present and seemingly alive along the road. Moreover, as Fleur and Pauline walk, they see the land as it was in the past: "We passed dark and vast seas of moving

buffalo and not one torn field, but only earth, as it was before. The grass was high and brown some places, sheltered from the snow. Farther on, the snow was drifted in long wings, or swept bare. There were no fences, no poles, no lines, no tracks” (*Tracks* 159). Here, Erdrich suggests that the relationship between the land and the Ojibwe is constant; tradition and identity cannot be subjected to any authority. This implication calls to mind Allen’s understanding of Indigenous borders as distinct from and impervious to colonial borders. Allen writes, “perhaps, as our traditions have always been about liminality, about voyages between this world and many other realms of being, perhaps crossing boundaries is the first and foremost basis of our tradition” (12). Erdrich’s three-day road reflects the centrality of movement and adaptation that Allen highlights here. By presenting the land in relation to Anishinaabe spirituality, Erdrich subsumes the borders imposed by settler colonial powers into Ojibwe history and identity. This dismissal of colonial structures precludes allotment’s purpose of assimilation.

Fleur’s radical mobility extends to her own physical form. Erdrich repeatedly likens Fleur to a bear and a wolf throughout both *Tracks* and *Four Souls*. Fleur’s “haunted, white, wolf grin” is presented as a Pillager trait, evoking her strength and aligning her determination with the traditional and highly skilled practice of hunting, as well as drawing on the wolf’s association with community as a pack animal (*Four Souls* 3). Erdrich’s association of Fleur with a bear is more literal; Pauline states that Fleur “got herself into some half-forgotten medicine” enabling her to transform physically so that she can hunt and survive alone:

She laid the heart of an owl on her tongue so she could see at night, and went out, hunting, not even in her own body. We know for sure because the next morning, in the snow or dust, we followed the tracks of her bare feet and saw where they changed, where the claws sprang out, the pad broadened and pressed into the dirt. By night we heard her chuffing cough, the bear cough. (*Tracks* 12)

Pauline's description of Fleur's metamorphosis emphasises not only its physicality, but also the transitional movements that compose the process. Pauline cites evidence of where Fleur's feet "changed," accentuating the activity in the verbs "sprang", "broadened" and "pressed". The transformation is not instant or unexplained, but clearly and traceably a sequence of physical transfigurations explicitly located within the landscape. Moreover, Fleur does not experience the metamorphosis passively; she is an active participant. She prepares herself for the metamorphosis and purposefully goes out to hunt. Fleur's physical transformation is both anchored in the physical world and contingent upon movement for its enactment.

Fleur's association with the bear is of particular significance. Nora Baker Barry points out that "In Chippewa religion there are five great beings", one of whom is "Sacred Bear" (26). Fleur's transformation into a bear thus heightens the significance of the metamorphosis; like her would-be drownings, Fleur's metamorphosis allows her to enter into communion with the spirit world and to derive power from it. Barry elaborates on the bear's significance: "In the rituals of the Grand Medicine Society, bears serve as guides, barriers, the breakers of barriers, and guardians of portals to spiritual power. Great Bear could restore life, and the power of immortality and resurrection are associated also with the orders of the *midewiwin* (26)."⁹ Fleur's association with the healing bear figure and her ability to literally metamorphose further illustrate the impotence of imposed borders and the Euro-American conception of landscape. As Jeanne Smith points out, "Transformation ... empowers because it signifies ultimate control of one's own physical boundaries" (20). Fleur's metamorphosis is thus a powerful declaration of self-determination and

⁹ "Midewiwin" refers to the Grand Medicine Society, a religious society associated with the Ojibwe.

an irrefutable claim to the land. This focus on the relationship between a spiritual tradition – the ability to metamorphose and knowledge of the methods to do so – and physical movement in connection with the land relates Erdrich’s vernacular landscapes to Vizenor’s transmotion as a function of survivance.

Owens elaborates on the role this highly charged mobility plays not only among Native peoples, but also and especially among those who are of mixed heritage, like both Fleur and Erdrich:

I come from families of mixed-bloods, Oklahoma Cherokee on my mother’s side and Mississippi Choctaw on my father’s. Anyone who has ever tried to mix disparate elements knows that it is very hard to achieve a pure blend. In the end, despite the long struggle for ‘survivance,’ there are often gaps and voids, dangerous pockets of emptiness that can burst unpredictably, but the process of mixing itself requires motion, the swirl of the blender, the whirl of contrary elements in the bucket or bowl. Mixedbloods, I am suggesting, are the products of motion, or what Vizenor, in *Fugitive Poses*, calls ‘transmotion.’ (*Mixedblood Messages* 149)

Owens’s presentation of mixedblood people as “products of motion” carries with it both Native peoples’ complex histories of nomadism and migration and the significance of mutability in Native cultures, as expressed by Silko. This understanding of mobility contrasts with the colonial desire for fixity, as epitomised by borders.

Nanapush and Fleur demonstrate a defiant fidelity to traditional Anishinaabe epistemology and anchor their respective senses of place and identity within this epistemology. The Little No Horse Reservation as a spatial and social construct represents Euro-American colonial principles of territory, property, individualism and demarcated borders; in subversive contrast, Erdrich’s vernacular landscape emphasises human and environmental interconnection, intergenerational temporality, tribally-specific subjectivity and flux; in short, transmotion and survivance.

“plot out the deepest water” ¹⁰

Erdrich contrasts Nanapush and Fleur’s vernacular landscapes with property boundaries and colonial mapping through the theme of surveying in *Tracks*. Early in the novel, Nanapush recounts the surveying of the reservation as part of the process of the tribe’s dispossession:

Starvation makes fools of anyone. In the past, some had sold their allotment for one hundred poundweight of flour. Others, who were desperate to hold on, now urged that we get together and buy back our land, or at least pay a tax and refuse the lumbering money that would sweep the marks of our boundaries off the map like a pattern of straws. Many were determined not to allow the hired surveyors, or even our own people, to enter the deepest bush. They spoke of the guides Hat and Many Women, now dead, who had taken the government pay.

But that spring outsiders went in as before, and some of us too. The purpose was to measure the lake. (*Tracks* 8)

Erdrich presents the surveying of the land as unwelcome and exploitative, connecting the practice of surveying with the figurative map on one hand, and literal starvation on the other. Notably, control of food supplies has historically been an actively pursued method of American settler colonial strategies for the management of reservations; Miner identifies the wiindigoo figure’s association with hunger as an outcome of European settler powers’ strategic use of starvation, with the aim of keeping “Native peoples too wanting and weakened to risk insurrection” (“Consuming the Wiindigoo” 230). Thus, like other aspects of Indian removal, surveying furthers the interests of capitalist, colonial society and strengthens the authority of colonial conceptions of land while jeopardising the physical and cultural survival of the Ojibwe. The “boundaries” Nanapush refers to are not only allotment borders, signifying the tribe’s hard-fought endurance and continuing claim to the land, but also

¹⁰ Erdrich, *Tracks*, 8.

the boundaries that reflect the clans' respective relationships with the land, their history and epistemology. The tribe's protectiveness over "the deepest bush", epitomised by Fleur's remote cabin, is suggestive not of a materialistic jealousy, but of parts of the land as yet unknown and unexploited. The Ojibwe's reluctance to allow even tribal members to survey the deepest parts of the reservation indicates that these areas are revered as a last bastion of Anishinaabe identity. The surveyors ultimately succeed in accessing and measuring the remote parts of the reservation, however, suggesting that further fragmentation of the reservation is inevitable.

Erdrich demonstrates that the surveys definitively alter the tribe's profoundly important collective sense of place, resulting in a sense of cultural displacement in addition to the legacy of spatial displacement. As Nanapush's introductory mapping of the reservation implies that the Ojibwe have entered a new, radically different era, so the surveying disorients Fleur's reclusive cousin Moses Pillager, who "didn't know where he was anymore, this place of reservation surveys or the other place, boundless, where the dead sit talking, see too much, and regard the living as fools" (*Tracks* 7-8). The reservation, once defined by natural order and the Ojibwe's history in the land, is now defined by measuring and mapping; the only other place available to the Ojibwe is the afterlife. Moses's radical sense of displacement can be read as a literal erasure from the colonial map.

The surveys also function as a link between colonial mapping and its human effects. Nanapush notes, "Every year there are more who come looking for profit, who draw lines across the land with their strings and yellow flags" (*Tracks* 9). The tangibility of the "strings and yellow flags" that so disturb Nanapush draws attention to the physicality of the act of surveying. As Cosgrove points out, "Survey is an embodied process involving direct, sensual contact with the spaces to be mapped"

(159). While allotment borders could conceivably be dismissed as imaginary boundaries, then, the physical presence of the surveyors evokes the power and reach of colonial US authority and the permeability of the reservation border.

Erdrich's specification of the lake as the site to be surveyed raises Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* as an important intertext. *Walden* is a canonical American text associated with transcendentalist ideas about solitude and nature, in which Thoreau celebrates self-sufficiency and the practices of rudimentary construction and agriculture in rural Connecticut. Thoreau iconises Walden pond, on the shore of which he builds his cabin, and treats surveying the pond as a means of becoming more knowledgeable about, and therefore authoritative over, the land he inhabits. Reflecting Locke's attitude towards property and cultivation, Thoreau exhibits a comfortable confidence in the validity of his intervention, approaching disdain for those who had not previously undertaken the project:

As I was desirous to recover the long lost bottom of Walden Pond, I surveyed it carefully, before the ice broke up, early in '46, with compass and chain and sounding line. There have been many stories told about the bottom, or rather no bottom, of this pond, which certainly had no foundation for themselves. It is remarkable how long men will believe in the bottomlessness of a pond without taking the trouble to sound it. (*Walden* 285)

Thoreau's specification of the season, year and his equipment serve to validate his findings, which he sets out in detail, and also, implicitly, his purpose: the words "sounding," "stories," "bottom," and "foundation" chime to undermine the locals' narrative of the pond, echoing colonial overwritings of place through cartography. Indeed, demonstrating his professional training as a land surveyor, Thoreau published his own map of the pond in the first edition of *Walden* (286).¹¹ The declaration of Walden as empirically measured and the publication of the results in print effectively

¹¹ See Appendix 3.

dismiss the local storytellers' relationships with the pond, reflecting the function of colonial cartography in relation to Indigenous lands.

In contrast with Thoreau's views on Walden pond, Ojibwe stories about Lake Matchimanito are the basis for its importance in *Tracks* and *Four Souls*, and Erdrich presents the measuring of the lake as foolish and intrusive. Elements of Erdrich's presentation of Lake Matchimanito echo Walden pond; both are remote bodies of water that deliver sustenance to local people and also carry cultural importance. Until it is surveyed, little is known about Lake Matchimanito beyond its social and cultural relevance to the Ojibwe, in keeping with traditional Native mapping techniques. Nanapush presents the arrival of surveyors as a violation: "But that spring outsiders went in as before, and some of us too. The purpose was to measure the lake. Only now they walked upon the fresh graves of Pillagers, crossed death roads to plot out the deepest water where the lake monster, Misshepeshu, hid himself and waited" (*Tracks* 8). Nanapush also foresees the inevitable progression from the measuring of the land to its loss, telling Fleur, "The land will be sold and measured" (*Tracks* 8). Erdrich here clearly aligns surveying with Native dispossession and, by extension, with the sacrilegious disturbance of the bodies of the dead.

Erdrich undermines the assumption of intellectual superiority borne by narratives like Thoreau's and proclaims the veracity and power of the Ojibwe's cultural associations with the lake by presenting the complacent surveyors with unpleasant consequences. Reflecting the elongated temporality and deeper sense of interconnection between people and land that characterise Anishinaabe epistemology, Erdrich reminds us that settlers do not know the land as well or in the same ways as the Ojibwe, as ultimately "the guides Hat and Many Women" die and "those who come looking for profit ... disappear sometimes" (*Tracks* 8, 9). Newcomers who make

assumptions about and adaptations to the land, as well as members of the Ojibwe who abandon traditional epistemology, encounter powerful forces that they do not understand; in this case, the water manitou Misshepesu. Their disappearance, combined with Nanapush's traditional, holistic sense of temporality, emphasises the surveyors' mortality and indicates that the land and its spiritual significance to the Ojibwe will outlast colonial incursions. By undermining the agency of the surveyors – and, by association, of Thoreau – Erdrich reminds us that the borders and maps created according to colonial conceptions of land are disastrously flawed in not taking account of Indigenous vernacular landscapes.

“like a pattern of straws” ¹²

Erdrich emphasises the disparity between the Ojibwe relationship with the land of the Little No Horse Reservation and non-Native representations of the land through the image of a cartographical map, the ultimate product of allotment and surveys. Nanapush is presented with the map towards the end of *Tracks*, when the Catholic priest Father Damien visits Nanapush and his clan to warn them about developments in land ownership on the reservation. Father Damien's map depicts every allotment on the reservation and its official status:

Then [Father Damien] pulled out the annual fee lists and foreclosure notices sent by the Agent and showed us how most families, at the end of this long winter, were behind in what they owed, how some had lost their allotments. We traced the list until we found the names we sought – Pillager, Kashpaw, Nanapush. All were there, figures and numbers, and all impossible ...

We watched as Damien unfolded and smoothed the map flat upon the table. In the dizzy smell of coffee roasting, of bannock cooking, we examined the lines and circles of the homesteads paid up – Morrissey, Pukwan, Hat, Lazarres everywhere. They were colored

¹² Erdrich, *Tracks*, 8.

green. The lands that were gone out of the tribe – to deaths with no heirs, to sales, to the lumber company – were painted a pale and rotten pink. Those in question, a sharper yellow. (172–173)

The map is not just an image representing colonial cartography in general, but a physical manifestation of the conceptualisation of Native land as property, as prefigured by Locke. Whereas earlier colonial maps represent the American continents as empty and ready for settlement on a large, abstract scale, Erdrich shows through this map that removal, allotment and the fragmentation of tribally held land operate on a distressingly local level. Father Damien's map effectively functions as a guide for those interested in selling or buying land, as the areas without a sanctioned proprietor are distinctly coded, as are allotments whose owners are vulnerable. The dramatic contrast between Erdrich's sensorial description of the starving family's meal and the inanimate paper map draws a link between borders, dispossession and bureaucracy: Father Damien arrives at Margaret's request, having "signed a paper" to help her access the family's food rations (*Tracks* 172). This development suggests that bureaucratic, property-driven colonial epistemology, having reshaped representations of and relationships with the land, has now permeated the daily lives of the Ojibwe.

In addition to the deeply local, immediate and visceral implications of the map from the family's perspective, Erdrich uses the map to situate the challenges faced by the Nanapush clan in relation to wider contexts:

With her fingernail, Margaret traced the print she could not read, polished first the small yellow Kashpaw square, then tapped the doubled green square of Morrisseys, and gestured at Fleur and Eli to compare.

'They're taking it over.'

It was like her to notice only the enemies that she could fight, those that shared her blood however faintly. My concern was the lapping pink, the color of the skin of lumberjacks and bankers, the land we would never walk or hunt, from which our children would be barred. (*Tracks* 173)

Nanapush's experience and awareness of political developments make him deeply apprehensive of the situation illustrated by the map. The coding of land traditionally held by the Ojibwe – vital not only to their way of life but to the very survival of the tribe – in the colour of white skin forges a sinister association with racial segregation. The “lapping” pink suggests the expanse of land lost to the tribe, overtaking the other colours on the map, but it also reminds us that the reservation is a human network and a living environment. We can imagine the water at Lake Matchimanito “lapping” the shore. The proximity of the word “lapping” to the words “blood” and “skin” further emphasises the living world of the reservation, while another meaning of “lapping,” compounded with the colour pink, calls to mind a tongue, accentuating the preceding passage in which the clan eats bread after days of starvation. The “pale and rotten” shade signifies the deception that has created these circumstances.

Nanapush is correct to be wary of the expanding pink sections, understanding that the borders on the map denote colonial dominance. In terms of cartography, the British Empire has traditionally been signified by the colour pink on world maps; Arthur Jay Klinghoffer explains:

maps were intrinsically tied to imperial designs ... Maps of the British Empire, centred on a Greenwich prime meridian, often featured shipping and telegraphic links, since strategic power and entrepreneurship went hand in hand. Components of the Empire were presented in striking red or pink, as coloring reinforced the concept of ‘Rule Britannia!’ (78–79)

The implication of British imperialism staking a claim to specific, local tracts of Ojibwe land exposes the predication of colonialism on the idea of property and the impact of global structures on local environments and living communities. The scale of the context around the Nanapush clan's dispossession exposes the profound inequality at the core of colonial attitudes to land and property.

Erdrich's association between the British Empire and individual allotments on the map also indicts Thoreau's endorsement of 'improvement': he states, for example, "One man says, in his despair or indifference to life, take up a handful of the earth at your feet, and paint your house that color ... Better paint your house your own complexion; let it turn pale or blush for you" (48). Thoreau, in keeping with settler colonial objectives, desires to build a house that reflects his race and identity, disregarding the land in its natural state as well as those who precede him in the land. What's more, the very act of modifying the landscape – literally landscaping – in this way is, in terms of Locke's views on property, validation of settlers' presence in, utilisation and overwriting of the land.

“an entire (un) culture” ¹³

Erdrich explores links between 'improving' the landscape, the overwriting of vernacular landscapes, and settler colonial claims of legitimacy further through the theme of construction in *Four Souls*, beginning the novel with Nanapush's outline of the land that will become the site for John James Mauser's grand mansion. Nanapush again depicts an Ojibwe-specific vernacular landscape, asserting a traditional Anishinaabe relationship with the land prior to colonial settlement:

During a bright thaw in the moon of little spirit, an Ojibwe woman gave birth on the same ground where, much later, the house of John James Mauser was raised. The ridge of earth was massive, a fold of land jutting up over a brief network of lakes, flowing streams, rivers, and sloughs. That high ground was a favorite spot for making camp in those original years before settlement, because the water drew game and from the lookout a person could see waasa, far off, spot weather coming or an enemy traveling below. The earth made chokecherries from the woman's blood spilled in the grass. The baby would be given the old name Wujiew, Mountain. After a short rest he was tied onto his

¹³ Jean Baudrillard, *America*, 8.

mother's back and the people moved on, moved on, pushed west. (*Four Souls* 4-5)

Nanapush's temporal setting echoes the opening words of *Tracks*, indicating that the events of the story took place in winter, but his evocation of the natural passing of time and warming temperature in the "thaw" contrasts with the continually falling snow in his earlier narrative, while the word "bright" implies favourable weather conditions and also connects with the word "moon" to call to mind moonlight, which carries connotations of peace and femininity, contrasting with the masculinity of the surveyors, Mauser and Thoreau. Erdrich refers to the bodies of "flowing" water as a "network," defying the colonial impulse to name and divide land and features. The image of the high ground as a "camp" recalls Ojibwe mobility, in contrast with the fixity of the reservation and fragmentation caused by allotment. The link between the birthplace and the naming of the baby suggests a profound affinity between the Ojibwe and the land. This impression of natural progression and interconnection is further evoked by Erdrich's image of natal blood enriching the earth. Finally, the idea of habitual, westward movement evokes the natural cycle of life, echoing the passage of the sun, as well as more sinister associations with Indian removal and westward expansion. By creating this vernacular landscape, Erdrich reaffirms the important relationship between history and land in Anishinaabe tradition.

Although belied by Nanapush's testimony, the construction of Mauser's mansion reflects the revisionist settler colonial strategy of claiming *terra nullius* and building a culturally European environment which overwrites Indigenous relationships with the land. Erdrich attaches the founding of Mauser's mansion to Fleur's dispossession, implying that his dishonest acquisition of the land is not an isolated incident, but a larger trend in US colonialism:

Now the island was stripped of trees. The dug quarry ran a quarter mile in length. From below the soil, six-by-eight blocks were drilled and hand-cut by homesick Italians who first hated the state of Michigan and next Wisconsin and felt more lost and alien the farther they worked themselves into this country ...

And to the north, near yet another lake and to the edge of it, grew oak trees. On the whole continent and to each direction these were judged the finest that could be obtained. In addition, it proved easy and profitable to deal with the Indian agent Tatro, who won a personal commission for discovering that due to a recent government decision the land upon which those trees grew was tax forfeit from one Indian, just a woman – she could go elsewhere and, anyway, she was a troublemaker. (*Four Souls* 5–6)

In contrast with Nanapush's description of the land upon which Mauser's house will be built, his account of the process of construction reflects the colonial desire to measure, modify and commodify the land for capitalist purposes. Whereas the land had previously been associated with natural processes, human interaction and fluid movement, it is now objectively quantified: the land is dug to create a quarter-mile-long quarry, within which it is divided into "six-by-eight blocks" which are further manipulated in order to be used in construction. The trees no longer bear connections to people or events, but are assessed merely in terms of utility for building. This is not a local event, as the search for timber indicates: the land has been surveyed and appraised across "the whole continent and to each direction." Accordingly, the casual displacement of Fleur and the despoilment of her profoundly meaningful land are far from exceptional: her (lack of) status as only "one Indian, just a woman" indicates that such dealings were commonplace across the US at this time; indeed, that authorities facilitated such practices.

Erdrich emphasises digging as a key part of the process of construction. The act of building requires excavation, which, as Erdrich illustrates, places people in very close proximity to the earth, differing dramatically from the gentle, respectful dynamic of the Ojibwe relationship with the land and, indeed, contrasting starkly with Under

the Ground's four days of communion with the earth. Erdrich implies that the Italian quarrymen, alienated from their homeland, work themselves into the fabric of the land that becomes, through their labour, Michigan and Wisconsin. As the land is "stripped of trees," so the pre-existing features and identity of the land are erased. Nanapush laments in *Tracks* that the "lumber men often used drags or sledges" which "had cut the earth, as did the shod hooves of animals" (*Tracks* 209). While the exploited immigrants inscribe themselves upon the map through their violent modifications of the earth, they necessarily displace or destroy the significance that the land holds for Native peoples. In this case, the land that has been important to ways of life and spiritually meaningful to the Ojibwe becomes the site for Mauser's house. The only vestige of the relevance of this place to the Ojibwe is Nanapush's story.

This association between digging, construction and erasure forms another parallel with Thoreau's *Walden*. Tending to his crop of beans, Thoreau tells us, "As I drew a still fresher soil about the rows with my hoe, I disturbed the ashes of unchronicled nations who in primeval years lived under these heavens, and their small implements of war and hunting were brought to the light of this modern day" (158). The contrast between the "fresher" soil, growing vegetation and the "modern day" on one hand, and "ashes," "unchronicled" people, the "primeval" past and "war and hunting" on the other, neatly elides any sense of the Native people's existence, dispossession or contemporary claim to the land, and indeed the notion that Thoreau is in any way personally culpable. Erdrich here evokes colonial societies' implicit denial of history and, by extension, the right to existence of primarily orally recorded cultures: the destruction of history is equated to the absence of history, which is taken to justify eradication. Erdrich notes that the "Norwegians and Sammi," are "so gut-shot with hunger they didn't care if they were trespassing on anybody's hunting

ground or not and just kept on digging deeper, deeper into the earth” as they mine for iron (*Four Souls* 7). This exploitation of disadvantaged immigrants, including a displaced Indigenous group, reminds us of the global structures of colonialism at play.

Erdrich’s attention to the immigrant labourers in particular connects the dispossession of Native tribes with other groups exploited by the structure of transnational settler colonialism, as Lorenzo Veracini argues:

the need to emphasise settler fixity encourages the perception of indigenous and exogenous Others as ‘unsettled’ ... As a result, derogatory images implying an enhanced degree of mobility are consistently and recurrently projected onto indigenous people and their lifestyles (projection, after all, is a crucial defensive mechanism). In turn, this dynamic allows a typically settler colonial inversion, where indigenous people are nomadified and settlers can perform their indigenisation and express their nativism. (78–79)

Neither Indigenous people nor “exogenous Others” are acknowledged as legitimate social presences in settler colonial narratives. Thus, as Cheyfitz suggests, perception and representation are at least as important to colonial national narratives as physical structures; in addition to displacing Native groups, Veracini demonstrates that settler identity depends on redefining or denying Native peoples’ and disempowered immigrants’ relationships with land. The settler urge to convey fixity while nomadising exploited groups adds further, disturbing significance to the flippant comment that Fleur could “go elsewhere”, as well as to Thoreau’s oblivious presumption in his admission that his timber, stones and sand were “claimed by squatter’s right” (49).

Mauser’s mansion is the ultimate outcome of the oak timber from Fleur’s land, the brownstone quarried by the Italians, and the iron mined by the Norwegians and Sammi, among other materials and workers. From a colonial perspective, the house, like the land, is the sum of its parts, and the manner of acquiring the materials and resources is irrelevant. In contrast, Nanapush supplements the catalogue of design and

materials with the human contribution to the building, telling us, “most of all sweat from the bodies of men and women made the house” (*Four Souls* 7). In the official narrative, the elements of the house would be reduced to the inanimate and quantifiable, but Nanapush’s narrative evokes the living presences concealed and overwritten by colonialist commodification.

In keeping with Locke’s views on improvement and Thoreau’s presentation of surveying and building, Mauser’s mansion functions as his unassailable claim to legitimacy as a gentleman and landowner. Similarly, Mauser’s identity is presented as inextricable from his work with lumber and the railroad, both entailing substantial interventions into the landscape and both vital to the construction of the nation. “He’d acquired a stiff reputation for his handling of the family lumber business and the railroad line, which stretched west from its terminus, went on forever, its print bold and black as doctor’s stitches on the maps he had me trace with my fingers”, Polly tells us (*Four Souls* 35). Erdrich’s comparison of the printed railroad on Mauser’s map with doctor’s stitches, suggesting through the image of a wound that the processes of construction and industrialisation result in the mutilation of the land, adds further weight and complexity to the idea of settler legitimacy and identity reformation.

According to Veracini:

Europeanisation [of the land] and indigenisation [of settler society] respond to the complementary needs of transforming the environment to suit the colonising project and of renewing the settler in order to suit the environment. These tendencies, of course, can be harmonised in a variety of ways, and the ‘changes in the land’ inevitably correspond to the making of a ‘new man’ (settler colonial traditions are particularly concerned with the possibility of regenerated manhood). (22–23)

Indeed, Mauser’s manhood is in need of regeneration to a radical extent. Mauser is diagnosed with illnesses caused by the practice of karezza with his first wife, Placide, who has a “terror of pregnancy” (*Four Souls* 37). In contrast with Erdrich’s image of

the blood-enriched earth, Mauser's first marriage deviates from natural cycles and processes. Ultimately, Mauser's second marriage also fails, Fleur returns to the reservation with their son and Mauser flees St. Paul. By having Mauser's business interests and social regeneration fail, and Fleur return to her ancestral homeland, Erdrich belies the image of the wealthy, land-developing settler and re-inverts the dynamic of the nomadic Native and indigenised settler.

Erdrich also refers to additional, transnational contexts beyond Mauser's control, suggesting that his condition and exploits are symptomatic of much larger forces at work. Polly mentions her suspicion that Mauser's ill health may in fact be a "hitherto undetected result of deadly chlorine gas, worsening over the months" (*Four Souls* 18). She relates Mauser's account of his experiences in the First World War:

Moles, human gophers, that's what we were. Burrowing creatures. I loved the dirt, craved the solid gray promise of it, nosed into the cold black safety, set my shoulders into the swing of the pick, the shovel, or dug with my face when the shelling commenced ... Life in the trenches fostered adoration of the muck and the shit of survival. Don't make a face! Queen Polly Elizabeth! I swear you're a Brit, a throwback, you and your conflagrate flowerbeds laid out in rows.

... Our first shelter, which we tried absurdly to make comfortable, was actually decorated all around the door with the trained vine of a climbing sweet pea. The girlfriend of some poor poetic cluck had sent the seeds on his request. He was blown to literal pieces before the show of the first bud, so it was left for the rest of us to enjoy the bower. The damn blossoms were enormous, hot pink, lavender, and white, fertilized by human guts. (*Four Souls* 93–95)

While evoking the trauma inflicted on soldiers in the First World War, Erdrich creates a perverse revision of the peaceful, natural image of the natal blood from the opening of the novel in the war-torn earth. Mauser finds a sense of "safety" in the earth, but the trenches invert the natural relationship between humanity and the earth. Mauser's reference to the English monarchy as an insult to Polly chimes with the British imperialist pink of the reservation map, suggesting that Euro-American settlers continue to live under transnational systems of colonial power. This connection is

emphasised by the barbs “Brit” and “throwback” as well as, most evocatively, the alignment of cultivated flowers – in rows, like trenches and geometric borders – with violent warfare. Moreover, Mauser’s associations with appropriating land, building, the railroad and the borders of trenches and flowerbeds call to mind the American frontier, suggesting that Mauser’s actions, the dispossession of Indigenous peoples, westward expansion and world wars are inextricable within global colonialism.

Erdrich’s treatment of Mauser’s house in relation to borders and maps thus demonstrates that, while colonial powers attempt to overwrite Indigenous presences and histories, they simultaneously attempt to rewrite Euro-American identity, both to create a sense of legitimacy in the United States and to regenerate patriarchal hegemony on a global scale. Franco Moretti writes:

Internal borders define modern states as composite structures, then, made of many temporal layers: as *historical* states – that need historical novels. But need them to do what? To represent internal unevenness, no doubt; and then, to *abolish* it. Historical novels are not just stories ‘of’ the border, but of its erasure, and of the incorporation of the internal periphery into the larger unit of the state. (40)

In nineteenth-century European historical novels, according to Moretti, borders function as a tool with which the nation is built, which are then subsumed by cultural narratives. Erdrich presents borders as vital to colonial attempts to represent, reshape and claim the land through maps as cultural narratives. By retelling the imposition of colonial borders, maps and narratives from an Ojibwe oral storyteller’s perspective, Erdrich undermines their validity and efficacy. This technique serves to re-revise the construction of the nation from an epistemologically Anishinaabe point of view, proclaiming Ojibwe survivance and the legitimacy of Indigenous claims to the land.

According to Owens’s reconceptualised frontier, by locating their narratives at these reservation boundaries, and indeed at other colonially-imposed borders, Native American writers like Erdrich can claim a position of power, enacting revisions of

history, place and identity through narratives – like vernacular landscapes – that refute colonial structures. In this way, reflecting Owens’s frontier as an assertion of the potency of ideological decolonialism, Erdrich’s evocation of vernacular landscape and concomitant critique of borders in *Tracks* and *Four Souls* constitutes literary decolonial resistance.

Chapter 2

Institutions and Resistance

Institutions play important roles in defining and controlling the ways in which societies function and people within communities relate to each other, as well as to government systems and other types of authority. Therefore, the establishment and functioning of national and transnational institutions on a localised scale is integral to colonial claims of presence, authority and cultural hegemony in settler states. As cartographical maps use borders to limit and define human relationships with land, so institutions embody Euro-American social, cultural, religious and political conventions and represent government authority in localised contexts. In Erdrich's work, institutions reflect the hegemony of settler colonial power over the Little No Horse Reservation and the Ojibwe people, but also its limitations in an Indigenous borderlands context. This chapter examines Erdrich's challenge to settler colonial narratives of American land and identity through her engagement with institutions within and around the Little No Horse Reservation in *Tracks* and *Four Souls*.

American legal institutions have been fundamental to the social position and treatment of Native American people since the early period of colonisation in North America. According to John R. Wunder:

The rights of America's indigenous peoples were the subject of great debate among European philosophers and jurists. Central to the discourse were the native inhabitants' sovereign rights to their land. The prevailing sentiments established that Native Americans could not own the lands they occupied and that genocide was justified because Indians were not humans. (67)

Thus Native peoples have consistently been considered within legal frameworks formulated expressly to facilitate settler colonial processes. In relation to the Dawes Act, for example, Daniel F. Littlefield, Jr. and James W. Parins remark, "it became

apparent that the real impetus behind the legislation was economic. It pandered to the interests of corporate America, particularly the railroad industry, and of land hungry American farmers and ranchers” (xv). This statement belies the Act’s paternalistic, ‘civilising’ pretext. Indeed, the intricacy of the legal particularities of Indian removal stirred Alexis de Tocqueville to note, “Men could not be destroyed with more respect for the laws of humanity” (397).

Central to both early colonial strategies for dealing with Native American populations and discourse around Indigenous rights ever since is the idea of sovereignty. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines sovereignty as, “Supremacy in respect of power, domination, or rank; supreme dominion, authority, or rule” (‘Sovereignty’). The sovereignty of Native American peoples has proved problematic to colonial powers because it challenges the overarching authority of United States governance; therefore, sovereignty has been fiercely contested for several centuries, resulting in complex legal manoeuvring by tribes and successive US administrations. In order to renegotiate treaties – legal documentation of the US government’s historic recognition of Native peoples’ sovereignty – from a position of power, the US government formulated a guardian/wardship relationship with Native American peoples. Building on Supreme Court Chief Justice John Marshall’s decision in 1831 that Native Americans constituted “domestic dependent nations,” the guardian/wardship formulation “has been used since the mid nineteenth century to construct for American Indians a cradle-to-grave social-control system” (Johansen 367). Tribal recognition, American citizenship and land rights continue to be the subject of social and legal debate.

The competing needs to maintain legal process and continue to divest Indigenous peoples of their lands has led to a proliferation of institutions devoted to

the welfare and acculturation of Native peoples since the early nineteenth century. Arguably the most powerful and controversial institution associated with Native American history is the Bureau of Indian Affairs, established in 1824 when 'Indian Affairs' were still under the purview of the US War Department. The BIA was instrumental in facilitating treaty negotiations between tribes and the government, Indian removal and the General Allotment Act and bore a reputation for corruption and racism throughout the nineteenth century and for much of the twentieth. Nonetheless, engagement with such institutions has been unavoidable for Native peoples in order to secure rights and resources. Such forced dependence upon incompatible and often hostile institutions led Jace Weaver (Cherokee) to remark, "Aside from his or her relation to family, clan, or tribal nation, an Indian's most significant relationship is with the federal government" (*Other Words* ix).

The incongruity between the legal status of Native American peoples enacted by and through institutions including the US government on one hand, and Native peoples' own senses of identity and place on the other, forms a parallel between Erdrich's reservation and Anzaldúa's borderlands. As Erdrich's Ojibwe characters live within artificial boundaries that do not correspond to their traditional or historical ways of life, so Anzaldúa's borderlands describe the difficulty of living as a minority between cultures, centred around the arbitrarily imposed US-Mexico national border. Anzaldúa's image of the border as "a narrow strip along a steep edge" evokes a sense of inaccessibility as well as instability at the limit; one could rest at the foot of the steep slope, but not at the peak (*Borderlands/La Frontera* 25). Ironically, as a direct result of an "unnatural boundary" being erected, the people who live around it, making up the living borderlands, are in "a constant state of transition" (*Borderlands/La Frontera* 25). After all, the US-Mexico border stands as historical testament to radical

change enacted by colonial forces: as Sadowski-Smith points out, “The imperialist absorption of Mexican territory by the United States turned native and Hispanic populations into minorities overnight” (2). Thus, institutionalised colonial dominance forces the colonised population into a state of flux while perpetuating a fallacy of structure and stasis.

While Anzaldúa presents the creation of borderlands largely in negative terms, she also argues that the plurality born out of living in this “state of transition” has a power that can be harnessed in a positive way:

The new *mestiza* copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity. She learns to be an Indian in Mexican culture, to be Mexican from an Anglo point of view. She learns to juggle cultures. She has a plural personality, she operates in a pluralistic mode – nothing is thrust out, the good the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned. Not only does she sustain such contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else. (*Borderlands/La Frontera* 101)

Anzaldúa’s “*mestiza*,” an embodiment of the cultural mixing found in borderlands, absorbs multiplicity as creative energy and personal strength. In a similar vein, Erdrich highlights her Ojibwe characters’ enduring agency and the vitality of Anishinaabe tradition in the face of political and social oppression geared towards cultural assimilation and economic dispossession. Thus, although institutions in borderlands and reservation seek to impose a narrative that contradicts Native senses of culture and identity, the resulting cultural pluralities can potentially generate an empowering adaptive capability, as embodied in Owens’s revised frontier. Thus, even the American frontier, a founding and dominant ideological institution of settler colonial narratives of US history and identity, can be challenged in light of adaptability as an essential aspect of Native survivance.

In this chapter, I argue that Erdrich’s reservation reflects the heterogeneous and adaptive qualities associated with Owens’s frontier, Vizenor’s transmotion and

Anzaldúa's borderlands while asserting Ojibwe sovereignty, presenting a challenge to the settler colonial narratives and structures embodied and perpetuated by institutions on and around the reservation. I first discuss the institutionalisation of the family home on the Little No Horse Reservation by global Christian and colonial powers. Secondly I consider the government school, focusing on its role in creating physical and cultural distance between the children who attend the boarding school and the reservation environment. I then turn to Erdrich's engagement with the institution of the Catholic Church as a pervasive and complex presence throughout the novels. Finally, I study the Ojibwe tribal council as a formalised system of governance imposed upon the Ojibwe community by non-Native systems of power.

“not comfortable, but home” ¹⁴

In *Tracks* and *Four Souls*, the family and home are clearly of paramount importance to Erdrich's characters. Fleur tirelessly battles against land-grabbers, companies and bureaucrats to reclaim her ancestral lands, while Nanapush mourns the loss of his home when unaffordable fees force him to leave it for Margaret's cabin. However, as I elaborate in Chapter 3, Erdrich's novels demonstrate that the Ojibwe conception of home – influenced by traditions of nomadism, communitarianism and affinity with the land – stands at odds with Eurocentric ideas of home. Margaret and Nanapush's family home illustrates the impact these conflicting influences have on the idea of home on the Little No Horse Reservation.

Margaret is a powerful matriarchal figure throughout Erdrich's Little No Horse novels, and she dominates her domestic environments. While broadly a traditionalist

¹⁴ Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 19.

who takes pains to commit her ancestry, her language and her great-grandmother's stories to heartfelt memory, Margaret is nonetheless inducted into Catholicism at school and maintains her devout Christianity throughout her life. Margaret also exhibits strong individualistic and materialistic tendencies. Erdrich demonstrates in *Tracks* and *Four Souls* that, whereas assimilation results in loss of language or removal from the homeland for some, for Margaret, assimilation occurs through the introduction of consumerism to the reservation. Erdrich uses linoleum, a recurrent motif throughout the Little No Horse novels, as a symbol of the growing influence of consumerism upon the reservation generally and Margaret especially. Nanapush tells us:

Acquisition, the priest called it. Greed. There was no word in our language to describe this urge to own things we didn't need. Where before we always had a reason for each object we kept, now the sole reason was *wanting* it ... Ever since Margaret had visited the nuns' residence, she had wanted a floor covering like theirs. (*Four Souls* 76)

Margaret's attention is drawn to artificial objects and aesthetics, culminating in an intense desire for a linoleum floor like the one she encounters during a visit to the convent. The linoleum in particular disturbs Nanapush as it represents unnecessary adaptation of and literal separation from the land, as well as Margaret's newly avaricious attitude towards their home.

Margaret's coveted linoleum floor is illustrative of a significant deviation from Anishinaabe tradition as she sells the land that her son, Nector, was to inherit in order to fund the purchase. Nanapush is deeply aggrieved by Margaret's decision to exchange "the real ground for the false ground" (*Four Souls* 82). He laments, "Margaret was always for the land, if nothing else. Nothing stopped her in this quest, until that linoleum. Because of it, she betrayed herself, and worse, she betrayed her son" (*Four Souls* 82). Nanapush is distressed at the sale not only because Margaret

has sold her son's security, but more importantly because she has thereby reduced the tribe's holding of land on the reservation. Additionally, Margaret has betrayed Nanapush, who strives to retain the tribe's common land above all else. Margaret's decision to disregard her familial and tribal responsibility and construct a physical barrier between herself and the land stands in dramatic contrast with Under the Ground's self-sacrifice and unique devotion to the land during her four-day burial.

Margaret's acquiescence to the assimilationist influence of consumerism through the institutions of the home and, by extension, the convent, illustrates the influence of global structures on the reservation through colonisation. Margaret's overwhelming desire for the linoleum reveals the reach of both the Catholic Church and the Industrial Revolution, even into a geographically remote, economically rudimentary community like that of the Little No Horse reservation. Thus Erdrich demonstrates that the border drawn around the reservation by the colonial US government is highly permeable to external forces, limiting the Ojibwe to a fixed expanse of land but not offering any means of social or cultural protection.

This transnational context draws our attention to the global cultural significance of linoleum as Margaret's specified object of desire. Invented by Englishman Frederick Walton in the 1860s, linoleum was for almost 100 years "probably the most widely used floor covering in the world," according to Pamela H. Simpson (17). The durability, ease of maintenance and variety of designs offered by linoleum, combined with its affordability thanks to technological advances in its highly industrialised manufacture, made it ubiquitous in the early twentieth century. While linoleum remains universally familiar today, it is an unlikely choice of flooring for one so attached to the land as Margaret and a radical departure from the previous earthen floor (*Four Souls* 77). In contrast with other inexpensive floor coverings like

oilcloth, Simpson continues, “Walton’s linoleum ... was thicker, more waterproof, resilient, and much longer-wearing ... Solid-color linoleums showed virtually no wear” (19). This brief description – highlighting the literal separation linoleum constitutes between the domestic space and the earth and the modern-era desire for delimitation, control and constancy of one’s space – illustrates the disparity between Nanapush’s preference for Anishinaabe tradition and Margaret’s increasing materialism.

This choice changes Margaret’s relationship to her home. She is suddenly determined “to improve” the path leading to the cabin by painting the stones that line it a “bright candy pink” (*Four Souls* 77). The colour, calling to mind artificial colourings and flavourings, is jarringly incongruent with the stones’ sacred significance to Nanapush and Margaret, who, in keeping with Anishinaabe tradition, call them “our grandfathers” (*Four Souls* 77). Recalling Locke and Thoreau’s respective endorsements of the ‘improvement’ of land, Nanapush laments that Margaret then “began to improve the rest of our dwelling” (*Four Souls* 77). Margaret’s fervent ‘improvements’ are clearly influenced by her Catholicism, as she tells Nanapush, “‘If we have to stay in one place,’ she reasoned, ‘if we can’t move around anymore and follow the rice and maple sugar and meat, then I plan to live in a good way. First, we have to make a better outhouse, just like Father Damien has drawn for us” (*Four Souls* 77). Here Margaret demonstrates her subconscious deference to both Catholic authority and materiality, privileging Father Damien’s advice – and, recalling his map, his documents – over Nanapush’s verbal opinion.

Nanapush maintains that the cabin is adequate without the installation of linoleum, but Margaret’s changing attitude towards their home reveals her divergence from Anishinaabe cultural tradition and gradual acceptance of non-Native social ideas:

Inside our cabin, we had already packed the earth down hard and laid skins over it. I took out the skins each morning and shook them clean. Instead of walking right inside we took our makizinan off at our door. ... It now looked to me like we had a comfortable and even fancy place, and I said so, but Margaret couldn't get the nuns' floor out of her mind. She kept pining over it, stabbing her finger at the skins on our dirt floor and frowning. (*Four Souls* 77–78)

The tonal contrast between the terms “packed ... earth” and “dirt” are telling. Erdrich's use of the word “stabbing” further reinforces Margaret's departure from the traditional Anishinaabe relationship with land, as she later uses this word to admonish Fleur upon her return to the reservation from St. Paul, telling her, “you stab the earth with the high heels on your shoes” (*Four Souls* 204). Evidently Margaret maintains a deep and traditional respect for the earth, but her desire to have what the nuns have – the comfortable linoleum suggesting a comforting sense of cultural superiority and confidence in heavenly reward – nonetheless results in a figurative and literal separation between Margaret and the earth.

While Nanapush scorns Margaret's behaviour as foolish, he recognises that her actions are not unusual but rather indicative of a cultural shift among the Ojibwe on the reservation. Nanapush tells us, “People traded away their land for pianos they couldn't play and bought clothing too fancy for their own everyday use. They bought spoons made of silver when there wasn't any food, and gilded picture frames when they had neither pictures nor walls” (*Four Souls* 76). Erdrich's images here are haunting: instruments that stand in silence, ostentatious clothes that go unused, obsolete cutlery and frames with nowhere to hang or anything to display; these objects imply an absence of bodies, signalling the wholesale loss of reservation land. In this context, Margaret's favouring of the inert linoleum over the earth and skin floor is ominous.

Erdrich suggests that Margaret has subscribed to the notion that such modern, industrially manufactured materials as linoleum are superior to natural resources. Margaret tells Nanapush that the nuns' linoleum floor "could be mopped shiny clean. It was far more beautiful than stone, earth, or wood; it was more green than leaves, with drops of cream and ink curled through it" (*Four Souls* 76). Margaret's description of the linoleum is hyperrealistic and evokes unnatural stasis, emphasising the contrast between the industrial process of producing linoleum and the more traditional packed earth floor concealed beneath it. Realistically, the "drops of cream and ink" she refers to would not remain "curled" but would move, blend or settle, while the statement "more green than leaves" evokes hyperreal emptiness. Indeed, while patterned linoleum was hugely popular at this time, so were designs that imitated natural substances like wood and marble (P. H. Simpson 23). Nanapush urges Margaret to abandon her project, telling her that her first pieces of linoleum "are dead. They never had any life" (*Four Souls* 78). Margaret also plants a garden with "new and outlandish seeds" that bear bitter fruit, becomes "distant" from Nanapush and takes on a gaze with "a faraway quality, as if she were peering into the future" (*Four Souls* 78). These descriptions point towards Margaret's growing cultural and epistemological distance from her Anishinaabe heritage.

There is an additional, disturbing foreshadowing in Erdrich's outline of Margaret's changing relationship with the land: Nanapush states that the pieces of linoleum "glowed against the earth or clean skins and did nothing" (*Four Souls* 78). Considering the disproportionately high usage of tribal lands in the mining of uranium and disposal of nuclear waste, Margaret's increasing attachment to artificial material on one hand, and disregard for the land in its natural state and traditional ways of life on the other, her ostensibly frivolous desire for linoleum carries sinister overtones.

Margaret's new house pride illustrates the power and reach of early advertising. In the 1910s, the Armstrong Cork and Tile Company, based in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, "became the first American flooring company to advertise directly to the consumer"; as a result, by "the end of the 1920s Armstrong linoleum dominated the American industry" (P. H. Simpson 21). The Armstrong Company achieved this success by printing advertisements in national magazines directed towards women. Simpson points to such examples as "The Story of a Woman and a Floor" from 1924, which emphasises linoleum's practicality and beauty as both life-changing and deserved by the average American woman, freeing her from the work required to keep wooden floors looking clean and attractive. Linoleum here is presented as a way in which American women can pursue the American Dream, liberating themselves from hardship and reaping just rewards. Moreover, Margaret's adoption of conventional Euro-American social roles and acceptance of the idea of the family home as a modern social institution necessarily changes her relationship with Nanapush. He tells us, "No more sitting in the sun, dreaming and smoking my pipe. Now, if I wanted Margaret to cook for me or even to give me a kind word now and then, I was forced to work" (*Four Souls* 77). Thus the institutionalisation of Margaret's home falls in line with the capitalist industrialisation of the modern United States.

The institutionalisation of Margaret and Nanapush's home illustrates the extent to which settler colonial institutions have sought to infiltrate Indigenous cultures. John Caputo and Mark Yount summarise 'power' as "the thin, inescapable film that covers all human interactions," and 'institutions' as "the means that power uses, and not the other way around, not sources or origins of power" (4). Thus the nature of the institution is dependent upon the nature of power. Louis Althusser argues that what he

terms Ideological State Apparatuses (or ISAs) are fundamentally different to other State Apparatuses; he states that they:

must not be confused with the (repressive) State apparatus. Remember that in Marxist theory, the State Apparatus (SA) contains: the Government, the Administration, the Army, the Police, the Courts, the Prisons, etc., which constitute what I shall in future call the Repressive State Apparatus. Repressive suggests that the State Apparatus in question ‘functions by violence’ – at least ultimately (since repression, e.g. administrative repression, may take nonphysical forms).

I shall call Ideological State Apparatuses a certain number of realities, which present themselves to the immediate observer in the form of distinct and specialized institutions. (96)

According to Althusser, ISAs exert state power, but perform in different ways from such large-scale and overarching systems as the government and military. ISAs fulfil the task of consolidating state power by influencing populations through social and cultural structures which, while separate to state power in some ways, nonetheless reflect and promote the values endorsed by the state. Althusser continues:

it is clear that whereas the –unified– (Repressive) State Apparatus belongs entirely to the public domain, much the larger part of the Ideological State Apparatuses (in their apparent dispersion) are part, on the contrary, of the *private* domain. Churches, Parties, Trade Unions, families, some schools, most newspapers, cultural ventures, etc., etc., are private. (97)

Althusser’s characterisation of ISAs in terms of “dispersion” and “the *private* domain” indicates the insidious nature of ideologically-driven state power: local institutions facilitate the internal submission to state power of the dominated communities that surround them. However, Erdrich demonstrates through Nanapush and Margaret’s home that, in the case of settler colonial power and ideology in the United States, ideological institutions are inextricable from other institutions of power.

“to reach through the loophole” ¹⁵

Government-run boarding schools played a central role in the implementation of Indian removal policy in the United States for much of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. The traumatic experiences of thousands of Native children during their years at government schools have resulted in a painful legacy of social alienation, familial disintegration, community dysfunction and cultural attrition. The boarding school system allowed the US government to promote the education of Native American people, a premise generally accepted as morally sound by the majority of the settler population, with the aim of assimilating Indigenous groups into colonial society. The infamous Carlisle Indian School, for example, was founded by the former army captain Richard Henry Pratt, whose slogan was, “Kill the Indian and save the man!” (Bess 8). By literally removing children from reservation communities and environments and placing them within the spatial confines and strict socio-cultural parameters of the boarding schools, the government hoped to achieve the extinction of Native American cultures.

Like Margaret’s home, Erdrich’s fictional Jesuit-run government school provides a forum for assimilationist influences. The strict spatial limits of the school intensify its impact on Erdrich’s characters, as the children do not have a choice in their attendance, and they do not have the option to leave. Moreover, the compound influences of the separation of the children from the reservation community and the inescapable authority of the Catholic Church result in the severe disruption of the children’s engagement with Anishinaabe tradition. Jorge Noriega (Mestizo) provides important historical context for Erdrich’s presentation of the Jesuit boarding school:

¹⁵ Erdrich, *Tracks*, 225.

The 'formal education' of the indigenous peoples of North America began at virtually the moment in which the European drive to colonize the continent began in earnest. At least as early as 1611, French Jesuit missionaries opened schools along the St. Lawrence River in which they actively pursued Louis XIV's edict, issued a year earlier, that where possible, long-term native resistance to French rule should be neutralized by implementation of a program to 'educate the children of the Indians in the French manner.' (Noriega 371)

Erdrich's presentation of the government school as an aggressively assimilationist institution thus reflects centuries of coordinated attempts to assimilate the Ojibwe into Euro-American society and culture conducted by educational, religious and political colonial bodies, further rupturing Althusser's distinction between Ideological and other State Apparatuses in the settler colonial context.

While Erdrich's government school clearly draws on the historical legacy of assimilationist institutions defined by a Catholic religious ethos, other aspects of the fictional school recall the Carlisle School. Located in Pennsylvania, and in operation from 1879 to 1918, Carlisle was the first non-reservation school devoted to the education and 'civilisation' of Native American children. Conceived out of Pratt's experiences dealing with Indigenous prisoners of war, Carlisle was modelled on military institutions and sought to turn young Native people into working members of the general population, thereby reducing the government's responsibility to observe Indian treaties and improve conditions on reservations (Brunhouse 75). There was a strong Christian element in the school's approach to education; as Jacqueline Fear-Segal writes, "Christian missionaries laid the deep and diverse foundations on which the federal system of Indian schools was built" (Fear-Segal 67). However, religious conversion was not Pratt's priority, and Fear-Segal notes that he "judged any effort to translate the Bible into an Indian language to be seriously misguided" (159). Rather, Pratt's goal was to 'civilise' Indigenous children by removing them from every aspect of traditional Native cultures. With a disconcertingly celebratory tone expressive of

social attitudes towards Native Americans in the early twentieth century United States,

Robert L. Brunhouse elaborates:

Pratt believed that the Indian could become a progressive part of the population through education. But to civilize the red man Pratt insisted that he must be taken from the reservation, that he must be torn up from the roots of his old culture and transplanted to surroundings which would encourage him to learn the English language, to work for a living, and to become a useful citizen. (73)

As Nanapush finds the role of the capitalist worker thrust upon him even within his own home, so Native children were brought to Carlisle in order to be trained as useful members of Euro-American society.

Nanapush, Margaret and Lulu each have traumatic experiences at the government school. Nanapush refers to his experience early in *Tracks* as background to his relationship with colonial institutions as a tribal elder. Nanapush presents himself as staunchly resistant to bureaucratic structures in particular. Drawing a parallel with Fleur's refusal to have her baby baptised, Nanapush declines to enter his name, a powerful carrier of identity and heritage, into bureaucratic systems:

Nanapush is a name that loses power every time that it is written and stored in a government file. That is why I only gave it out once in all those years.

No Name, I told Father Damien when he came to take the church census. *No Name*, I told the Agent when he made up the tribal roll.

‘I have use of a white man's name,’ I told the Captain who delivered the ration payout for our first treaty, ‘but I won't sign your paper with that name either.’ (*Tracks* 32-33)

Nanapush is protective of his name partially because he has had to resist attempts to change or overwrite it; he has been assigned “a white man's name”. As Euro-American borders, maps and buildings aim to redefine the relationship between the Ojibwe and the land, so the renaming of Nanapush reflects colonial society's intention to assimilate the Native population. Nanapush links this attack on his personal and cultural identity with his experience of the government school, describing himself as,

“a holdout, like the Pillagers, although I told the Captain and the Agent what I thought of their papers in good English. I could have written my name, and much more too, in script. I had a Jesuit education in the halls of St John before I ran back to the woods and forgot all my prayers” (*Tracks* 33). Nanapush understands that his education was an attempt to subjugate him, but he vociferously rejects its influence. He perceives the colonialist nature of the institution and remains wary of its manifestations in social and bureaucratic structures on the reservation.

It is not entirely true, however, that Nanapush “forgot” what he learned after leaving the government school. Nanapush goes on to exploit his familiarity with colonial systems for the very purpose of protecting his Ojibwe identity. He takes pride in his ability to write “in script,” which allows him to understand and reject Euro-American bureaucracy, and he utilises his “good English” to rebuff figures of colonial power (*Tracks* 33). Nanapush also tells us that he “came back from the Jesuits with a pair of eyeglasses, six books, a watch, and the old gods still strong in my heart” (*Four Souls* 49). These tools ultimately equip Nanapush to resist the assimilationist institutions that furnish him with them. The juxtaposition of the educational materials with “the old gods” demonstrates the cultural exchange that has occurred at the school; Nanapush has carried his Anishinaabe spirituality with him but, reflecting trickster behaviour, he has also engaged with non-Native epistemologies insofar as it is in his personal interest and in the collective interest of the Ojibwe.

Margaret is also deeply resistant to the assimilationist objectives of the school. Margaret protects her identity by maintaining a profound sense of connection with her ancestors. Her experience with the school shows that its reach goes far beyond the confines of the building, however: its political and religious frameworks allow the influence of the school to permeate the reservation community. Margaret reflects:

After the priests came among us, my great-grandmother said, She Knows the Bear became Marie. Sloping Cloud was christened Jeanne. Taking Care of the Day and Yellow Day Woman turned into Catherines. I became Margaret, but I always knew that would happen. The year they carried my great-grandmother out the western window, wrapped in red cloth and then tied to birch bark, the school finally got me. The girl who was named Center of the Sky became Margaret, then Margaret Kashpaw and then Rushes Bear. (*Four Souls* 179)

Margaret presents the school as a predatory force, for which her great-grandmother has prepared her. The renaming of members of the Ojibwe foreshadows the cultural oppression that takes place at the school. Moreover, the parallel between renaming and Christian baptism highlights the submission demanded by assimilationist institutions. However, Margaret's commitment of the renamed women's Ojibwe identities to memory helps her remain connected to her own sense of Ojibwe identity, and her prayer-like testimony of the name changes affords her a moment of communion with her past.

While such reaffirmations help Margaret to resist cultural assimilation at school, she is forced to present a semblance of acquiescence. Echoing Margaret's great-grandmother's concealment of her beneath her skirts to avoid school for as long as possible, she learns to preserve elements of her Ojibwe identity, including her language, in secret: "Every time I was struck or shamed for speaking Ojibwemowin, I said to myself, *There's another word I won't forget*. I tamped it down. I took it in. I grew hard inside so that the girl named Center of the Sky could survive" (*Four Souls* 179). By secreting her native language and Ojibwe identity, Margaret constructs a cultural border within herself. This clandestine resistance recalls W. E. B. Du Bois' concept of double consciousness; Margaret's internal border evokes Du Bois' feeling of "two-ness"; of "two unreconciled strivings" as a member of a disadvantaged social minority within Euro-American society (8). Whereas Du Bois "remember[s] well" the traumatic realisation of being "different from the others" as a black child among white

children at school, and feels “shut out from their world by a vast veil” thereafter, Erdrich presents Margaret’s early sense of ‘two-ness’ not as a sense of exclusion, but as the direct effect of enforced conformity (Du Bois 7-8). The rupture in Margaret’s sense of identity is manifested in the linoleum; she is separated from the land and, thereby, from her ancestors. Yet this compromise is the only means by which Margaret can ensure the survival of her Ojibwe identity in the face of colonial dominance.

Lulu’s experience of the government school is the most painful of any of the characters in *Tracks* and *Four Souls*. Fleur places Lulu in the school at the end of *Tracks* when she departs from the reservation to regain legal ownership of Matchimanito for the second time. Lulu’s separation from her mother highlights the painful divisions caused by the boarding school as a spatially remote, self-contained institution. Fleur’s decision also reflects the extent of the institution’s power: Fleur intuitively feels that the school is the safest place for her daughter to go while she is away. Lulu’s distress and loneliness at the government school are made clear through Nanapush’s narration; the entirety of his portion of the novel is addressed to Lulu to explain Fleur’s actions and to try to heal the rift between the mother and daughter.

Fleur’s decision to send Lulu to the school is indicative of the instability of the reservation as a whole at this time. As Nanapush tells Lulu:

She sent you to the government school, it is true, but you must understand there were reasons: there would be no place for you, no safety on this reservation, no hiding from government papers, or from Morrisseys who shaved heads or the Turcot Company, leveler of a whole forest. There was also no predicting what would happen to Fleur herself. (*Tracks* 219)

Fleur is so concerned with providing a “place” for Lulu – specifically the place that had afforded Fleur “safety” and a “hiding” place as a young woman after the death of her family, the Pillager lands at Matchimanito – that she feels the school is the next best option.

However, the school works against the relationship between mother and daughter in an unforeseen way: Lulu hates the spatial and cultural constraints of the school and resents Fleur for leaving her there. When Margaret and Nanapush succeed in reclaiming Lulu from the school, her appearance bears witness to both the influence of the school and her resistance to assimilation:

Your braids were cut, your hair in a thick ragged bowl, and your dress was a shabby and smoldering orange, a shameful color like a half-doused flame, visible for miles, that any child who tried to run away from the boarding school was forced to wear. The dress was tight, too small, straining across your shoulders ... You went up on your toes, and tried to walk, prim as you'd been taught. Halfway across, you could not contain yourself and sprang forward. (*Tracks* 226)

Lulu embodies constriction. Her braided hair, a distinctive marker of cultural identity, has been cut, carrying overtones of interference with natural growth and development. She has been trained to walk in a “prim” way, suggesting the imposition of formal gender roles at the school. Moreover, Lulu’s walking on tiptoe signals her departure from Erdrich’s alignment of Ojibwe femininity with traditional ways of interacting with and walking upon the earth; like Margaret’s linoleum or Fleur’s high heels, Lulu’s separation from the reservation has set her at a remove from the land, forcibly altering her relationship to the earth. Similarly, Lulu’s ill-fitting dress, reinforcing the implication of restrictive gender roles, limits her movement and reflects the spatial limits of the school, her attempted escape from which is also expressed by the dress. The “smoldering” orange “like a half-doused flame” reflects the school’s wearing down of Lulu’s spirit, but the energy with which she “sprang forward” counteracts the image of the weak flame. Lulu is caught halfway; like Margaret, the school has erected internal borders within Lulu, and her traumatic experience there now forms part of her identity.

Lulu's cultural duality is highly evocative of Anzaldúa's depiction of borderlands identity. The discomfort implied by such words as "cut," "ragged," "shabby," "smoldering," and "straining" forge a connection with Anzaldúa's account of borderlands identity as a painful experience: "I am a border woman. I grew up between two cultures, the Mexican (with a heavy Indian influence) and the Anglo (as a member of a colonized people in our own territory). I have been straddling that *tejas*-Mexican border, and others, all my life. It's not a comfortable place to live in, this place of contradictions" (*Borderlands/La Frontera* 19). Lulu's alienation from her mother is symptomatic of borderlands experience; separation from family and the homeland, as well as the experience of effectively being 'institutionalised,' further complicates the sense of place and identity of the "border woman".

Althusser identifies 'the school' as a highly influential ISA, pointing out that in any educational institution the students are taught much more than academic material:

children at school also learn the 'rules' of good behaviour, i.e. the attitude that should be observed by every agent in the division of labour, according to the job he is 'destined' for ... In other words, the school (but also other State institutions like the Church, or other apparatuses like the Army) teaches 'know-how', but in forms which ensure *subjection to the ruling ideology* or the mastery of its 'practice'.
(89)

Althusser's view of the school as an institution designed to "ensure *subjection to the ruling ideology*" gains greater import in a settler colonial context, and more disturbing resonance in relation to the Carlisle School's origins in the containment of Indigenous prisoners of war. Indeed, Jennifer Bess considers Pratt to have managed the Carlisle Indian School according to his own "militant ideologies" (8). This characterisation suggests that, in the case of Native American educational institutions in particular, Althusser's distinction between repressive and violent State Apparatuses and non-

violent Ideological State Apparatuses breaks down to reveal the overarching system of settler colonial power. Brunhouse provides a distressing example proving this point: “The Indian Office used the Carlisle School as a means to secure from discontented tribes the children of the important tribal leaders, who could thus be held as hostages for the good behavior of the whole tribe” (78). Against this context, Lulu’s status as the daughter of an indomitable sacred archetypal figure suggests that Erdrich views government boarding schools as especially insidious, targeted and harmful expressions of settler colonial dominance overwriting Native American senses of place and identity.

“I cherish doubt”¹⁶

The Catholic Church is of great importance throughout Erdrich’s work, both as a powerful transnational institution and as a local one. Erdrich was raised Catholic and has stated, “I accept the Catholicism of many in my family,” but clarifies, “I am not deeply religious anyway. That is to say, I do not have an assured faith. I am full of doubt” (‘An Emissary’). Erdrich’s deep knowledge of Catholic practice and history is immediately evident in her writing, featuring many Catholic characters in addition to a culturally prominent church and clergy on the reservation and references to Catholic practice and mythology. Erdrich’s ambivalence towards the Catholic Church is equally apparent, signalling the long and complex relationship between the Ojibwe and the Catholic Church.

In *Tracks* and *Four Souls*, Erdrich presents the Catholic Church as a colonial institution dedicated to the religious conversion and cultural assimilation of the

¹⁶ Erdrich, ‘The Art of Fiction No. 208’, 140.

Ojibwe. The Church historically worked hand-in-hand with other colonial institutions in order to bring ‘civility’ and Christianity to Native peoples: as Wunder details, from 1871:

the Indian agent became the focal point for the enforcement of acculturation rules ... The agents chosen were persons who had strong religious backgrounds and who were committed to the destruction of Native American culture through Christianity. By turning the Indian Service over to Christian zealots, the federal government sanctioned the mixing of church and state on most reservations. (37–38)

Indeed, Joel W. Martin classifies Christian missions as colonial enterprises, stating that, “the history of Native American conversion is inextricably interwoven with a brutal history of colonialism and conquest and its aftermath. Some would go further to argue that missionization itself was a tool of conquest, a powerful means to assault the very souls and identities of Native peoples” (2). The spatial limits, authoritarian approach and capitalist interest held by the Catholic Church make for an effective force in government-sanctioned campaigns of cultural assimilation. The reservation system dictates the nature of the relationship between individuals, groups and the land, while the Catholic Church imposes dogma, its own set of rules for human relationships, and ritualistic practices with strict temporal and spatial conditions. While de Tocqueville was impressed by the US government’s adherence to law in undertaking Indian removal, Wunder points out that the dominance of Christian missions on reservations contravened the United States’ own Constitution: “Both the establishment and the free-exercise clauses of the First Amendment were blatantly compromised” (38).

Indeed, the legal prohibition of traditional Native religious practices was not lifted by Congress until the American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978, and further amendments – the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, the Native American Free Exercise of Religion Act, and the American Indian Religious Freedom Act,

passed in 1993 – have been challenged repeatedly in the Courts as unconstitutional. Weaver points out that the epistemologically Euro-American, Judeo-Christian-centred First Amendment is incapable of protecting traditional Native practices as it decrees that, “One is free, within certain defined parameters, to say or print whatever one wishes. Likewise, one is free to *believe* whatever one wishes. One is not free, however, to *do* whatever one wishes, *wherever* one wishes, even if one feels compelled by religious belief to do so” (*Other Words* 180). Thus, because “Native religious traditions are intimately and inexorably tied to the land and often cannot be practiced merely anywhere,” the imposition of Christian institutions and, indeed, the very borders that dictate the domain of Native American reservations, inevitably discriminate against the practising of traditional Indigenous spiritualities (Weaver, *Other Words* 179).

Erdrich’s presentation of the Church reflects the historical context of the Little No Horse Reservation’s North Dakota setting: missionaries who accompanied northern tribes, including the Ojibwe, to reservations during the period of removal were most often from Jesuit backgrounds, subscribing to an intensely spiritual Catholic tradition with an emphasis on charitable work and a deep respect for papal authority. The Jesuit missionaries arrived into markedly different societies from those they left, posing their task of converting tribal members with challenges; according to Karen Janet McKinney, “It is not surprising that the Jesuits had difficulty understanding the Chippewa, for no two cultures could have been more different politically and religiously. The Jesuits knew only the tightly hierarchical kingdoms of Europe; the Chippewa’s political structure tended to be loosely organized” (154). The establishment of Catholic institutions among the Ojibwe contradicted not only spiritual beliefs, but the entire structure of Ojibwe society. Yet Erdrich’s writing

testifies to the success of Catholic missionaries, to such an extent that she defines their work as “essentially tragic. Those who enter the field from the religious side often do so out of love, and out of love they destroy the essence of the people they love” (‘An Emissary’). In spite of the finality of Erdrich’s tone here, her treatment of Catholic institutions in *Tracks* and *Four Souls* evokes resistance to and subversion of aspects of missionary Catholicism.

Erdrich’s characters react to missionary efforts in a variety of ways in *Tracks* and *Four Souls*. The traditionalists Fleur, Nanapush and Eli reject Christianity in favour of their deeply-held Anishinaabe spirituality. Margaret, Nector and, as we find out in other novels, Lulu, demonstrate a dualistic approach to religion, evincing a devout Catholic faith without renouncing traditional Anishinaabe spirituality. By contrast, Pauline – the dishonest and vengeful mixed-blood outcast who is later accepted into the convent as the severe and self-mortifying Sister Leopolda – considers the two belief systems to be diametrically opposed and rejects Anishinaabe spirituality, along with any discernible vestige of Ojibwe identity.

The local parish church and convent are important features of the Little No Horse reservation environment and community. Characters regularly enter the church and interact with the parish priest and nuns, and more devout Catholics like Margaret and Pauline make their active faith a focal point, socially and ideologically, in their daily lives. Reflecting the traditionally egalitarian, community-orientated and place-based nature of Ojibwe society, the practice of traditional Anishinaabe spirituality requires not a house of worship but a much broader, holistic approach to the location of communal spirituality within the land. In contrast, the spatially-limited and hierarchical institution of the Catholic Church asserts a dominant position of authority over the daily happenings and sense of identity of the Ojibwe. The Church thus forms

its own set of borders within the reservation, tacitly opposing spatially boundless religious practice while exerting a weighty influence over the reservation community.

While opposing aspects of the two spiritual traditions are played out in these characters' responses to the Church, the variety of their attitudes indicates some exchange and mediation. Catholic missions seek to convert non-Christians to traditional, authoritarian Christianity, a systematic process of adaptation and acquiescence, but in order to do so, the Church undergoes minor alterations that enhance its appeal or accessibility to non-Catholic communities. Consider, for example, the importance of Our Lady of Guadalupe to Mexican culture, of which she is the patron saint, in her specifically Mexican context as distinct from European portrayals of the Virgin Mary. Luis D. León argues that:

in the Mexican Americas, religious belief and practice are continuously redefined by devotees of various traditions that started in and were transformed by, brought to and found, throughout the borderlands as a creative and often effective means to manage the crisis of everyday life. ... Poetic, creative religious practice does not occur only at the boundaries of institutions, but within, parallel to, and sometimes in direct conflict with established traditions. (5)

In borderlands contexts, then, the Church is intensely traditional, authoritative and constant on one hand, but engaged in reciprocal processes of adaptation on the other.

Margaret's devout faith reflects the Church's success in shaping the community's culture. She attends Mass regularly and tries to draw other characters closer to the Church, including the decidedly non-Christian Nanapush: in order to relax tensions in their relationship, Nanapush accompanies Margaret to "the pre-Lenten Masses ... By the time we got our foreheads crossed with ashes, we were keeping company" (*Tracks* 123). Nector, Margaret's youngest son, is an altar server, and Margaret secretly has Lulu blessed by the priest as a baby. At the same time, Margaret remains committed to her Anishinaabe heritage and spirituality, performing

healing songs among other ceremonies. Margaret exemplifies the success of the Church as a borderlands institution in securing weighty cultural influence and contributing to the acculturation of Indigenous communities.

In contrast, Nanapush and Father Damien's relationship demonstrates the dialogical nature of the local church as an adaptable borderlands institution. Father Damien Modeste, whose authority is respected across the community of the Little No Horse Reservation, is the central and most sympathetic figure related to the Church in these texts. He visits families, shares information and supplies, and manages administrative tasks for the community, as well as offering the tribe religious guidance and medical help. Father Damien manages to exert a strong influence over the tribe without attempting to further the cause of cultural assimilation. When Father Damien asks Nanapush about having a Catholic marriage, for example, Erdrich demonstrates the familiarity of such cultural exchanges on the reservation:

‘I’m having relations with Margaret already,’ I whispered to startle him. ‘That’s the way we do things.’

He had dealt with similar problems before, so he was not even stumped as to what remedy he should use.

‘Make a confession, at any rate,’ he said, motioning me back into the church. (*Tracks* 123-124)

Father Damien attempts to guide Nanapush according to Catholic teaching, but he does not instruct him to change his ways. Rather, he makes the parish church available to the Ojibwe without demanding fundamentalist adherence.

Father Damien's respect for Anishinaabe tradition both extracts him from the spatial limits of the church and informs his understanding of the traditional Anishinaabe sense of place. When Lulu is born, for example, Nanapush tells us that Father Damien arrives to provide whatever services are necessary, in a culturally aware manner: he was “prepared for the last rites but very pleased to have a new life in their place. He carried his host and chalice. I gave him a dipper from the bucket. He

greeted Margaret, but sensed the correct way, and did not cross the threshold” (*Tracks* 61). Father Damien clearly demonstrates respect for Anishinaabe tradition, undermining the monolithic authority of the Church.

Father Damien’s unusual disregard of Catholic orthodoxy goes far beyond intercultural sensitivity, however. In *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*, Erdrich informs us that Father Damien arrives at the reservation after a colourful early life, having been born female as Agnes DeWitt. Agnes enters a convent as Sister Cecilia, but is more passionate about playing Chopin on the piano than worshipping God and soon departs. Agnes falls in love with Berndt Vogel, a German farmer, but their contentment is destroyed when Berndt is killed trying to rescue Agnes during a bank robbery. Agnes survives and is visited by “Father Damien Modeste (The First)”, who tells her of his upcoming mission among the Ojibwe in North Dakota (*Last Report* 34–37). A week later a flood devastates Agnes’s farm and sweeps her away. Washed ashore, Agnes falls asleep and has a vision of Christ nursing her. The next day she finds the drowned body of Father Damien and decides to begin a new life in partnership with God by taking on Modeste’s mission and living as a male priest. When this second Father Damien arrives at Little No Horse, he lives a life of great spiritual devotion, although more committed to the wellbeing of the tribe than to Catholic dogma. Despite the tacit understanding of a few of his parishioners, including Nanapush, that he is not entirely male, and even a later sexual relationship with another missionary priest, Father Damien dares not confess his deception and fears damnation in death, but continues to minister to the Ojibwe for the rest of his long life. Father Damien, therefore, is a multiplicitous character working under a cultivated identity within the strictly authoritarian institution of the Catholic Church. In contrast with the visually distinct figure of the Catholic priest, so prescribed in belief and behaviour as

to form an institution in and of itself, Father Damien is a radically subversive – indeed, heretical - character who represents not Catholic dogma but rather a uniquely intercultural and deeply communitarian individuality. In this sense, Father Damien echoes the trickster figure, and Erdrich subverts the narrative of Catholic missions unilaterally performing religious (and sociocultural) conversions among the Ojibwe.

Within the orthodox, authoritarian and patriarchal institution of the Catholic Church, therefore, Erdrich deconstructs the institution of the priest. The priest in Catholic teaching is God's representative on earth; he is endowed with the power to forgive sin and administer sacraments; he transmits the Pope's infallible word to his parishioners, enacting the decrees of a global system on the most local levels. In contrast, Father Damien explodes the binaries upon which the Church depends: he disregards strict dogma, favouring Nanapush and Margaret's loose and blended spirituality over Pauline's excruciatingly literal interpretation of Catholic teaching; wavering from the simplicity, humility and self-denial symbolised by traditional vestments, Father Damien assumes several layers of affected identity, passing between genders and gendered spaces like the church and convent at will; and he speaks Ojibwemowin fluently alongside English, despite the colonial government's zealous efforts to eradicate Native languages, thereby defying both Catholic and colonial authorities.

Erdrich presents Father Damien's intercultural perspective not only as a personal strength in this novel, but also as an important factor in the success of his mission among the Ojibwe and in his endeavours to help the tribe. Father Damien is welcomed by Nanapush and his dear friend Kashpaw because he does not glibly criticise Kashpaw's polygamy as he is expected to, saying simply, "Kashpaw does not belong to the Church" (*Last Report* 94). He also tends to the ill and dying during the

tuberculosis epidemic with no concern for his own health. Perhaps most significantly, Father Damien not only encourages the mixing of Catholic belief with Anishinaabe spirituality among the tribe, but he develops the same blended faith. After decades of writing reverential, obsequious letters to the Vatican that go unanswered, Father Damien sends a final note with a very different tone:

Pope!

Perhaps we are no more than spores on the breath of God, perhaps our life is just one exhalation. One breath. If God pauses a moment to ruminate before taking in a new breath, we see. In that calm cessation, we see. All I've ever wanted to do is see.

Don't bother with a reply.

Modeste. (*Last Report* 344)

Ultimately, Father Damien dispenses with the hierarchy and certainty that characterise traditional Catholicism. Focusing on sight and breath in his final lines, Damien expresses his subjectivity of thought and emotion, his adoration of the sensorial, and his affinity with natural, peaceful human actions and rhythms. Providing a dramatic contrast with Sister Leopolda's sustained attempts to deny and denigrate her own physicality, and with the restrictions and shame applied to feminine physicality in particular by the Catholic Church, Father Damien demonstrates a profound respect and affection for human physicality. Indeed, whereas the Church draws a distinction between the physical and the spiritual, considering the former to be of a decidedly lower order, Father Damien honours the physical and sensual as essential aspects of spirituality. Thus Father Damien's spirituality ultimately adheres to Anishinaabe veneration of the natural world more closely than it does to Catholic orthodoxy. Father Damien, therefore, mirrors Anzaldúa's *mestiza*, demonstrating "a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity," within a specifically Anishinaabe epistemological setting (*Borderlands/La Frontera* 101).

In contrast with Father Damien's church, however, the convent forms an additional, less permeable border constructed by the Catholic Church within the reservation. Like the church, the convent acts as a point of cultural interaction between the Ojibwe and Catholic colonialism. The convent, however, produces and regulates an exclusivist border to a greater extreme, enacting the literal separation of women from wider society, limiting social interaction and forbidding sexual relations. It also provides a stark contrast between Father Damien's gender fluidity and radical mobility on the one hand, and the Church's traditional separation of the male and female spheres and drastic limitation of women's power, autonomy and spatial freedom on the other. Here Erdrich emphasises the unequal and rigid gender roles imposed by the Catholic Church: Father Damien can only maintain his autonomy as long as his secret identity goes undiscovered (by the nuns, at least). In order to continue living as Father Damien, Agnes reflects the Church's limitations on women by binding her breasts, cutting her hair short and endeavouring to walk and talk with masculine mannerisms. Father Damien's home is presented as a sanctuary, and the nuns serve him by cooking, cleaning and performing tasks he asks of them. The nuns, meanwhile, rarely leave the convent and endure similar corporeal restrictions by wearing the habit. Erdrich presents the convent as an insular domestic space, setting scenes most often in the kitchen. As exemplified by Margaret's linoleum, the convent is defined by confinement, stasis and personal and social insularity.

As Sister Leopolda, Pauline encapsulates the limiting insularity of the convent. Pauline is initially drawn to the convent precisely because of the isolation and disconnection from her heritage it demands. Early in her life, Pauline is estranged not only from her immediate family, but from her cultural identity. At fifteen, Pauline already feels alienated from her ancestors, telling us, "except for me, the Puyats were

known as a quiet family with little to say. We were mixed-bloods, skimmers in the clan for which the name was lost” (*Tracks* 14). Pauline has lost her sense of history, and therefore her sense of place as a member of the Ojibwe, which drives her to seek a new identity and home in Argus. Pauline’s liminality is wholly negative; in contrast with other characters, Pauline does not evoke an empowering sense of *mestiza* but relinquishes any sense of place and identity, which Erdrich presents as profoundly damaging.

In addition to feeling disconnected from the reservation community, Pauline expresses a desire to assimilate into non-Native society. She explicitly calls Argus “the white town,” and whereas Fleur travels to Argus in order to safeguard her land, Pauline goes “to learn the lace-making trade from the nuns.” Pauline hopes to leave behind all traces of her Native identity, including aspects of her physical appearance:

‘You’ll fade out there,’ [Pauline’s father] said, reminding me that I was lighter than my sisters. ‘You won’t be an Indian once you return.’

‘Then maybe I won’t come back,’ I told him. I wanted to be like my mother, who showed her half-white. I wanted to be like my grandfather, pure Canadian. That was because even as a child I saw that to hang back was to perish. I saw through the eyes of the world outside of us. I would not speak our language. (*Tracks* 14)

Pauline’s sense of identity is deeply problematic. She differentiates between her ancestors by race, instead of locating herself in relation to them as people, part of her living history. She deifies her grandfather as “pure Canadian,” a somewhat paradoxical term, and – in a self-inflicted inversion of Margaret’s self-preserving generation of double consciousness – she forges a dangerous split between the reality of her upbringing and the outsider’s perspective she cultivates. Tellingly, Pauline also willingly subscribes to non-Native interpretations of her identity; recalling Pecola in Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*, she abandons her autonomy by adopting “the eyes of the world outside of us.” Pauline’s statement proves to be foolhardy, as the following

winter brings devastating disease to the Ojibwe and Pauline hears no more from her family. Thus, Pauline's rejection of her heritage leads to her literal isolation.

Pauline leaves Argus to live and work for the well-to-do mixed-blood Bernadette Morrissey, later giving birth to the illegitimate daughter of Bernadette's brother Napoleon. Pauline subsequently disowns her daughter and enters the convent. Here Pauline uses God as a narrative device to invent a new past for herself: "He said that I was not whom I had supposed. I was an orphan and my parents had died in grace, and also, despite my deceptive features, I was not one speck of Indian but wholly white ... I was forgiven of my daughter. I should forget her" (*Tracks* 137). Pauline uses this new identity to secure her position in the convent away from the Ojibwe community, telling us:

'The Indians,' I said now, 'them.' Never *neenawind* or us. And I soon found it was good that I did. For one day during supper Sister Anne announced that Superior had received word that our order would admit no Indian girls, and that I should go to her and reveal my true background. Which I did. And Superior said she was delighted that the hindrance was removed, since it was plain to see that I abided in His mystical body. (*Tracks* 138)

Erdrich's use of the words "reveal," "true," and "plain to see" recall Pauline's abdication of her own perspective as well as Father Damien's thwarted desire simply to "see" in God's grace. The nun's statement implies the absurdity of the order's instructions as well as Pauline's hypocrisy; the nuns prefer to believe an outright lie than to gain a deeper understanding of Pauline or of the Ojibwe people among whom they live. Pauline's admission into the order reveals the conservatism of orthodox Catholicism as well as the solidity of the institution's borders; her Native heritage would be a "hindrance," but her disavowal of it permits her to access the settler side of the borderland of the convent.

In addition to supporting the colonial institution of the Church, Pauline – as Sister Leopolda – actively participates in attempts to acculturate the Ojibwe. The nun’s approach to interacting with the Ojibwe reflects and extends her attempt to eradicate any trace of Ojibwe heritage from her own identity. Pauline visits Fleur and the Nanapush clan with full awareness that she is an imposition, but she takes it upon herself to “baptize, to gather souls” (*Tracks* 141). Whereas Father Damien helps the clan access food, Pauline asks Fleur for “a little scrap to eat,” stating pitifully, “I am alone and have no land” (*Tracks* 142). Pauline is zealous in her mission, and attempts to baptise Fleur’s stillborn baby against her wishes:

‘I must baptize this soul,’ I said, and reached for the tiny form. I intended to pour a teaspoon of water on its brow. But Fleur’s arm swung out, cut me across the throat like a branch. I slumped to my knees, struggled to regain my air, and could only watch as Margaret wrapped the unsaved in a good cloth, then laid it in a fancy brown box that had held Lulu’s shoes ... I told Margaret that I was leaving, that I would ask Father Damien to visit. (*Tracks* 163)

Paying no regard to traditional practices or non-Catholic senses of spirituality, Pauline’s primary concerns are creating and projecting an entirely new identity for herself, and laying claim to her place in the convent. She personifies and intensifies the sequestered character of the convent environment. Indeed, her lack of compassion can be interpreted as a favourable attribute as a nun; in *Last Report*, we learn that Sister Leopolda is being considered for canonisation (54). In this sense, Pauline and the convent together form a damning representation of the Church’s role in the displacement and cultural genocide of Native peoples that facilitated the consolidation of settler colonial power in the United States.

Pauline’s self-hatred and desire for a singular, non-Native identity is indicative of Anzaldúa’s more painful evocation of life as a border woman. She writes, “The U.S.-Mexican border *es una herida abierta* where the Third World grates against the

first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country – a border culture” (*Borderlands/La Frontera* 25).¹⁷ Pauline secures her reputation among the nuns by committing to self-flagellation, calling to mind biblical violence as well as Anzaldúa’s bloody imagery, which is in itself reminiscent of the sacrificial violence of stigmata. Pauline’s isolation leads her to reject the society of the Ojibwe and even her own child. Her physical self-harm thus reflects the mental self-harm induced by internal colonisation. In this way, Erdrich exposes the Church’s broader purpose as a presence on the reservation, fulfilling precisely the same function that Noriega identifies as that of colonial education, which has been “the mechanism by which colonialism has sought to render itself effectively permanent, creating the conditions by which the colonized could be made essentially *self*-colonizing, eternally subjugated in psychic and intellectual terms and thus eternally self-subordinating in economic and political terms” (374).

Erdrich presents the Church as a complex colonial institution, both positioned to take advantage of borderlands communities and susceptible to intercultural interpretations of and engagements with its teachings. While Father Damien and Margaret represent a positive and expansive enactment of borderlands *mestiza*, maintaining a commitment to Ojibwe sovereignty, Pauline demonstrates a damaging abdication of tribal identity and personal autonomy triggered and fostered by the potentially dominating presence of the Church in a borderlands setting.

¹⁷ The Spanish “*una herida abierta*” translates as ‘an open wound’ in English.

“Wires... tied to the hands and the arms” ¹⁸

The assaults on Indigenous senses of place and identity that attended the industrialisation and social development of the United States were not limited to religious, educational and land ownership systems; institutionalisation also affected Native nations’ political systems by way of the tribal council. Erdrich presents the tribal council of the Little No Horse Reservation with ambivalence throughout *Tracks* and *Four Souls*. Ostensibly the tribal council represents self-determination and sovereignty. However, Erdrich presents it as testament to colonial dominance, as in order to protect the reservation environment and the community’s interests, the tribe must formalise its form of governance in line with Euro-American systems.

The model for tribal councils was not generated organically by Native peoples or from their traditional modes of governance; rather, it was based on non-Indigenous structures and paternalistic colonial authority. According to James S. Olson and Raymond Wilson:

The Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, ending allotment and presumably restoring tribal authority, only replaced direct Bureau of Indian Affairs supervision of the tribes with indirect BIA supervision of all tribal decisions through tribal councils. Also, by providing for election of tribal leaders and majority rule in tribal decisions, the Indian Reorganization Act undermined the hereditary rule and consensus politics common to many Native American tribes. (24–25)

This political structure effectively serves as a proxy for US governmental authority.

Thus the tribal council represents colonial authority via Indigenous voices.

Throughout the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth, legal structures and institutions aimed at improving the welfare of Native peoples and protecting tribal

¹⁸ Erdrich, *Tracks*, 185.

environments through reform were made to work hand-in-glove with colonial systems of acculturation. Wunder elaborates that, during this period:

Indian agents wished to gain further control over the reservation, and the means toward this end was through police powers and local courts. In 1878, the first Indian police force, the Light Horse of the Oklahoma Creeks, was created through congressional funding, and by 1884 two-thirds of all Indian agencies had an Indian police force. The Indian police became the enforcers of forced acculturation policies. They rounded up children to send away to off-reservation boarding schools. They performed public-works jobs for some agents, and they took the census. They wore non-Indian clothing, cut their hair, and took individual allotments of land once they were authorized. (35)

Reflecting Noriega's description of perpetual self-colonisation, such institutions thus bear the fingerprints of colonial power.

Erdrich engages with the tribal council most significantly through Nanapush in *Tracks* and *Four Souls*. As earlier discussions of the Church and government school illustrate, exhibiting his trickster nature, Nanapush is highly capable of interacting with and working productively within colonial institutions while remaining deeply resistant to conformity. Just as Nanapush can read and write in English but refuses to do so, and is fully aware of Catholic teaching but flagrantly disobeys it, he has a nuanced understanding of the structures of power within and beyond the reservation, but strives to remain independent from any formal authority. Even when Father Damien, as a respectful and respected friend of the clan, encourages Nanapush to consider standing for the position of tribal chairman, Nanapush rejects the idea:

‘I am old wood and I burn easily,’ I said. ‘My anger would scorch those around me.’

‘That is why you should get yourself into a leadership position,’ he said. ‘You must gain the Agent’s ear, help make these decisions, find ways to prohibit the whiskey traders from roosting on the reservation boundary.’

... His ideas were good, no doubt. But I saw the snare right then, the invisible loop hidden in the priest’s well-meaning words. Unlike the Pukwans, who were government Indians, I saw the deadfall beneath my feet before I stepped. I would avoid the job. I knew what was attached. (*Tracks* 185)

Nanapush recognises that his skills as a traditionalist leader and educated speaker would make him a strong representative for the tribe, but he considers the role to be fundamentally conflicting with his sense of identity. Nanapush defines himself in opposition to the Pukwans; if they are “government Indians,” he is emphatically not aligned with the government. In this way, Nanapush conflates the tribal council and the US government, suggesting that the council represents an abdication of tribal sovereignty. The words “snare” and “deadfall” cast the Ojibwe as prey and the government as hunter, a role Nanapush prefers to inhabit. This displacement relates the tribal council to settler colonial displacement of Indigenous peoples on the widest scale.

The idea that the council is inextricable from the government speaks to the important idea of tribal specificity; it follows that joining the tribal council would set Nanapush at a remove from Ojibwe tradition and thereby dilute Ojibwe cultural identity. Indeed, we are introduced to Edgar Pukwan in the opening of *Tracks* as a blundering and dishonourable member of the tribal police who fails to fulfil both his official responsibilities and important Anishinaabe rites when he accompanies Nanapush to rescue Fleur and bury the deceased Pillagers. Nanapush tells us that, having attempted and failed to burn the Pillagers’ cabin with their tuberculosis-infected bodies still inside, “Pukwan cursed and looked desperate, caught between his official duties and his fear of Pillagers. The last won out” (*Tracks* 3). Pukwan foreshadows the deadly entrapment Nanapush detects in the tribal council: as those who harm or offend Fleur tend to do, Pukwan dies soon after this incident (*Tracks* 4). Pukwan’s membership of the tribal police places him in an impossible situation; he can neither fulfil Anishinaabe tradition, nor satisfy the requirements of the official body, leaving him in between two cultures with an eroded sense of identity in spite of

his ostensibly powerful position. To borrow from Wolfe, “Here, in essence, is assimilation’s Faustian bargain — have our settler world, but lose your Indigenous soul. Beyond any doubt, this is a kind of death” (397). Thus the death of Pukwan and other dishonourable characters can be read as a representation of the Ojibwe’s cultural death through physical death.

While Nanapush demonstrates a proclivity for dissent in his dealings with the institutions of the government school and the Church, his distrust of the tribal council in particular and of the government in general is derived from personal experience. We know that Nanapush is highly intelligent and literate, and Erdrich reveals that Nanapush has in fact employed his abilities in the past. He tells us, “As a young man, I had made my reputation as a government interpreter, that is, until the Beauchamp Treaty signing, in which I said to Rift-In-A-Cloud, ‘Don’t put your thumb in the ink.’ One of the officials understood and I lost my job” (*Tracks* 100).¹⁹ This reminiscence illustrates the fact that Nanapush’s role as a government employee does not endow him with significant power; rather, he is subordinate to the government. Despite acting as an interpreter, it is Nanapush’s duty not to ensure mutual understanding but to facilitate deals between the government and tribal representatives. Finding himself morally bound to advise Rift-In-A-Cloud against the treaty, Nanapush, like Pukwan, is pulled between two conflicting obligations, and the government punishes his disloyalty by dismissing him. Given the close link between one’s “reputation” and one’s sense of identity, this humiliating incident disillusioned Nanapush and influences his intense devotion to Anishinaabe traditionalism, while

¹⁹ The 1867 Treaty with the Chippewa of the Mississippi created the White Earth Indian Reservation in Minnesota.

emphasising that compliance with such government practices is fundamentally incompatible with Ojibwe sovereignty.

In broader terms, this experience also challenges the settler colonial institutionalisation of land and Native American tribal identity through the use of treaties. Treaties were foundational to colonial acquisition and capitalist exploitation of Native lands, as they were predicated on the idea of land as something to be bought and sold, implicitly denying the profoundly important cultural significance of land to Indigenous peoples. The formalisation and regulation of land ownership institutionalised land as real estate, administered through treaties and necessarily implicating Native peoples. Having worked as an interpreter and subsequently outlived his family and many fellow tribal members through times of disease, migration, poverty and starvation caused in part by such negotiations, Nanapush rejects any possibility of treaties being fair or positive for the Ojibwe. He tells us, “There were so few of us who even understood the writing on the papers. Some signed their land away with thumbs and crosses” (*Tracks* 99). Nanapush’s emphasis is on the individual here: he translates between a governmental organisation and an individual representative of the collective Ojibwe; tribal members use thumbs, not several fingerprints, or a cross, a single character, to sign agreements that affect the entire tribe, illustrating the malapropos application of (corrupt) democratic practices to a consensus-based community.

Erdrich emphasises the cultural impact of such colonial bureaucracy upon the Ojibwe through Nanapush’s affinity with the oak trees of Matchimanito, linking the destruction of the forest with the decimation of the Ojibwe population and the idea of erasure: “I heard the groan and crack, felt the ground tremble as each tree slammed earth. I weakened into an old man as one oak went down, another and another was

lost, as a gap formed here, a clearing there, and plain daylight entered” (*Tracks* 9). Nanapush also highlights paper as part of the inescapable trap of bureaucracy: “I began to see what we were becoming, and the years have borne me out: a tribe of file cabinets and triplicates, a tribe of single-space documents, directives, policy. A tribe of pressed trees” (*Tracks* 225). Erdrich’s motif of written documents reflects the fact that the colonial institutionalisation of land dealings ignores traditional tribal methods of organising environments and communities, including notably the practice of public speaking and listening, and elides the collective’s role in traditional communal governance, fundamental to Ojibwe sovereignty.

Indeed, US government policies have applied institutional frameworks to Indian identity itself. While imposing social and ideological individualism through allotment, as part of the Dawes Act the US government established criteria by which Native Americans’ genetic identity would be assessed. According to M. Annette Jaimes (Juaneño/Yaqui), allotments were allocated to those “identified as being documentably of *one-half or more Indian blood* ... ; all others were simply disenfranchised altogether” (117). As Chadwick Allen (Chickasaw) elaborates, this policy deviated dramatically from earlier precedent:

Local, state, and federal policies have subjected African American citizens of the United States to an exclusionary ‘one drop’ rule of racial identification that emphasize their non-European heritage; but local, state, and federal policies have subjected American Indian citizens to an inclusive standard of ‘blood quantum’ or ‘degree of Indian blood’ that emphasizes instead the admixture of European and other bloodlines. A standard of racial identification, blood quantum originally served as a device for documenting ‘Indian’ status for the federal government’s purposes of dividing and subsequently alienating collectively held Indian lands. (176)

The institutionalisation of American Indian identity, therefore, was purposefully designed to advance the interests of settler colonial land development and diminish tribal sovereignty. This system disallows Indigenous approaches to self-

determination. Like the epistemologically incongruous mapping of the Little No Horse reservation, the application of blood quantum to Native peoples elides tribes' traditional understandings of their own identities as well as their social systems. For example, Nancy L. Chick points out that family trees fail to "bring order to Erdrich's fictional universe, because this universe is not defined by blood relationships or the resulting blood quanta of mixed-bloods and full-bloods. Such family trees are tangled maps validated primarily by Euro-American political structures, not by the Native structures woven into the texts" (Sarris et al. 83). For Nanapush to enter into such a formal system would be to implicitly submit to a colonialist, institutionalised formulation of Ojibwe identity and society.

Nanapush's desire to remain apart from the tribal council as well as educational and religious institutions, therefore, is as much an attempt to protect his own sense of Ojibwe identity and traditional social practices as it is a protest against settler colonial power structures. Ultimately, however, Nanapush does join the institution of the tribal council. At the end of *Tracks*, after Fleur's departure for St. Paul, Nanapush and Margaret are faced with insurmountable bureaucracy as they attempt to navigate the institution of the government school in order to have Lulu returned home. Nanapush tells Lulu, "To become a bureaucrat myself was the only way that I could wade through the letters, the reports, the only place where I could find a ledge to kneel on, to reach through the loophole and draw you home" (*Tracks* 225). The cultural identity of the Ojibwe in part depends on the sense of identity evinced by the tribe's youngest members, but in order to protect this Nanapush is forced to sacrifice part of his own identity by conforming to colonial power structures. It is not enough to work within new systems; he must "become a bureaucrat." While Nanapush presents this decision as a debasing sacrifice, emphasised by his evocation of a literal lowering through the

image of “a ledge to kneel on,” he nonetheless consistently illustrates the power held by knowledge, and the enhancement of this power derived from his trickster-like skill, cunning and steadfast adherence to Anishinaabe epistemology.

Indeed, despite Nanapush’s tone of defeat, Erdrich suggests that his position as tribal council chairman benefits the tribe from a traditionalist perspective and, what’s more, that Nanapush can retain some autonomy within his role. In *Four Souls*, Nanapush addresses the tribe at a council meeting in an impassioned speech, urging them to vote against a settlement for an expanse of reservation land. Demonstrating his keen political awareness, Nanapush uses his official position to criticise US policy:

I am one hundred percent pure Anishinaabeg and I speak my language and English both. But today, that English language tastes foul, tastes rancid in my mouth, for it is the language in which we are, as always, deceived. Lies are manufactured in that English language. All the treaties are written in English, are they not? In its wording our land is stolen. (*Four Souls* 154)

By rejecting English in his formal address as chairman regarding important tribal matters, Nanapush suggests that there is power to be derived from Anishinaabe tradition, and that one can remain “one hundred percent pure Anishinaabeg” while working within a non-traditional political system. Nanapush goes on to remind the Ojibwe, “We call the earth Grandmother. We ask her help when times are difficult” (*Four Souls* 155). Nanapush’s appeal to Anishinaabe tradition works; he persuades the Ojibwe to vote against the land settlement, succeeding in exercising self-determination even within the hierarchical bureaucratic system.

In addition to Nanapush’s doubled authority as both an official chairman and a tribal elder, he further complicates his role, and highlights his trickster nature, by wearing Margaret’s medicine dress to the gathering. Nanapush only attends in the dress by accident; the evening before the meeting, Nanapush puts on the dress in order to show Margaret how to dance in it better. He later spends the night drinking altar

wine in the cellar of the convent, awakens in the tribal jail, and is reminded of the imminent council meeting by the Pukwans. Rather than reneging on his duty or showing his embarrassment, Nanapush makes the dress a feature of his speech. Cunningly realising that the crowd “was composed of two women to every one man”, Nanapush tells his audience that the “sacred” dress made him able “to hear all I missed when I was arrayed like a man” and communicate with the earth (*Four Souls* 155-156). Thus Nanapush stretches his autonomy within the institution of the council, playing on his appearance and channelling Anishinaabe tradition to exhort the community not to sell tribal land. By wearing the dress in an official capacity in a public forum and invoking the earth’s presence as a female voice, Nanapush challenges the binary gender roles enforced by the institutions of the Catholic Church and government school, thereby mirroring and creating a moment of communion with Father Damien. Thus Nanapush’s autonomy, unpredictability and strong connection with Anishinaabe tradition undercut the assimilationist and homogenising force of hierarchically structured systems of power.

Nanapush’s comfort with ambiguity and desire to use his power as tribal chairman to reflect and protect Ojibwe identity and Anishinaabe tradition bridges his tricksterism with both Anzaldúa’s *mestiza* and Vizenor’s survivance. Throughout *Tracks* and *Four Souls* Nanapush implements survivance through “deliberate strategies of survival,” maintaining his sense of Ojibwe identity while undergoing necessary adaptation and striving to effect positive change upon and through the institutions developing around him on the reservation (Pasquaretta xiv).

Erdrich returns to the written document motif to illustrate Nanapush’s strategy to protect Ojibwe sovereignty at the end of *Four Souls*. Nanapush presents the written word as a new way of asserting Ojibwe sovereignty, declaring, “Once we were a

people who left no tracks. Now we are different. We print ourselves deeply on the earth ... I have left my own tracks, too. I have left behind these words” (*Four Souls* 210). As Stirrup points out, “documents – the maps and treaties in particular – emblems as they are of imposition, become, through the kind of advocacy Nanapush represents, means by which sovereignty can be reasserted; an irony most deeply illustrated by Fleur’s cabin being lined with treaty papers” (76). Reflecting the powerful potential of harnessing the ‘hybridity’ generated by a borderlands context, and his own subversive power as a colonially-antagonistic trickster capable of prevailing over authoritative written documents, Nanapush and other characters simultaneously subsume and harness borderlands multiplicity and advocate for Native sovereignty. In this way, Erdrich posits Ojibwe survivance as a powerful and active force in defiance of the assimilationist influence of colonial institutions.

Like Owens’s frontier, Erdrich’s challenges to the institutions of the Church, capitalist-driven family home, government school and tribal council in *Tracks* and *Four Souls* function as a specifically Ojibwe-centred and survivance-driven undermining of institutional authority and a decolonial revision of Euro-American cultural narratives.

Part 2

“Creation, emergence, and migration” ²⁰

Cycles and Survival

²⁰ Allen, *Off the Reservation*, 13.

Chapter 3

Home and Mobility

Home is a challenging concept throughout Erdrich's Little No Horse novels, and the relationship between 'home' and 'house' in these texts is neither simple nor consistent. This complexity is perhaps to be expected, considering the history of land dispossession, tribal disempowerment and the influence wielded by exploitative capitalism over socio-cultural development on reservations in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, signified by borders in Erdrich's fiction. Yet Erdrich continually, albeit ambivalently, places the home at the centre of her novels, and at the centre of her characters' lives. The contrast between the importance of the home on one hand, and the lack of security many characters have within, or derive from the home on the other, forms a paradox in the lives of several characters in *The Bingo Palace* and *Love Medicine*, and drives their respective trajectories in these novels.

The home in Erdrich's work is paradoxically characterised by movement away from and troubled returns to it. This is not unusual within the genre of Native American fiction: William Bevis has explained that, whereas classically Eurocentric American novels tend to follow a "mobile plot" of outward-looking adventure, "Native American novels are not 'eccentric,' centrifugal, diverging, expanding, but 'incentric,' centripetal, converging, contracting" (582). In this sense, alongside the supreme importance of community and sense of place, mobility in Native American literature habitually functions as an integral aspect of the idea of home.

The ambivalent nature of this dynamic is due in part to longstanding Euro-American ideological assaults on traditional Indigenous ideas about home and mobility. Since the frontier era, the premise of free, independent movement to claim

ready land and the right to build and defend one's home have been foundational to Euro-American culture. The centrality of mobility to this model of American identity distinguishes it from traditional European approaches to home, dependent on a more rooted sense of subjectivity, which privilege the community and the past, as opposed to the dominant American focus on the individual and the future. The realisation of manifest destiny was contingent upon its resonance with settlers on an intimate level; the West could not have been (re)settled were it not for the unshakeable belief among settlers that they had the right and capability to find and forge their own homes in new surroundings. Euro-American concepts of home and mobility thus depended upon the radical and all-encompassing disruption of interrelated traditional Native ways of life and senses of place.

Prior to colonisation, nomadic or semi-nomadic practices were traditionally common to many Native peoples, as an essential part of subsistence agriculture, hunting and gathering lifestyles. These practices worked in unproblematic relation to spiritually and culturally profound relationships with specific expanses of land. However, with the advent of colonisation, settler authorities both precluded the free continuation of nomadic practices and took advantage of traditional practices to create an exaggerated narrative of Native nomadism. Raymond D. Fogelson terms this strategy the "myth of nomadism" (49). As recorded by de Tocqueville, based on the premise that "a nation, above all, has to take root in order to be ready for civilization and this cannot be done without introducing cultivation of the land," European settlers ironically deracinated the Indigenous population: "having scattered the Indian tribes into the wilderness, [they] condemned them to a wandering vagabond life, full of indescribable suffering" (383, 373). Alison McQueen and Burke A. Hendrix note that the language used by President Andrew Jackson and Secretaries of War John C.

Calhoun and Lewis Cass, who had responsibility for Indian removal during their respective tenures, reveals that, “As long as Indians could be described as nomads whose displacement would simply return them to their natural condition, ... few claims of ‘injustice’ could plausibly be pressed” (671). This paradox was made permanent through the reservation system.

The twentieth century saw concerted efforts to continue this trend through governmental facilitation of migration from reservations to urban environments. Many Native people were motivated to move to cities by poor conditions on reservations; others were incentivised by the government’s relocation programme, which offered vocational training and employment. Laura M. Furlan explains:

Begun after the Second World War and ending in the early 1970s, relocation was initially an employment program for returning Indian veterans and was designed by the BIA as an alternative to growing poverty on the reservations, which had dramatically increased after years of drought. In 1956 the Senate passed Public Law 959, or the Indian Adult Vocational Training Act, which established urban and reservation training centers, though relocation had begun unofficially in 1952 ... [Relocatees] received bus or train fare, fifty dollars to use to move their household goods, a temporary room (usually at a YMCA or transient hotel), and job placement assistance, mostly as industrial laborers. (14-15)

The era of relocation thus continued colonial policies of removing Native peoples from their homelands, even the relatively recently established homelands constituted by reservations, in order to disrupt traditional ways of life.

The programme appeared to be a success: “From 1951 to 1971, more than one hundred thousand were relocated from their reservations to urban areas” (Furlan 15). However, many relocatees returned to reservations. Furlan reports that the “return rate” of participants may have reached up to seventy percent, although her source, Donald Fixico, notes that widespread manipulation of figures “helped fuel the controversy over relocation” (Furlan 15; Fixico 20). Ultimately, the programme

precipitated “a widespread, organized reaction” in the form of such political groups as the American Indian Movement (Furlan 19).

Evidently, as illustrated by Bevis’s observation and Erdrich’s work, the nexus of home and mobility remains central to many literary representations of American Indian identity. This dynamic applies to both reservation and urban contexts. The majority of Native Americans now live in urban environments, but, as R. David Edmunds notes, “most of these individuals [have] maintained ties to reservation communities” and many “still vote in tribal elections, return to the reservation communities to participate in ceremonial or social occasions, and even anticipate a retirement back on the reservation” (Edmunds 735). In this way, the connection between a distinct, ancestrally significant homeland and mobility continues to define Native American senses of home and lend significance to patterns of movement between reservations and urban environments.

In relation to the United States as a settler colonial state, however, this understanding of home and mobility is fundamentally irreconcilable with American citizenship. Cheyfitz notes that tribal membership compromises Native people’s citizenship by categorizing them “as colonial subjects, not free citizens of either the United States or their own nations” (‘(Post)Colonial Predicament’ 409). As a result, he explains:

If an Indian remains on the reservation, which, with all its economic hardships due to colonial underdevelopment, is still the place of identity – the nurturing nexus of kin and land – then she or he is constrained to live under the colonial regime of federal Indian law without the constitutional guarantees of his or her US citizenship, excepting the right to vote in US state and national elections. (‘(Post)Colonial Predicament’ 413)

Since a tribally-specific sense of place is a vital aspect of tribal identity and, indeed, a requirement of legal tribal classification, the tradition of the reservation as a culturally

important, centripetal point of habitual return necessarily imposes what Kenneth R. Philip terms “second-class citizenship” upon both reservation-based and urban-dwelling Native people (177). This dynamic illustrates Coulthard’s view that, in settler colonial polities, “Indigenous subjects are the primary object of repair, not the colonial relationship” (127). Coulthard bases this assertion specifically on the Canadian context, in which ‘reconciliation’ between First Nations and non-Indigenous populations is an explicit political goal, but the formulation is also pertinent in relation to the US. The differences between Native and non-Native concepts of home and mobility suggest that, even under a scheme of (asymmetrical) reconciliation, certain aspects of traditional Indigenous societies are in fact *irreconcilable* with settler colonial society.

The centrality of Indigenous relationships with land to Coulthard’s concept of grounded normativity – defined as a set of “modalities of Indigenous land-connected practices and longstanding experiential knowledge that inform and structure our ethical engagements with the world and our relationships with human and nonhuman others over time” – positions the continuation of traditional practices around home and mobility, highly evocative of Vizenor’s transmotion, as modes of decolonial resistance (Coulthard 13). In this chapter, therefore, I utilise these concepts to examine Erdrich’s presentation of Ojibwe senses of home and mobility in *The Bingo Palace* and *Love Medicine*.

This chapter is structured around examples of impermanent and/or mobile homes which, I argue, illustrate the fundamental irreconcilability between Native and non-Native concepts of home and mobility. I firstly examine the Kashpaw home and Zelda Kashpaw’s unfulfilled desire to leave the reservation, and secondly the Senior Citizens’ residence in which the matriarchs Marie Kashpaw – Nector’s wife and

Zelda's mother – and Lulu Lamartine – Fleur's daughter – now live. Both of these humble residences are of substantial communal importance.

I then examine the relatively less secure home of the reservation bingo hall. The eponymous "Bingo Palace" is the central community focal point of the novel and illustrates the growing influence of capitalism upon the reservation community, in addition to the increasingly structured and individualised nature of Ojibwe society. The Bingo Palace acts as a temporary home for Lipsha, who sleeps there at night before beginning his shift as caretaker in the early hours of the morning. I examine Lipsha's misplaced sense of home in relation to this atypical, improvised home.

I continue to consider Lipsha's bingo prize van as a type of mobile home. Lipsha's use of the van as a home both reflects his increasing insecurity and isolation and forges connections between Lipsha and his definitively displaced mother, the deceased June. I examine Lipsha's van as both a source of mobility and home in order to explore the ways in which these concepts, once fractured, can be reconciled in an Ojibwe context.

Finally, I discuss Lipsha's father, Gerry Nanapush's imprisonment as an extreme instance of Ojibwe displacement under settler colonial authority, and his brief escape from prison as an expression of Native transmotion and survivance.

"No house stayed empty, no land unclaimed" ²¹

The most 'homely' of the homes Erdrich depicts in *The Bingo Palace* and *Love Medicine* is that of the Kashpaw family, situated beside Margaret Kashpaw's cabin and home to Nector and Marie Kashpaw and their children. We first come across the

²¹ Erdrich, *Tracks*, 184.

Kashpaw homeplace early in Erdrich's 1984 debut novel *Love Medicine*, which precedes *The Bingo Palace* chronologically, when the house is occupied by Aurelia. Albertine tells us, "Although Aurelia kept the house now, it was like communal property for the Kashpaws. There was always someone camped out or sleeping on her fold-up cots" (*Love Medicine* 29). Albertine describes the house as "one big square room with a cooking shack tacked onto it. The house is a light peeling lavender now, the color of a pale petunia, but it was never painted while I lived there" (*Love Medicine* 12). There is a "tacked-on addition that held toilet, laundry, kitchen sink. The plumbing, only two years old, was hooked up to one side of the house" (*Love Medicine* 24). Erdrich's presentation of the house is ambivalent; while the house is roughshod and its inhabitants rotate, it nonetheless conveys a sense of emotional support and spiritual nourishment. Indeed, while Nector "kept getting offers" like "Hollywood wants *you!*" as a young man, he soon finds that "the greater world was only interested in my doom" and returns "home on the back of a train" (*Love Medicine* 122, 124). This precedent defines the relationship to home for subsequent generations of the Kashpaw family.

As a deeply maternal character and matriarch of the Kashpaw clan, Marie is aware of the house's shortcomings, but takes pains to make the house as safe and comfortable as possible:

I looked at my linoleum carefully, all the worn spots and cracks, all the places where the tin stripping had to be hammered flat. It was one of my prides to keep that floor shined up. Under the gray swirls and spots and leaves of the pattern, I knew there was tar paper and bare wood that could splinter a baby's feet. I knew, because I bought and paid for and put down that linoleum myself. It was a good solid covering, but under it the boards creaked. (*Love Medicine* 164)

Unlike the linoleum which earlier elicits such longing and pride in Marie's mother-in-law Margaret, linoleum in the late twentieth century period is banal and utilitarian. It

is “solid” but “worn,” and the grey colouring echoes the tin stripping, signalling that the house’s raw materials and component parts are scarcely concealed. Yet the linoleum also acts as a manifestation of Marie’s powerful maternal force, allowing her to create a sense of homeliness in the house. Marie succeeds in protecting the bodies of her children and the integrity of the home.

The location of the home, built on the site of Margaret and Nanapush’s cabin, illustrates the Kashpaws’ enduring connection with their ancestral land. However, Albertine’s description of the Kashpaw home conveys the degeneration of the reservation across the twentieth century:

Whenever he came out to the home place now, Grandpa [Nector] had to get reacquainted with the yard of stunted oaks, marigold beds, the rusted car that had been his children’s playhouse and mine, the few hills of potatoes and stalks of rhubarb that Aurelia still grew. She worked nights, managing a bar, and couldn’t keep the place as nicely as Grandpa always had. (*Love Medicine* 18)

In contrast with Nector’s freewheeling travels in his youth, his daughters’ relative immobility is reflected in the poor growth of the oak trees and the redundant car, suggesting that a degree of mobility is vital for the Ojibwe, but that mobility is also increasingly difficult to maintain for Native peoples in the twentieth century US.

In *The Bingo Palace*, Zelda occupies the Kashpaw house with Shawnee Ray Toose and her young son Redford, forming a multigenerational surrogate family to substitute Zelda’s relationship with her daughter Albertine, a medical student living in Fargo who is absent for much of the novel. Zelda’s relationship with her home, as well as the relationships her wider family hold with the house, illustrates her fraught relationship with mobility. Whereas Vizenor perceives mobility to be a powerful statement of Native sovereignty, to Zelda mobility simply means escape from the reservation and the seemingly inevitably oppressive life for Ojibwe women who

remain. Whereas Nector's opportunities to travel come easily, there is a gendered aspect to his mobility. Rebecca Tillett argues that:

Like Momaday and Silko, Erdrich's analysis of cultural dis-ease takes place within the context of the 'return home'. However, the textual settings are emphatically domestic, not only exposing gendered conceptualisations and interpretations of home but also foregrounding a feminised domestic space and the women of the text. In this sense, the text emphasises and explores traditional gender roles within Ojibwe society. (75)

While male characters like Nector, June's sons King and Lipsha and the transmotional trickster archetypal figure Gerry Nanapush habitually leave and return to the family homeplace, a heavier burden of responsibility for the home falls on female characters like Marie, Zelda, Albertine and Shawnee Ray. The result is that mobility is figured as freedom for the men, and as escape for the women.

Having failed to escape the reservation herself, Zelda resents and fears the prospect that Albertine and Shawnee will succeed and leave her stranded and isolated, as a conversation with Shawnee demonstrates:

'It's for your own good,' said Zelda, softening. 'I just want to stop your wild-goose chasing. That contest – I know the woman... she'll never come up with the money.'

'She lost her daughter.'

'Because she left, went to the Cities, never really came home. Just like some.'

'You're scared I'll be like Albertine?' Shawnee looked steadily at the older woman, and then spoke coaxingly. 'She comes home, she's going to be a doctor. You're lucky with her, you know that.'

'I don't call it coming home,' said Zelda. 'She never stays!' (The Bingo Palace 118)

Zelda's use of the term "wild-goose chasing", in stark contrast with the repeated phrase "coming home", is telling. Shawnee hopes to win enough money by entering dancing competitions at powwows to study design at college while supporting Redford, and Albertine is already admired for her academic success. Albertine is figuratively following a path, while Shawnee is dancing in a variety of locations;

mobility is imperative to the girls' lifestyles and ambitions. The hope the two young women associate with mobility indicates negative implications of stasis in Ojibwe culture, and therefore a degree of failure in Zelda's life. Zelda's fear is not that Albertine and Shawnee will not succeed in life, but that they will succeed where she failed and leave her behind without any family of her own. This ambivalence raises questions around the achievability of mobility and success for the Ojibwe community, particularly Ojibwe women, in the modern capitalist colonial social context.

Zelda's ideas about home and mobility carry distinct racial implications. She tells us that Xavier Albert Toose, her first love for whom Albertine is named, "was the lookingest man around here, and a smart one too, but he wasn't the man I was saving myself to marry. That special man had to be white, so he would take me away from the reservation to the Cities, where I'd planned my life all out from catalogs and magazines" (*The Bingo Palace* 46). Mobility is presented as the preserve and power of the white population. Zelda privileges the magazine images that create a stereotypical, and entirely white, idealised illusion of marriage and home over her own identity and sentiments. She rejects Xavier, arguing, "he was wrong for me, didn't fit into my futures, where I saw myself holding a pan over a little white stove. In those wish dreams, I was dressed in pink, dressed in pale blue. I was someone with an upstairs to her downstairs, a two-story woman" (*The Bingo Palace* 47). Zelda here projects an image of herself *as* a home, implying that her sense of self is an empty construct. In contrast with the Kashpaw home, invigorated by the irregular cycle of departure, return and reunion of its inhabitants and adapted as and when necessary, Zelda's imagined house fulfils a prior design with exclusivity at its core. Thus Zelda's traditional Ojibwe upbringing comes into conflict with colonial US social influences, resulting in an irreconcilable dichotomy between her sense of place and ideal future.

The centripetal and ever-evolving Kashpaw home is replicated in Zelda's other abodes. At the beginning of *Love Medicine*, according to Albertine, Zelda lives with her second husband, Bjornson, "who owns a solid wheat farm" located "just on the very edge of the reservation" (*Love Medicine* 12). This strong and simple statement of ownership, not just of a home but of workable, dependably "solid" land, stands in marked contrast with Zelda's other homes, yet she cannot make it *her* permanent home. Ironically, Bjornson's farm illustrates not mobility on Zelda's part, but rather the continual encroachment of colonial presence onto Native land. Prior to this, after the disappearance of Zelda's first husband and Albertine's father Swede Johnson, the mother and daughter lived "in an aqua-and-silver trailer, set next to the old house on the land my great-grandparents were allotted" (*Love Medicine* 12). In a further twist on Zelda's desire for escape, the fixed "trailer" affords her neither passage beyond the reservation boundaries, nor the magazine-image white home of which she dreams. Ultimately, when Zelda admits her enduring love for Xavier at the end of *The Bingo Palace*, she has to dismantle her interconnected constructed identity and idea of home: "She was a house coming apart, the nails, each in turn, wrenched from the wood with a sob, the boards bounding off like blows" (*The Bingo Palace* 242–243). Having finally accepted Shawnee and Albertine's respective assertions of mobility and her own Ojibwe-centred sense of place, Zelda can establish a true sense of identity and home on the reservation with Xavier.

Albertine reflects her mother's urge to escape the reservation and her family's tendency towards informal, unstable homes. Albertine's living conditions - "Far from home, living in a white woman's basement" - constitute an inversion of her mother's dream: instead of Zelda's two-storey white house, Albertine lives underneath a white woman's house (*Love Medicine* 7). The "linoleum table" in Albertine's kitchen, on

one hand, connects Albertine's displacement with a Kashpaw family tradition of concurrent materialism and financial decline, but on the other it echoes the significance of home shared by Albertine and her mother (*Love Medicine* 7).

This ambivalence plays out in a violent incident early in *Love Medicine*, which illustrates the tense ambivalence of the house's associations with identity and tradition. Albertine recounts a family gathering during which June's son King, an abusive alcoholic, his white wife Lynette and their baby King Junior visit the family home. Entering the kitchen together, Lipsha and Albertine "saw at once that King was trying to drown Lynette. He was pushing her face in the sink of cold dishwater. Holding her by the nape and the ears. Her arms were whirling, knocking spoons and knives and bowls out of the drainer. She struggled powerfully, but he had her" (*Love Medicine* 41). Albertine tackles King and brings the fight to an end, but realises that Lipsha, like her other relatives, has fled, and she resents her family for abdicating responsibility and leaving her in vulnerable isolation. Albertine goes to check on King Junior, while King mimics his family by attempting to escape the house:

Lynette had turned the lights out in the kitchen as she left the house, and now I heard her outside the window begging King to take her away in the car.

'Let's go off before they all get back,' she said. 'It's them. You always get so crazy when you're home. We'll get the baby. We'll go off. We'll go back to the Cities, go home.'... They got into the car soon after that. Doors slammed. But they traveled just a few yards and then stopped. (*Love Medicine* 42)

King and Lynette derive no physical or emotional safety, comfort or freedom from the Kashpaw home. The couple's deep discomfort exacerbates their difficult relationship and serves to destroy any sense of security the rest of the family enjoys in the house. They see the mobility their car grants them as a more comfortable mode of living, offering them a sense of escape and relief.

King's alienation results in a dysfunctional relationship in which Lynette becomes trapped in cycles of violence and forgiveness. Lynette views King's family and home as the disruptive factors in their relationship and sees leaving the reservation as a solution, failing to understand or respect King's Ojibwe heritage while declining to hold him personally responsible for his actions. As a white person, escape is more accessible to Lynette than it is to King, as she does not share his profound, albeit ambivalent, sense of place. Thus Lynette implicitly desires to make King assimilate into white society. In this way, the themes of home and mobility allow us to read the couple's relationship as a reflection of the large-scale trauma inflicted upon Native peoples in the US, mirroring the devastating impact of family disintegration, parental death, violence – especially against women – and poverty on reservations in the twentieth century.

Further reinforcing the influence of colonial US systems on Indigenous communities, the home as a fulfilment of bureaucratic criteria is an important asset in the fractious reservation society. Zelda's position as a matriarch depends on Redford: the presence of a child in her home both offers her personal, maternal validation and, to her mind, validates her home as a domestic space. In her battle to reclaim Redford from Shawnee's volatile sisters Mary Fred and Tammy, Zelda channels colonial power to weaponise her house as a symbol of stability. Erdrich contrasts Zelda's authority with the disenfranchised Toose sisters, recalling the influence of official bureaucracy and the formalisation of governance on the reservation through the Church, school and tribal council earlier in the century, and echoing the painful history of the removal of Native children by colonial social organisations:

At first glance, Vicki Koob could see that Redford and Mary Fred were not in the house, but she pushed past Tammy and took out her notebook to describe it anyway, for the files, to back up this questionable action. The house consisted of just one rectangular room with whitewashed

walls and a little gas stove in the middle. She had already come through the cooking lean-to with the other stove and a washstand and rusty refrigerator ... Not one detail escaped Vicki Koob's trained and cataloging gaze. She noticed the cupboard that held only commodity flour and coffee. The unsanitary tin oil-drum beneath the kitchen window, full of empty surplus pork cans and beer bottles, caught her eye, as did Tammy's serious physical and mental deteriorations. She quickly described these 'benchmarks of alcoholic dependency within the extended family of Redford Toose' as she transferred the room to paper. (*The Bingo Palace* 175)

The Kashpaw residence is barely any more homely than the Toose sisters' house, with the "rusty refrigerator" recalling the Kashpaws' "rusted car", but as a government employee, Zelda knows how to manipulate the official systems and utilise the authoritarian imperialist gaze to her own ends. Social worker Vicki Koob's particular noting of "commodity flour and coffee" and "surplus pork cans" highlights the sisters' poverty, reliant on the very substances provided by the government, theoretically sufficient but socially inadequate. In spite of Zelda's clear and self-interested bias in instigating the investigation, Vicki creates an impression of objective and empirical evidence in her report. Her formulaic documentation of the house recalls Nanapush's distrust of bureaucracy in *Tracks* and *Four Souls* and builds a parallel between BIA activities and the practices of ethnography and anthropology. As James Clifford points out, ethnographic writing conceals the fact that it is the product of "multiple subjectivities" by "enact[ing] a specific strategy of authority. This strategy has classically involved an unquestioned claim to appear as the purveyor of truth in the text" (25). Vicki Koob thus employs a colonial method to challenge and control the Toose sisters' home and family.

Zelda's appeal to social authorities to regain guardianship of Redford and the legitimacy of her home therefore illustrates the all-pervasive power of colonial social structures. According to Foucault:

this power is exercised rather than possessed; it is not the ‘privilege,’ acquired or preserved, of the dominant class, but the overall effect of its strategic positions – an effect that is manifested and sometimes extended by the position of those who are dominated. Furthermore, this power is not exercised simply as an obligation or a prohibition on those who ‘do not have it’; it invests them, is transmitted by them and through them; it exerts pressure on them, just as they themselves, in their struggle against it, resist the grip it has on them. (*The Foucault Reader* 174)

In this sense, Zelda’s utilisation of official authority undermines Ojibwe concepts of home – both the Kashpaw house and the Toose sisters’ house – and mobility as expressions of Ojibwe sovereignty, further complicating the reconciliation of the two concepts for Zelda. The influence of colonial power thus mirrors and subsumes the centripetal trajectory of Native homing by infiltrating inward from the reservation boundary towards individual dwellings and family dynamics.

“territory is clearly mapped, fully imagined as a place of containment” ²²

The Senior Citizens’ residence is another communal, evolving home in *The Bingo Palace*. Marie Kashpaw and Lulu Lamartine, the two dominant matriarchal figures of the generation prior to Zelda’s, live in individual apartments in the Senior Citizens’, balancing the atmosphere of the residence in accordance with their rival but civil relationship. Both Marie and Lulu are widowed mothers, making their status as supported ‘senior citizens’ complex: they no longer control a family home, so important to Zelda’s sense of power and identity; yet both women are still highly respected within the reservation society and central to their respective family dynamics. The Senior Citizens’ home thus illustrates the disparity between, on one hand, official approaches to and modes of accommodating individuals, and on the

²² Owens, *Mixedblood Messages*, 26.

other, the Ojibwe community's approach to more traditional or habitual conceptions of home and place. Like aspects of Zelda's home, this disparity can be traced to drastic shifts in the Ojibwe way of life and sense of place triggered by the US government's destructive policies pertaining to Native American lands and communities in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.

After being widowed in *Love Medicine*, Marie Kashpaw continues to live in relative comfort in her Senior Citizens' apartment. She has a "round wooden table" upon which "the winter sun cast[s] a buttery light ... warming her knobbed fingers" (*The Bingo Palace* 27). As in the Kashpaw homeplace and Albertine's lodgings, the table denotes a distinctly feminine domestic space, implying that the home itself retains an element of mobility, embodied less by a building than by a (maternal) person. Indeed, Marie awaits Lipsha's arrival at the Senior Citizens', knowing instinctively "that her youngest would come by to visit soon" (*The Bingo Palace* 27). The Senior Citizens' functions as a home, a centripetal point of return, for Lipsha. In this way, Marie's very presence makes the apartment a home. Yet, like the reservation, Marie's Senior Citizens' apartment is highly permeable to the exterior world: the curtains are "sheer nylon drapes," and Lipsha's arrival is signalled by the sound of "footsteps in the hall" (*The Bingo Palace* 27–28). This permeability both emphasises the community-orientated nature of the Ojibwe sense of home and foreshadows Lulu's arrest by FBI agents at the end of *The Bingo Palace*.

In contrast with Marie, and in spite of her strong social standing as a powerful matriarch, Lulu struggles to establish a firm sense of place throughout her life. Continuing the trajectory instigated by the traumatic experience of being left by her mother Fleur and sent to the government boarding school, Lulu evinces only limited loyalty in her romantic relationships, and refuses to buy a legally secure home. Early

in *Love Medicine*, Nector seeks to build a factory, the tribal land allocated for which is the site of Lulu's existing but officially unapproved house:

The area redevelopment went through. I was glad, because if I hadn't betrayed Lulu before, I had to do it now, over the very land she lived on. It was not hers ... she didn't own the land, because the Lamartines had squatted there. That land had always belonged to the tribe, I was sorry to find, and for now the tribal council had decided that Lulu's land was the one perfect place to locate a factory. (*Love Medicine* 138).

Desperate to be with Lulu, Nector writes a letter to his wife Marie telling her he is leaving, and another to Lulu declaring his commitment. He awaits Lulu outside her house, but, apprehensive, he lights a cigarette and inadvertently sets fire to the letter and thereby Lulu's house. After the destruction of their home, Lulu and her sons camp at the site of the burnt building until the tribe "finally built a crackerbox government house for us. They put it on a strip of land rightfully repurchased from a white farmer. That land was better than Henry's, even, with a view overlooking the town. From there I could see everything. I accepted their restitution" (*Love Medicine* 288). Like the politics of reconciliation analysed by Coulthard, Lulu's granted land formulates the return of ancestral lands to Native peoples in official, economic terms. Accordingly, Lulu's Senior Citizens' apartment, while pleasant, is simply the latest of her short-term, unstable homes managed by government bodies.

Illustrating continued colonial authority over reservations, federal agents searching for the escaped Gerry Nanapush, Lulu's eldest son, arrive at the Senior Citizens' home to search Lulu's apartment and take her for questioning with unimpeded access. The collective narrators tell us:

They say that she was ready for the federal marshals when they drove up to the doors, though they were quiet, their tyres hardly crunching snow. The rest of us had no wind and no warning, no inkling, but we were mostly awake anyway in the dark chill of a day that began with a plunging degree of cold. That below-zero chill burned our feet through the covers. We shivered, twisting deeper. Old bones need warm caves. From outside, in the insulated halls and behind the doors, we heard the

shuffling, we heard the boot steps, the noise of their invasion, but most of us turned over into a sleep that would soon go on forever. (*The Bingo Palace* 261)

Erdrich's language raises militaristic connotations: the "crunching" tyres and "shuffling" "bootsteps"; the marshals' quiet arrival with no forewarning. The agents' stealth recalls the arrival of Zelda, Vicki Koob and tribal Officer Leo Pukwan at the Toose sisters' home, signalled only by "the crunching sound of cinders in the yard, the engine throbbing, the dust sifting off their car" (*The Bingo Palace* 172). This strategic access connects the two incidents of assault on reservation homes under the overarching authority of the imperial gaze.

The hostile weather conditions – recalling the ominous beginning of *Tracks* – alongside the residents' old age and physical vulnerability and the marshals' tactical entry, present this incursion as the latest in a long history of colonial assertions of authority over Native land. The community-orientated home, Erdrich thus suggests, is an important target for colonial forces. The vital role played by mobility is central to the functioning of the Ojibwe home as a mode of resistance against colonial authority. Cyclical patterns of leaving and returning home, and also the shifting of the meaning of home, defy the imposed stasis denoted by reservation and allotment borders. On a wider scale, traditional Indigenous understandings of home enact Owens's decolonial frontier by subverting the mobility vital to what Wolfe terms the ongoing "structure" of "invasion" (402). The FBI raid thus illustrates the threat traditional concepts of home and mobility are perceived to pose to colonial authority.

We infer from Marie and Lulu's circumstances that the majority of Senior Citizens' residents are also female and widowed. The demographic structure of the Senior Citizens' home reinforces Erdrich's presentation of the domestic space as predominantly feminine and maternal. Marie and Lulu's shared matriarchal status, as

well as Lulu's performative femininity, therefore cast the FBI investigation in gendered terms. The narrators posit that, whether the federal marshals find incriminating evidence or not, "motherhood itself was more than enough" to arrest and question Lulu (*The Bingo Palace* 262). This equation of Native maternal identity with criminality recalls Paula Gunn Allen's assertion that "the western world's relation to women powerfully mirrors its relation to Native people ... Both are close to nature, irrational, intuitive, mystical, culturally focused, domestic, dependent entities, at one with flora and fauna, and best kept silent, dependent, and enclosed – for their own protection" (9). As the embodiment and protector of the home, the Native mother is a radically subversive figure from a colonial perspective.

Lulu channels this subversive power by planning and manipulating the spectacle of her arrest to derail the investigation and illustrate the impropriety of the marshals' actions. Erdrich emphasises Lulu's sense of home and maternal identity as motivation for her scheme: the marshals foolishly "spent a long time questioning a fish in the river, they spent a longer time talking to a turtle in its shell, they tried to intimidate a female badger guarding the mouth of its den and then, to fool an old lady coyote who trotted wide of the marks her pups had left" (*The Bingo Palace* 263). Parodying the marshals' expectations of a weak elderly lady, Lulu pretends to have difficulty remembering and explaining her role in Gerry's escape, or indeed whether she was involved at all. Signalling the futility of the marshals' mission by referring to the tradition of homecoming practised by Gerry and other Ojibwe men, she tells the officers, "Of course, of course he was here. He came home" (*The Bingo Palace* 263). Yet, having claimed that "she has just returned from taking him up north across the border in her automobile," the precise location seems impossible to recall: "She tries to help but the world is going vague, losing its shape and everything is getting mashed

around inside her stumbling brain,” the narrators tell us (*The Bingo Palace* 264). Losing patience, the marshals “have dusted everything for fingerprints. They have examined every surface for nail clips and hair. They have looked into each drawer and sounded walls. Gone over each of her possessions, in turn. Including the wanted poster, nicely framed” (*The Bingo Palace* 264). Lulu’s openly defiant, reverential exhibition of Gerry’s wanted poster in the presence of colonial authority frames the interaction in terms of survivance.

The marshals remove Lulu from her apartment in full view of local journalists and the tribal police, creating the indelible image of “Lulu Lamartine surrounded, walked off by muscle-bound agents, as if she would escape, and so frail! Removed from an old people’s home!” (*The Bingo Palace* 264–265). Lulu animates her curated image with “the old-lady traditional, a simple step, but complex in its quiet balance, striking ... exactly like an old-time Pillager” and supplies it with the soundtrack of “the old-lady trill, the victory yell,” in which the residents “can’t help join her” (*The Bingo Palace* 265). The public visibility and collective narration of the arrest highlights the importance of community to the Senior Citizens’ home, and to the reservation generally. Lulu’s dancing as an act of defiance invokes transmotion, while Erdrich’s reference to the Pillagers contextualises Lulu’s protest as a place-dependent, historically-anchored event. Lulu’s dancing also contextualises Shawnee’s dancing as a means of asserting her social and financial autonomy, and thus the privileging of mobility as a valid and important decision for the Ojibwe – including Ojibwe women – in the late twentieth century US.

Both the Kashpaw house and the Senior Citizens’ home therefore function as microcosms for the reservation system, in which Erdrich explores the intrinsic

connection between home and mobility in Anishinaabe tradition and asserts Ojibwe identity and sovereignty in the face of settler colonial authority.

“slipping between the seams” ²³

Zelda Kashpaw’s house and the Senior Citizens’ residence are linked through the main protagonist of *The Bingo Palace*, Lipsha Morrissey. We meet Lipsha early in *The Bingo Palace* upon his return to the Little No Horse Reservation from Fargo, after Lulu sends him a photocopy of Gerry’s wanted poster as a summons to come home. Later, we realise that Lulu sets Lipsha’s return in motion to create the necessary circumstances for Gerry’s escape. Throughout the novel, however, Lipsha struggles to forge any clear sense of home, maintaining an inclination towards isolation and banal semi-nomadism. Lipsha’s passing through and between several families and different types of home regularly illustrates the fraught relationship between mobility and home in the Little No Horse Reservation context. The eponymous Bingo Palace owned by Lulu’s son Lyman becomes one of Lipsha’s liminal, improvised and insecure homes.

Lipsha arrives home on the reservation during the winter powwow and promptly falls in love with Shawnee Ray Toose, who inquires about his return to the reservation:

‘You’re back,’ she states. ‘For good?’

‘For bad,’ I joke.

She doesn’t laugh.

... I have the sense of weight descending, and then of some powerful movement from below. I have this sudden knowledge that no matter what I do with my life, no matter how far away I go, or change, or grow and gain, I will never get away from here. I will always be the subject of a plan greater than myself, an order that works mechanically,

²³ Owens, *Mixedblood Messages*, 41.

so that no matter what I do it will come down to this. (*The Bingo Palace* 21)

Part of Lipsha's difficulty in developing a sense of home at Little No Horse is the lack of autonomy he perceives in his role within the reservation community. While he is ostensibly a deeply traditional figure, Lipsha suffers from the "weight" of the community's disappointed expectations of him as an Anishinaabe healer. Lipsha rails against what he sees as his undesired and unfulfilling destiny to return to the reservation, to the gaze of his father from his wanted poster and the legacy of his lost mother, by resisting his sense of home and refusing to establish a sense of place in the community, favouring instead a rootless form of mobility.

Lipsha's liminality is immediately remarked upon by the collective Ojibwe narrator in the opening chapter of *The Bingo Palace*. The community notices that "there was no place the boy could fit" (*The Bingo Palace* 9). Surveying the range of roles and figures of the reservation among the crowd, the narrators conclude that he "was none of these, only Lipsha, come home" (10). As a unique character, Lipsha has no clear place within his society. Whereas Zelda and Marie have homes which signify and facilitate their respective senses of place and, indeed, identity, Lipsha subsists without any formal home. He has no parents' home to return to; he does not request to stay at either Zelda's house or the Senior Citizens', in spite of his closest familial connections leading him to these places. Lipsha's nomadism is less a conscious lifestyle than the only way of life that Lipsha knows. Whereas Lulu and Shawnee are comfortable with the interrelation of home and mobility, for Lipsha, simultaneously deeply traditional and unpredictable, the contingent ideas of home and mobility present an irreconcilable conflict.

Lipsha eventually finds himself occupying a temporary, informal and impersonal home at the Bingo Palace when he is offered a job as a caretaker by successful businessman and influential tribal member Lyman Lamartine:

‘I suppose,’ says Lyman, putting the pipe reluctantly back into my hands, ‘you don’t have a place to keep this museum piece.’

‘I’m kind of between places,’ I acknowledge. ‘I had the pipe stowed in a little suitcase in my car trunk.’

Lyman drops his chin low and looks up at me from under his brows.

‘You working?’

‘I’m between jobs, too.’

‘Maybe,’ says Lyman, his teeth showing a little, ‘you could work for me again. Close by. Where I could keep an eye on you.’ (*The Bingo Palace* 39)

Lipsha’s repetition of being “between” homes and jobs emphasises his liminality. While his possession of Nector’s pipe, an important, culturally significant gift from Marie Kashpaw, should help Lipsha develop a stronger sense of belonging, the fact that he keeps it in his car illustrates his withdrawal from his failed role as an Anishinaabe healer and the influence of his displacement upon his mobility. Jeanne Smith, drawing on Bevis, notes that, “Like many contemporary Native American novelists, Erdrich uses a ‘homing’ plot, which emphasizes family, community and culture, rather than the classic American ‘leaving’ plot, which emphasizes individual freedom” (13). In Lipsha’s case, however, this “homing” appears to be symptomatic of a compulsive, escapist nomadism entailing only temporary returns to the reservation, reflecting his inability to reconcile the idea of home with the reservation and his past there.

Lipsha’s description of the Bingo Palace emphasises its inadequacy as a home:

From outside, my place of work is a factorylike Quonset hut – aqua and black – one big half-cylinder of false hope that sits off the highway between here and Hoopdance. By day, the place looks shabby and raw – a rutted dirt parking lot bounds the rippled tin walls. Bare and glittering with broken glass, the wide expanse is pocked by deep holes. The Pabst sign hangs crooked and the flat wooden door sags as if it was

shoved shut in too many faces, against hard fists. (*The Bingo Palace* 41)

Similarly to the trailer Zelda lives in prior to taking on the Kashpaw home – the Bingo Palace is aqua and black, while Zelda’s trailer is aqua and silver – Lipsha’s temporary home is little more than a prefabricated outbuilding. The “half-cylinder” shape echoes Lipsha’s aimless, cyclical wandering, as does the bingo hall’s location “off the highway” en route to a local town. The location also attracts other dislocated figures, as Erdrich elaborates: “People come and go underneath the cloud. Some to the bar, some to the bingo. There are the road workers, in construction, slab muscled and riding temporary money, new pickups with expensive options and airbrushed curlicues on the doors” (*The Bingo Palace* 42). Continuing the narrative set in motion by Mauser and his generation of ceaseless builders, the Bingo Palace serves as a place of escape for other semi-nomadic people. Erdrich’s description of the spatial features of the Bingo Palace reinforces its impermanence and insecurity: the “dirt parking lot” is “rutted”; the “tin walls”, recalling the carefully concealed tin stripping of Marie Kashpaw’s house, are “rippled”; the prominence of “broken glass” is suggestive of broken windows and the door “sags” in defiance of “hard fists.” Thus the Bingo Palace is entirely unhomely.

Indeed, the Quonset hut is a rootless, temporary structure. The prefabricated corrugated steel huts were widely used during the Second World War and repurposed to house returning American soldiers post-World War II. Discussing an example of the use of Quonset huts in New York, Dana Schulz explains that the structures were used to compensate for a housing shortage resulting from the Depression, but the cold, leaking structures proved unfitting as accommodation (Schulz). Like the Indian reservation system, the Quonset hut reminds us of the central role played by the US military in Indian removal. Thus the Bingo Palace’s location “off the highway” is

fitting; the repurposing of the structures offered a temporary solution to an inconvenient problem.

The interior of the Bingo Palace belies its glamorous name. Lipsha tells us:

My place of employment is an all-purpose warehouse containing an area for gambling that Lyman hopes to enlarge, a bingo floor that converts to a dance area, and a bar ... At five each morning I roll from bed in a room behind the bar, fill a bucket with hot water, add a splash of pink soap, wring out my mop, and set to work. After I swab the linoleum, I sling my rag across the seats and counters. (*The Bingo Palace* 40)

Lipsha's reference to the linoleum floor creates a network between the Bingo Palace, Albertine's basement room, Marie Kashpaw's chaotic house and Margaret Kashpaw's old cabin, suggesting that industrialisation has secured a firm hold on the reservation and disrupted relationships to home on the reservation. The scale of the building and its capitalist focus further imply that the predominance of linoleum has grown in proportion to the Ojibwe's separation from the land.

Lyman's offer of a job and place to live illustrates the lack of autonomy Lipsha's homelessness generates, and the power Lyman derives from his position as boss and landlord. Like Nector, Lyman is comfortable in business and, exhibiting Nector's opportunity-driven mobility, he navigates the world of western capitalism with ease. Lipsha states that he, "honestly admire[s] Lyman's ease in the larger world", implying that Lyman possesses a type of mobility granted by colonial and capitalist power that Lipsha lacks. (*The Bingo Palace* 160). Luck is not always on Lyman's side, however. Visiting a casino out of town, Lyman gambles away not only his own money, but also official funds for tribal development and Lipsha's tobacco pipe:

Right about there, when he perched just under three thousand, he felt a low wave, a green slide of nausea, and told himself to leave. But he was two people then, split, and could not unstick himself. He started losing his way in a muddy sluice of sloppy plays, and he got desperate. His luck turned unpredictable and he played on, but the momentum had died. (*The Bingo Palace* 93)

Erdrich here makes another play on Du Bois' double consciousness, triggered, like Margaret's forced suppression of her native language, by a crisis-inducing cultural collision fracturing Lyman's sense of identity. Lyman has tipped into individualistic, irresponsible and unsuccessful gambling, far removed from traditional Native gambling practices. Pasquaretta points out that, "For Native peoples, dealing with hostile colonial forces has always been a high-stakes game of chance. Narrative traditions, in both their spoken and written forms, combined with traditional gambling practices, instruct the players on how to play that game" (162). Kathryn Gabriel notes that, "there are no good guys and bad guys per se in Native myths. The social function of traditional tribal myth is to distribute value evenly" (23). The imbalance that is fundamental to capitalism thus precludes the traditional approach to gambling. As an Ojibwe man in a capitalist colonial context, Lyman realises that the house will win.

Moreover, Lyman's sensation of "a low wave" indicates that he is in fact no longer in control of his mobility. His "green slide of nausea," the colour of the money he loses, evokes involuntary and unstoppable movement and a lack of bodily control. Stirrup reads the "moment of splitting" in Erdrich's work as "a moment of transition," arguing that "the space between splitting and healing is a necessary stage in the consolidation of individual and community identity" (10). Whereas Lipsha pursues this healing, however, Lyman subjects his agency to this destructive gambling: his 'splitting' prevents him from moving out of danger, even though he "told himself to leave". When Erdrich tells us that "the momentum had died", we infer that not only has Lyman's run of luck ended, but the irreconcilability of his individualistic, capitalist gambling with Anishinaabe tradition has also hampered his personal mobility. Thus Lyman has disowned his Ojibwe sense of home for his "ease in the larger world".

Despite his catastrophic losses, Lyman is determined to forge ahead with his business ventures on the reservation, and he is willing to jeopardise the tribe's land holdings and, thereby, tribal sovereignty in the process. Like Nector before him, Lyman focuses on immediate opportunities, which aligns him more closely with the temporality and motivations of "the larger world" and sets him at odds with the long-term interests of the tribe. Lyman tells Lipsha, "There's lots of ways to make money, and gambling is not the nicest, not the best, not the prettiest. It's just the way available right now" (*The Bingo Palace* 103). Lyman's refusal to set his enterprise in historical, social or moral context highlights his wilful dislocation.

The Bingo Palace echoes Lyman's previous enterprise, the ill-fated tomahawk factory. In *Love Medicine* we learn that Lyman founds a "tribal souvenir factory" producing "fake arrows and plastic bows, dyed-chicken-feather headdresses for children, dress-up stuff" (*Love Medicine* 303). Under pressure from Lulu and other tribal members, the project is adapted to produce "'museum-quality' artifacts" instead (*Love Medicine* 303). Lyman organises the tribal factory workers into a production line, which Erdrich delineates step by numbered step. The outline ends with a sales pitch for the items highlighting their credentials and value:

End product:

An attractively framed symbol of America's past. Perfect for the home or office. A great addition to the sportsman's den. All authentic designs and child-safe materials. Crafted under the auspices of the U.S. Department of the Interior, Anishinabe Enterprises, Inc. Hand produced by Tribal Members. (*Love Medicine* 310)

Despite the fact that the industrialised mass manufacture of the items dramatically betrays their traditional purposes and production, Lyman presents the factory 'hand production' as a certification of authenticity and commodifies it as a selling point. He also boasts that he has modernised and streamlined the production of his "favorite"

item, “patterned birch bark” (*Love Medicine* 310). In the traditional method, “women bit the shapes of snowflakes and stars into pieces of birch bark”, but Lyman “could not have my workers sitting around nibbling, dental benefits wouldn’t cover it” (*Love Medicine* 310). Eventually Lyman mechanises the birch bark tooling, so that “One worker operating this machine could produce, in a day, the winter’s work of a hundred Chippewa grandmothers” (*Love Medicine* 310). By establishing these systems, Lyman not only decontextualises culturally significant objects, but he also subverts Ojibwe mobility by placing the workers in stasis and mobilising the product along the assembly line. More worryingly, by absorbing the work of “a hundred Chippewa grandmothers” Lyman risks displacing women like Lulu and Marie who form the enduring core of the Ojibwe community.

Lyman demonstrates his loyalty to individual capitalist gain over tribal interests by asserting to Lipsha that, “Money is alive ... You have to put it in a place where it grows” (*The Bingo Palace* 101). Instead of observing the message he receives from Fleur Pillager in a vision, telling him, “*Land is the only thing that lasts life to life*” (*The Bingo Palace* 148), Lyman perceives the profit – the growth of money – to be made not by buying back land, but by “us[ing] a patch of federal trust land somewhere” to invest “immediately into land-based operations” (*The Bingo Palace* 149). By committing himself to further commodification and industrialisation of tribal land, Lyman directly contravenes the principles of grounded normativity.

Lyman’s reckless pursuit of short-term, individualist gratification recalls Marx’s evocation of the constant motion of capital in *The Communist Manifesto*:

The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society ... Constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. (Marx and Engels 7)

Marx here reminds us that capitalism is all-pervasive and all-consuming. Therefore, Lyman's decision to dislocate his enterprise from its context and impact erodes not only his sense of place and identity, but that of the tribe collectively, inevitably leading to serious implications for tribal sovereignty over time.

Harmon et al. point out that such narratives of loss of Indigenous autonomy can distort representations of relationships between Native peoples and settler society. They explain that, "Coverage of twentieth-century Indians usually focuses on those who were passive beneficiaries of government assistance rather than producers of goods or active owners of valuable resources. Also obscured is the importance of tribal land, coal, oil, water, uranium, and other resources to the growth of American capitalism" (Harmon et al. 705). US society's disinclination to account for Native dispossession in the industrialisation of the country simultaneously allowed for continued social and financial exploitation on reservations in the late twentieth century in the form of casinos. As Gabriel remarks:

Gambling continues to be of great economic and social significance to Indian peoples – presumably a four to six billion dollar annual business. Since the Seminoles opened their first bingo parlor in Florida in 1974, roughly 200 tribes in twenty states have banked on gambling ventures in the attempt to gain economic independence. These enterprises have proven to be a bonanza for most groups, and a sign of their success is that gambling has surpassed baseball as a national pastime. (3)

Such casinos necessarily produce beneficiaries, like Lyman, and disadvantaged consumers, including other tribal members and non-Native gamblers. More generally, as Marx and Engels remind us, capitalist society "creates a world after its own image," which suggests that Lyman's enterprises ultimately risk eliding Anishinaabe tradition. (*The Communist Manifesto* 8). The self-sustaining motion of capitalism raises further unsettling implications in relation to the Bingo Palace's roadside location: traditional

Ojibwe practices around home and mobility, like traditional approaches to gambling, could fall prey to “the economic law of motion of modern society” (Marx 92).

The Bingo Palace thus functions as an inversion of the Ojibwe home, shifting the possession of mobility from the idea of home to capitalist enterprise, thereby threatening Ojibwe sovereignty.

“motion is the real American dream”²⁴

Lipsha’s occupation of the room behind the bar of the Bingo Palace ends when he wins the bingo grand prize, a much-coveted van. The van offers Lipsha a unique solution to his isolation and displacement as a mobile home:

I see that I wouldn’t want to live as long as I have coming, unless I own *the van*. It has every option you can believe – blue plush on the steering wheel, diamond side windows, and complete carpeting interior. The seats are easy chairs, with little built-in headphones, and it is wired all through the walls ... In the back there is a small refrigerator and a padded platform for sleeping. It is a starter home, a portable den with front-wheel drive, a place where I can shack with Shawnee Ray and her little boy, if she will consent. If she won’t live there, though, at least she will be impressed. (*The Bingo Palace* 63)

Lipsha’s description of the van illustrates his understanding of home: it is a “den,” a place to “shack.” Like Zelda’s attitude to the Kaspaw house, Lipsha sees the van as a valuable asset that will enhance his social status. When he considers the possibility of Shawnee Ray declining to move in, Lipsha imagines her not wanting to “live there” in the van, but he fails to consider the “there” surrounding the van. Lipsha’s view of home is entirely dislocated from the land, and he prefers nomadism to a sense of place.

In addition to the van’s dislocating effect, it is equipped to insulate Lipsha from the surrounding environment and community. His outline of the van emphasises its

²⁴ Owens, *Mixedblood Messages*, 161-2.

physical layers: it has a “complete carpeting interior” and a “padded platform”; “built-in headphones” and wiring “all through the walls”. The result is a self-contained, mobile home with soft surfaces and food storage; it is remarkably womb-like. Lipsha’s reference to Shawnee Ray and her young son Redford reinforces this maternal quality.

For Lipsha, the association between the van, insulation and the womb hinges on its monetary value. Lipsha describes money itself as “insulation” based on “what it keeps away – cold, heat, sore feet, nicotine fits and hungry days, even other people” (*The Bingo Palace* 95). What’s more, according to Lipsha, “Insulation buys insulation” (*The Bingo Palace* 95). Lipsha receives the seed of the money when his deceased mother June visits him at the Bingo Palace to reclaim her car, a Pontiac Firebird. Lipsha’s half-brother King buys the car with an insurance payment arising from June’s death, and Lipsha then wins the car in a game of poker at the end of *Love Medicine*. June also gives Lipsha a book of lucky bingo tickets on her visit (*The Bingo Palace* 54–55). Thereafter, Lipsha tells us, “Every time I play for money using one of June’s remaining bingo tickets, I win a small amount. The first time, it’s fifty dollars, just gas money, but the trend continues ... always I keep acquiring the insulation” (*The Bingo Palace* 95). Lipsha’s summation of his good fortune is that June “watches over me, at last, in the form of hundreds and twenties” (*The Bingo Palace* 95). Thus Erdrich suggests that Lipsha’s early and traumatic loss of his mother has impaired his sense of home, affecting his senses of place and identity.

Whereas Lipsha sees the mobility embodied by the van in opposition to more traditional Ojibwe ideas of home, Owens explains the intrinsic relationship between home and mobility as part of his mixedblood Choctaw/Cherokee upbringing. Owens writes, “In my own immediate experience, Oklahoma is primarily a place of transit, a long stretch of highway my family drove in our seemingly incessant journeys between

my father's birthplace in Mississippi and our numerous homes in California" (*Mixedblood Messages* 143). Rather than removing him from any single home, Owens conveys that driving is what connects and defines his homeplaces. Owens elaborates on this point in his discussion of his family photos:

Always there is family associated with each automobile, and an almost tangible sense of pride in that association. Adult hands casually touch the chrome and caress the shining hood and shoulders lean confidently into sturdy metal, feet possessively lifted onto running boards. Only one house holds in my memories of those photographs – the cabin we lived in when I was little in Mississippi – but I remember what seems like scores of sleek, sloping-fendered, chrome-edged cars and an obvious desire to be associated with those vehicles. (*Mixedblood Messages* 161)

For Owens and for Lipsha, mobility realised in the form of cars or a van is a way of life; the vehicles that convey them between the people and places they know most intimately function as their homes. However, for Owens the homely aspect of his family's cars depends on interpersonal interaction. His relatives make bodily contact with the car and he conveys a sense of interdependence – the family "caress" the car, and in return it supports their "shoulders" and "feet" with its "sturdy metal" – whereas Lipsha uses his car as a means of isolating himself from his family and the community.

Owens's description of the homeliness of his family's cars suggests that Erdrich's presentation of the van as a mobile home is somewhat paradigmatic of Indigenous perspectives on home and mobility. Indeed, Eric Gary Anderson remarks that, "Mobile homes, in tribal historical contexts, are nothing new" (4). Considering the US government's approach to social conditions on reservations since the nineteenth century, relying on substandard prefabricated housing and incentivising Native people to move from reservations to urban centres, this is unsurprising. However, mobile homes play a larger role in US society more generally, with significant socioeconomic influences and impacts. According to Esther Sullivan,

“manufactured housing is the single largest source of unsubsidized affordable housing in the United States, with about 18 million people living in mobile homes and one third of these living within mobile home parks”; it is “also the fastest-growing form of new housing in the United States” (‘Dignity Takings’ 937–938). A substantial proportion of these mobile homes are occupied by immigrants, particularly of Latinx origin, who take pride in the achievement of home ownership in the United States.

Conversely, the system of mobile home ownership in the US creates a disturbing paradox. Undermining the sense of security associated with home ownership, mobile home owners frequently find themselves effectively renting their own homes, since, as Sullivan points out, while “80 percent of mobile home park residents own their homes,” “only 14 percent also own the land beneath” (*Manufactured Insecurity* 34). Mobile home owners can find themselves forced to move sites with little notice, counteracting any measure of security afforded by this type of home ownership. While the Latinx mobile home owners interviewed by Margarethe Kusenbach professed satisfaction in the quality of their homes, “almost half of the Latino/a interviewees said that they disliked the fact that they owned and rented at the same time” (41). As a result, remarks Sullivan, for a “large portion of mobile home residents living in mobile home parks, the threat of dispossession is literally inscribed into the land under their homes” (‘Dignity Takings’ 939). In the Ojibwe context, the conflict between traditional and Euro-American concepts of home and, crucially, of land ownership further complicates the idea of home ownership.

Moreover, Sullivan notes that, with regard to prefabricated structures, “The term *mobile home* is misleading. Contemporary mobile homes are highly *immobile*. Once set in place, their frames slacken and relocation can result in serious structural damage” (941–942). Elaborating, Kusenbach notes that mobile homes are, for “tax

and legal purposes,” “not considered homes and thus not subjected to property tax laws,” but “classified as ‘vehicles’ and therefore regulated by state-level Departments of Motor Vehicles ... This classification of mobile homes as vehicles persists despite the fact that the vast majority of today’s mobile homes are never moved after they are first set up, meaning they are practically just as immobile as site-built homes” (34). In reality, the mobile home park system denies mobile home owners’ legitimacy as homeowners and imposes a narrative of itinerancy. By attempting to establish a stationary mobile home, therefore, residents commit to a socially liminal, financially unstable structure upon an expanse of land to which they are denied any title. This paradox reflects Fogelson’s “myth of nomadism” as a strategy to legitimise Indian Relocation (49). It also highlights the importance of a balanced connection between home, mobility and land. Lipsha’s van illustrates the result of imbalance between these needs when he admits, “The money buys me gas so that I can idle my van in place” (*The Bingo Palace* 97).

One of the few significant journeys Lipsha makes in *The Bingo Palace* is a trip with Shawnee Ray to a motel. The trip reflects Lipsha’s itinerant tendencies: the couple take a lift “with some others in the back of their car” and they get out “at a certain place”; Lipsha vaguely states that it is a “border-town,” “just over the reservation line” (*The Bingo Palace* 67–71). In his description of the motel, Lipsha emphasises the features that signal single, anonymous occupation: the “cement shower stall” is furnished with a “personal shower mat”; the room has “a little tin desk” where the guest can “write a letter on a sheet of plain paper”, and there is a “Good Book someone has placed in the drawer” (*The Bingo Palace* 71–72). Like the Bingo Palace, the motel provides no more than an ephemeral home; both buildings have roadside

locations, both are commercial enterprises, and both offer Lipsha a semblance of personal refuge, but ultimately exacerbate his dislocation.

Not long after Lipsha wins the van, it is stolen from outside a party and he finds it wrecked in a field. He is not distressed by his discovery, however, because an epiphany has altered his relationship with the van. Threatened with a forced tattoo of the map of Montana as revenge for offending another party-goer from the state, Lipsha explains that “the straight-edged shape is not a Chippewa preference. You look around, and everything you see is round, everything in nature. There are no perfect boundaries, no natural borders except winding rivers” (*The Bingo Palace* 80). Lipsha expresses an analogy between the van and such man-made borders, calling it “a four-wheeled version of the state of North Dakota” (*The Bingo Palace* 80). By the time he finds the van, Lipsha has also accepted that his “luck’s uneven” and that he is “serious about” Shawnee Ray (*The Bingo Palace* 82). Lipsha climbs into the destroyed van, settling “to sleep where I am”, thinking “at this moment I feel rich. Sinking away, it seems like everything worth having is within my grasp” (*The Bingo Palace* 83). Having developed a strong emotional connection and hopes for the future with Shawnee Ray and divested of his “insulation” – both the van and most of his money – Lipsha opens himself to the prospect of making himself at home among the reservation community and within the reservation environment.

Lipsha’s loss of his van forces him to engage physically with the reservation environment. Lipsha has a strong attachment to the roads of the reservation – he tells us that he, “knew the reservation inside out, I thought, but it turns out I knew it by car, not foot” (*The Bingo Palace* 133). Lipsha’s shift to sensorially-connected movement through walking directly on the earth connects him with his ancestors Fleur and Four Souls as well as to his parents. Lipsha fails to achieve meaningful mobility in his van

because he pursues a kind of mobility dissociated from home; in other words, he is eager to escape the reservation as an individual, but does not understand the urge to return home to the reservation that he feels while away. His experience of walking on the earth suggests that his removal from officially prescribed modes and routes of movement, particularly the containment of the car, allows Lipsha to experience transmotion through the reconciliation of his ideas of home and mobility.

“fugitive warriors”²⁵

Gerry Nanapush is the most profoundly displaced of Erdrich’s Little No Horse characters. Gerry is Lulu’s eldest son and enjoys legendary esteem among the Ojibwe as a repeated prison escapee. Conceived by Lulu with Moses Pillager on an island in Lake Matchimanito during her self-imposed exile from the reservation as a newly autonomous young woman, Gerry’s Pillager heritage is double. Gerry must therefore be read in relation to Fleur Pillager’s tireless defence of her ancestral land and spiritual gift of metamorphosis, as well as to his namesake Nanapush’s trickster and leader qualities. This familial context positions Gerry Nanapush as an heir to Anishinaabe tradition and decolonial resistance through transmotion, making Gerry’s cycle of escape from and return to prison highly politically loaded. This political charge is intensified by Erdrich’s clear alignment of Gerry with Leonard Peltier (Ojibwe/Lakota).²⁶

²⁵ Vizenor, *Bear Island*, 60.

²⁶ Leonard Peltier is an American Indian Movement activist who was convicted in 1977 of the murder of two FBI agents killed during a shoot-out on the Pine Ridge Oglala Lakota Reservation. Peltier was sentenced to two consecutive life sentences. He was denied parole in 1993 and 2009. His next parole hearing is scheduled for 2024, when he will be 79 years old. Doubts about Peltier’s guilt, the conduct of the trial and the quality of evidence submitted are widely held, and many consider Peltier to be a political prisoner. Peltier was initially arrested in Canada, after fleeing across the border after the conflict at Pine Ridge. He also escaped from prison in California and was apprehended several days later. Gerry Nanapush’s trajectories echo both of these incidents.

The prison cell represents a conceptual paradox by simultaneously housing a prisoner and depriving them of any sense of homeliness. In an Ojibwe context, the significance of this paradox is manifold. Considering Erdrich's presentation of the concepts of home and mobility as intertwined in Ojibwe culture, and each character's sense of place – within both the land and the community – as vital to their relationship with home and mobility, to remove an Ojibwe prisoner from their home and deny them mobility constitutes an act of cultural violence. Erdrich emphasises this dynamic by exploring Gerry's experience of imprisonment primarily under the conditions of solitary confinement, intensifying the pain of removal from his community by completely isolating him from humanity. Erdrich thus demonstrates that forcing members of Indigenous nations to submit to a system of punishment based upon colonial epistemology is emblematic of the ongoing cultural subjugation effected by settler colonialism.

Gerry's dreams of escape from prison illustrate the role immobilisation plays in his suffering as a prisoner. "Months went by and he lived only for the dreams – bright, monotonous, unwinking dreams in which he led a thoroughly boring everyday life. To sleep in a bed wider than himself, to shit behind a closed door, to walk a curved road, a straight road, a ditch" (*The Bingo Palace* 223). To walk freely is, for Gerry, an expression of place-based Ojibwe identity. The state of mobility not only facilitates and characterises Gerry's conception of home, but functions *as* his home. In this sense, the prison cell functions as a complete inversion of home for Gerry specifically and for the Ojibwe collectively.

Elaine Scarry explains that the torture room functions in the same way as other rooms as an extension of the body's boundaries, except that in the torture room, the power to regulate the passage across these boundaries is held not by the occupant but

by a separate authority (38). In the case of torture, Scarry elaborates, the impact of this denial of bodily autonomy is severe; the very fact of bodily abuse weaponises the room (40). This spatial dimension to the violence of torture is not necessarily contingent upon bodily violence, however: Lisa Guenther argues that solitary confinement, as experienced by Gerry, is “the worst from of torture and the principle upon which all more determinate forms of torture are based” (xv). Guenther writes that solitary confinement seeks to enact prisoners’ social death, which is when “a person or group of people is excluded, dominated, or humiliated to the point of becoming dead to the rest of society. Although such people are physically alive, their lives no longer bear a social meaning; they no longer count as lives that *matter*” (xx). The pursuit of solitary confinement as a method of imprisonment, Guenther explains, is no longer designed to effect positive change within the isolated prisoner; rather, in “the era of the control prison”, the “aim is to control, contain, and incapacitate prisoners. Gone is the rhetoric of rehabilitation or spiritual redemption. It has been replaced by a neo-liberal rhetoric of risk management, security, efficiency, accountability, and public-private partnerships” (161). In a settler colonial context, therefore, the establishment and proliferation of the control prison constitutes the ultimate stage in colonial power since, as Foucault wrote of the panopticon, it is “through spatial ordering” that authority secures “power, control of the body, control of groups and knowledge” (*The Foucault Reader* 19). Surpassing the effects of the delimited reservation, the western family home, the Church, school and tribal council, and even the cultural death signified by the Pukwans’ participation in the tribal police force and their subsequent physical deaths, solitary confinement elides communal culture and autonomous relationships with land entirely, thereby placing traditional Native ways of life in a

state of social death. Thus Gerry's imprisonment and solitary confinement enacts violence against the Indigenous community as a whole.

Erdrich presents the effects of Gerry's experience of solitary confinement in prison in terms of both physical and emotional pain:

In solitary, he stared at his foot until it changed to a paw. He chewed his paws and wept and let his hair grow long, coursing down his back. ... All day he stared at a crack beside the door and thought *windigo*, *windigo*, because he had a flu, a fever that made the cell bloom and collapse, and he remembered the stories of Old Man Nanapush. In a voice like a wind-strummed reed, Nanapush spoke from his bed, where he sat all day that winter, falling over into sleep at night. He told of the ice giant shoving cracked floes between drifts of his lips, chewing ice bones with ice teeth, sinking frozen into view from frozen clouds. For two days Gerry's cell breathed to life, walls disappeared, and then the world shrunk back to itself again and his mind hid underneath a black cloth. (*The Bingo Palace* 223–224)

Here, Erdrich emphasises the torturous nature of imprisonment itself when set within the context of Anishinaabe tradition. Gerry, like Fleur, has the ability to metamorphose, lending his mobility spiritual significance. Whereas Fleur is associated with the bear and wolf, Gerry is associated with the dog, a social animal which needs companionship and movement. Gerry's desire to escape, to express autonomy through mobility, is realised in an extended episode of disorientated self-harm. He can metamorphose, but only within his cell, expressing his anguish and distress by biting his own paws. He skirts the realm of madness by appealing to the wiindigoo figure, which would allow him to forge a different kind of connection with the natural world channelling his isolation, illness and discomfort in the cold weather. Aligning himself with the wiindigoo is ultimately futile, however: Gerry can chew his paws and think about an "ice giant ... chewing ice bones with ice teeth," but the cannibal wiindigoo depends on an other to consume; in culturally alien isolation, Gerry cannot survive or escape by cannibalising himself.

Gerry combats his isolation by entering into spiritual communion with the powerful Nanapush, his grandfather figure, whose spiritual presence reminds Gerry that his world is not limited to the concrete parameters of his cell. Gerry's Ojibwe identity and connection with both history, through Nanapush, and the natural world, through the wind and ice, challenge the integrity of the cell's structure. Gerry's spiritual fever makes the cell "bloom and collapse" like a plant or body; it "breathed to life, walls disappeared, and then the world shrunk back to itself again". Despite his incarceration, the degrading conditions and freezing temperatures, Gerry utilises the cell as a sweat lodge. Challenging the legitimacy and efficacy of the US prison system, Erdrich here implies that the occupant of a prison cell can maintain some sense of place and, therefore, autonomy.

Peltier's account of participating in sweat lodge ceremonies in prison highlights the importance of autonomous spiritual mobility to the practice:

Many people are terrified of sweats – and not without some reason. It can get so hot in there when they pour the water on the red glowing stones that, if you're not used to it, you literally reach the end of your tether, of your self-control ... You're never forced to stay in the *inipi*. And yet, with rare exceptions, you don't [leave]. You resist the temptation. You suck in your gut and tough it out. You dig your nails into the bare soil of the floor. Sitting there naked in the superheated darkness, your bare knees only inches from the molten rocks in the central pit, you come right against the cutting edge of your own fear, your own pain. But the fear of pain is much worse than the pain itself. (314–315)

Peltier's account allows us to appreciate the significance and demands of Gerry's spiritual experience while in solitary confinement. In an act of profound survivance, Gerry defies the pain of solitary confinement to reconnect himself bodily and spiritually with the earth and, therefore, with his community and ancestors. He passes through what Peltier terms "the cutting edge of your own fear, your own pain" and

exposes this edge, like the walls around him and the borders beyond, as arbitrary colonial constructs.

Isolated from his people, however, Gerry cannot contribute to the interconnected activity of land and history, fundamental to Ojibwe identity. Scarry considers torture to be “language-destroying: as the content of one’s world disintegrates, so the content of one’s language disintegrates; as the self disintegrates, so that which would express and project the self is robbed of its source and its subject” (35). If we consider the condition of being imprisoned as a form of torture in itself, Gerry’s metamorphosis, affinity with the wiindigoo and communion with Nanapush can be read, on one hand, as the “disintegration” of his self and language – he literally has no form of expression at these times – but simultaneously, on the other hand, as a mode of resistance to this violence and destruction. Gerry performs spiritual journeys and re-centres himself in his cell under new terms, defined not by prison or other government authorities but autonomously. After the episode in which Erdrich describes the cell walls undergoing cycles of movement, Gerry has come to a new sense of place and self in spite of the prison’s impact on his access to language.

To compensate for this deprivation of language, Erdrich emphasises Gerry’s receptive, non-oral senses. His “mind was deepest sky, dreamless and pure, his thoughts black earth. He smelled dirt and new rain. Prison smells were chemical, or sweat, milky disinfectant, piss, old piss, metallic breath, the aftershave on guards. His own smell was of a dog. The dog his mother kept – tick-bit, rangy and half feral” (*The Bingo Palace* 224). In this state, Gerry is purely of the earth, subject to neither authority nor language. He thinks in terms of land and space – focusing on (canine) colourless vision and the sense of touch, emphasising the personal, corporeal relationship with land epitomised by walking on the earth, in the tradition of Margaret

Kashpaw, Fleur and Four Souls which is also being taken up by Lipsha. The third highlighted sense is (canine) smell, and with this sense Gerry deepens his connection with the outside world. He disregards the scents of the prison to focus on the smells of “dirt and new rain” – substances vital to life and perpetually (co-)engaged in the natural processes of plant life and the water cycle respectively. Having become “half feral”, Gerry has found a way to exist and resist while in prison which bypasses language, echoing the strategies of resistance to the English language as colonial indoctrination previously applied by Margaret Kashpaw and his own mother Lulu at the government boarding school.

Gerry’s Ojibwe-centred process of sensory connection with the wider world leads him to a heightened awareness of the power of luck and chance, and when luck and chance eventually create the conditions necessary for his next escape from prison, Gerry is ready. At the prospect of being transferred by plane to a cell in a maximum-security prison in Minnesota, “Something surged in him like true love at the prospect of being somewhere, anywhere else, and he looked forward to the ride like a child, impatient for the power of different clouds, the brush of a different wind” (*The Bingo Palace* 224). The very prospects of movement and of *being* outside of his cell, inhabiting his own existence beyond those spatial confines, almost regardless of the potential to escape once again, thrill Gerry. His visceral emotional reaction emphasises that mobility *is* home for Gerry, and movement is his personal expression.

The first signal of approaching change reminds Gerry not to passively wait, but to remain alert, adaptable and attuned to every sense; in other words, mobilised. Whereas he expected “a low whistle when it happened, a warning,” as might a dog awaiting a signal, Gerry’s first indication of change and chance comes in the form of “papers. Tribal council papers with his mother’s name obscure” (*The Bingo Palace*

224). Gerry's moment of communion with the natural world in solitary confinement has imbued him with a radical form of literacy, which permits him to see past the page to perceive the "forceful wrangling" undertaken by Lulu to secure "every other signature" on the document arranging his prison transfer. Erdrich tells us that:

He knew from sitting in the still eye of chance that fate was not random ... Chance was patterns of a stranger complexity than we could name, but predictable. There was no such thing as a complete lack of order, only a design so vast it seemed unrepetitive up close, that is, until you sat doing nothing for so long that your brain ached and, one day, just maybe, you caught a wider glimpse. (*The Bingo Palace* 226)

The document of signatures draws another link in Erdrich's work between colonial US borders and bureaucracy, highlighting the inability of colonial constructs to access or account for luck, chance and Anishinaabe epistemology more generally.

Gerry's visions, searching for liminal spaces, are highly evocative of Owens's re-envisioned frontier. In addition to walking along roads, Gerry dreams specifically of walking along "a ditch," and "inside of a house, out, in, to open a door with your own hands" (*The Bingo Palace* 223). In solitary confinement, he stares obsessively at a "crack beside the door" – not beneath, as we might expect, but beside – and he sees June as a "little brown mink stealing bait on his trapline, a curve in the air, a comma, winking and unwinking" (*The Bingo Palace* 224). Such strange dream sequences locate Gerry at fluid edges and in fluctuating cracks and draw a parallel between language, chance and his escape. Nanapush's stories – told and remembered orally – help centre Gerry in the natural world and, indeed, in the limen. His vision of "a curve in the air, a comma," evokes a pause, an opening, a moment in between "winking and unwinking" – alternating partial sight and full sight, but never the slice of complete darkness signified by 'blinking.' Gerry learns to perceive chance openings throughout his prison cell, the very walls of which vacillate. This heightened awareness allows Gerry to see past the walls and documents endorsed by the US colonial prison system,

to understand the action and significance behind his mother's signature, to await and read his moment of luck, and to escape custody as the sole survivor when the plane carrying him crashes.

Embodying the relationship between home and mobility that Lipsha comes to recognise, Gerry is simultaneously rooted and nomadic. He perceives meaning and fulfilment in his movement and he harnesses liminality to pursue survivance. However, Gerry's moment of healing is ultimately short-lived; his return to prison is inevitable. Gerry's cyclical adaptation and healing thus illustrates Coulthard's criticism of settler colonial reconciliation: "In such conditions, reconciliation takes on a temporal character as the individual and collective process of overcoming the subsequent *legacy* of past abuse, not the abusive colonial structure itself" (108–109). Gerry, like the Ojibwe collectively and other Indigenous peoples, can only temporarily transgress the parameters set by the US government. The legacy of allotment remains in the borders and systems that have come to define Gerry's identity.

"The road thinks ahead"²⁷

Erdrich closes *The Bingo Palace* by depicting Fleur's final departure from her home at Matchimanito. The narrative's return to Fleur evokes the convergence of time and space, of land and history, on the Ojibwe reservation, and reinforces the interwoven histories of Fleur, Gerry, Lipsha and other members of the tribe. Narrated again in the collective tribal voice, Fleur's story is enshrined as a piece of living tribal history. Once again, Fleur is displaced by people "who came to take her house away with signed papers," this time for Lyman's new venture (*The Bingo Palace* 271). Thus

²⁷ Erdrich, 'The Lady in the Pink Mustang', *Jacklight*, 17.

capitalist colonial bureaucracy continues to infiltrate the land and community of the Little No Horse Reservation. As before, Fleur “only took those things she carried with her all her life,” which include “her toboggan of bones,” the emblems of her ancestors (*The Bingo Palace* 272). She meets her already-departed relatives on her way, from Nanapush to her child and her grandmother, “Four Soul, who had given Fleur the burdensome gift of outliving nearly all of those whom she loved” (*The Bingo Palace* 273). In a final act of independent mobility, Fleur’s journey from the human world into the spirit world takes her “over the frozen waves,” rather than her previous walks *into* the water, and onto “the unmarked path”, an illustration of power (*The Bingo Palace* 273). Along the path she transforms into a bear, leaving tracks that show “where they changed, the pad broadened, the claws pressed into the snow” (*The Bingo Palace* 273).

The narrative echo of Lipsha’s arrival at the start of the novel in Fleur’s departure at the end affirms and legitimises Lipsha as the inheritor of the Pillager powers. As Smith writes, “By linking the boundaries of identity with shrinking reservation borders, Erdrich affirms the inseparability of identity from land, and equates western encroachment on Native American lands with an equally devastating threat to self-concept” (19). Yet Erdrich’s alignment of Lipsha with both Gerry and Fleur positions Lipsha as a powerful descendant whose practice of transmotion will enhance tribal sovereignty.

Chapter 4

Motherhood and Water

Fleur Pillager's relationship to Lake Matchimanito is emblematic of connections between motherhood, water and transmotion which underpin several of Erdrich's novels. This association of women with water reflects spiritual traditions common to many Native nations, including the Ojibwe. According to Kim Anderson (Cree/Métis), in traditions common to several Native peoples the feminine is aligned with water, while the masculine is aligned with fire. These dynamics, Anderson explains, are reflective of the balance, interconnection and cyclicity that characterise the world views of many Indigenous cultures:

Symbols of feminine and masculine balance can be found everywhere in Indigenous worlds ... We talk frequently about the significance, the properties, and the energies of water (often equated with the female) and fire (often equated with the male). We know that both water and fire are critical to our survival and that the balance between these properties must be respected as each has the ability to consume the other. (153)

Both fire and water are valuable resources, contributing to human sustenance and communion with the environment through natural processes, and each force balances the other. Writing from a Canadian context but with specific regard to Anishinaabe and Métis peoples, Natasha J. Szach elaborates, "First Nations also hold that water is integral to cultural and spiritual survival and is an inextricable link to one's ancestors" (26). Moreover, the affinity between Indigenous women and the earth's water positions women as "spokespersons for water and carrying the primary responsibility for protecting that water" (McGregor 27). Erdrich's water imagery thus evokes not only a sense of physical place through the ideas of connection and balance, but also a

strong sense of social place – an important traditional role within the community – for her female characters.

Part of the significance of this relationship derives from the belief common to many Indigenous traditions that all forms of life on earth are intrinsically connected, and that history is ever-present in the land. According to Paula Gunn Allen:

It is reasonably certain that all Native American peoples view the land as holy – as intelligent, mystically powerful, and infused with supernatural vitality. The Native concept of land includes meteorological phenomena such as wind, rain, clouds, thunder, hail, snow, ice; geophysical features such as mountain ranges, rivers, lakes, ponds, waterfalls, seas, canyons, mounds, bluffs, and rock formations; and non-humans such as birds, insects, reptiles, and mammals. (41)

In keeping with this holistic view of the world, the association of water with femininity in Anishinaabe tradition is profoundly important and all-pervasive. Szach describes Anishinaabe and Métis understandings of water as “the lifeblood of Mother Earth. Lakes, rivers and streams act as arteries, veins and capillaries”; thus the specific association in Anishinaabe tradition between water and the maternal as life-giving forces speaks to understandings of place, identity and life itself (69). This connection, characterised by holism, intimacy and cyclicity, clearly forms an epistemological and political conflict when set against the construct of imposed colonial borders.

In this chapter I argue that Erdrich’s presentation of this link between water and motherhood in the novels *The Bingo Palace*, *Love Medicine* and *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse* both demonstrates the harm caused to Native peoples, especially mothers, by colonial borders throughout history and illustrates transmotion by invoking defiance of those borders. I further argue that Erdrich’s portrayals of positive, if complex, maternal relationships in relation to water in these novels convey Ojibwe survivance.

Erdrich illustrates the complexity of the dynamic between motherhood, water and colonial borders through a story in *Books and Islands in Ojibwe Country*. The author recounts a trip she made around the lakes and islands of northern Minnesota and southern Ontario with her eighteen-month-old daughter. The trip entails crossing the US-Canada border at International Falls/Fort Frances by a bridge across Rainy River. In contrast with Erdrich's disinclination to definitively chart the environment of the Little No Horse Reservation in any of the North Dakota novels, she prefaces *Books and Islands* with a map entitled "Ojibwe Country," depicting the border region encompassing most of northern Minnesota, the south-eastern corner of Ontario and the bizarrely geometric incursion of the eastern Manitoba boundary. In addition to national and state borders and a few towns and cities, Erdrich delineates main roads, the scattered components of the Red Lake Indian Reservation, the Big Grassy First Nation Reserve and some of the lakes and islands she visits. Like her use of vernacular landscape throughout her work, Erdrich's map is personal and Ojibwe-centred, simultaneously noting the presence of colonial borders and challenging their validity and power by diminishing their importance in the hierarchy of her autonomous, decolonial cartography. However, Erdrich places this characterisation in stark contrast to border security processes at the national border crossing. The name "International Falls" in particular elides any historical, communal and particularly Indigenous associations of place in favour of heralding and policing a geopolitical boundary; originally named Koochiching, the town is an extreme example of the "*perceived settling*" of not only the area but of two countries; the name bears no relation to the land it denotes, and has overwritten any history of Native presence, relegating the city to a mere site for the security and regulation of two colonial states (Cheyfitz, *Poetics of Imperialism* 55).

Erdrich feels “nervous” about crossing the border at International Falls; she hates “the questioning, the scrutiny, the suspicious nature of the border guards” (100). She carries eagle feathers – culturally and spiritually important to nations including the Ojibwe but subject to prohibitive legal conditions by the federal government – but reassures herself of her “right to carry them”, and she has her tribal documentation ready for inspection (*Books and Islands* 100). Erdrich wishes she “had a copy of the Jay Treaty, which guarantees Native People the right to cross the Canadian-U.S. border without hassle,” to provide legal ballast against any potential border security infringement of Indigenous rights (*Books and Islands* 100). Indeed, the border guards’ scrutiny escalates into an invasive and personal confrontation when they challenge Erdrich on the parentage of her daughter:

‘Do you have any proof that you’re her mother?’

I stare at him in shock, it is such a strange question. I have to think.

‘Well,’ I say, ‘I can nurse her.’

He stares back at me. Gestures to the side of a building.

‘Pull over.’

Am I going to be required to nurse my baby in front of some border-crossing guard? (100)

Erdrich’s description of the guard can be read in two ways, as adjective and verb: the guard is stationed at the border crossing, and the guard himself crosses a border; as a presumably non-Native citizen, he seemingly enjoys more expansive rights than Erdrich, crossing freely, and he also crosses professional and personal boundaries by making such a shocking inquiry. The description of the guard as “border-crossing” recalls Erdrich’s presentation of reservation borders and Ojibwe-centred boundaries as permeable to colonial force. Moreover, the guard’s question recalls the long-held practice of removal of Indigenous children from their parents in the United States, Canada and other settler colonial states.

Erdrich is taken aside to be questioned by a “sharp-eyed woman” and finds that she and her child seem to have “passed some mother/daughter test”, although the criteria remain opaque (*Books and Islands* 101). Erdrich feels capable of managing a challenge based on her right as an Ojibwe person to cross the border, but the questioning of her legitimacy as a mother is devastatingly intrusive. This distressing incident, demonstrating what Stirrup terms the “especially politically fraught” nature of Native motherhood in a borderland context, illustrates the arbitrary, artificial and inordinately powerful nature of the US-Canada border: not only are Erdrich’s rights and practices as a Native person hampered, but the unrealistic idea of “proof” of her motherhood targets the maternal body and the most intimate, dependent and natural of human relationships as matters of colonial regulation (Stirrup 14). Erdrich’s responsive urge is “to get out of International Falls and back onto a lake” (*Books and Islands* 101). The contrast between the extremely regulated, systematised process of crossing the border via the International Bridge and the carefree ambiguity of the phrase, “back onto a lake” signifies the appeal of lakes and islands for Erdrich, defined in her text by Ojibwe relationships, history and transmotion.

The relationship between Anishinaabe motherhood and water forms a parallel between the border guard’s inappropriate attempt to test Erdrich’s motherhood and the flawed logic of utilising the river as part of the national border. Defined by motion, a-national, uncontrollable, rivers are peculiarly poorly suited to the purpose of marking international boundaries. Indeed, Owens’s use of water imagery in his explanation of mixedblood identity positions the river as a space of flux; as in Owens’s revised frontier, the “mixing,” “gaps and voids”, the “swirl” and “whirl” in the “bucket or bowl” of mixedblood identity suggest confluence and chaotic energy rather than division and control (*Mixedblood Messages* 149). Owens’s account recalls Anzaldúa’s

comparison of borderlands experience to “trying to swim in a new element, an ‘alien’ element” (19). These analogies for borderlands and mixedblood identity position water as a fruitful metaphor for Indigenous liminality and transmotion, forming a perception of the river entirely counter to its purpose here as an international border.

In addition to the intractable energy of flowing water, the very banks of a river inevitably move over time. In his ode to the Mississippi, Mark Twain conveys the natural creative power of the river through natural erosion:

A cut-off plays havoc with boundary lines and jurisdictions: for instance, a man is living in the State of Mississippi today, a cut-off occurs tonight, and tomorrow the man finds himself and his land over on the other side of the river, within the boundaries and subject to the laws of the State of Louisiana! Such a thing, happening in the upper river in the old times, could have transferred a slave from Missouri to Illinois and made a free man of him. (32)

Twain’s cheery summation of the human effects of the discordancy between a river’s natural processes and its utilisation as a socio-political boundary omits an alternative outcome, whereby a ‘free’ person could be enslaved due to a geographical fluke. Anzaldúa accentuates this striking arbitrariness when she recalls that the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo made the Rio Grande both American and part of the border between the US and Mexico: “*Tejanos* lost their land and, overnight, became the foreigners” (*Borderlands/La Frontera* 28). Like rivers, then, colonial US borders are literally built on shifting sands, while maintaining an illusion of political legitimacy.

The particular unpredictable and uncontainable energy of water Twain identifies here conflicts with capitalist colonial narratives and systems of ‘resource management’; as Szach points out, the management of water as a resource “can be especially complex because water knows no physical or political boundaries” (14). American and Canadian authorities’ failure to respect this fact has led to environmental degradation and the violation of tribal sovereignty during the

construction and, occasionally, catastrophic failure of continental-scale infrastructure projects including the infamous Dakota Access Pipeline, the Site C Dam in British Columbia, the Lake Sakakawea Pipeline, ND, the transnational Keystone XL Pipeline, the extension of which the Trump administration is working to facilitate, and Enbridge Lines 3 and 5. Each project privileges the extraction and sale of fossil fuels over the security of land and resources, ultimately jeopardising ecological safety, especially water quality, as well as Native sovereignty. As a result, the position of Indigenous women as spokespersons for water has developed into the Water Protectors activist movement. Indigenous activist Kandi Mossett (Mandan Hidatsa Arikara) explains that the Water Protectors' task cannot be reduced to the label of 'protest': "I am not a protestor. I am protecting the very essence of what I am made up of, which is mostly water" (FUSION). Mossett's statement emphasises the profundity and holism of the relationship between Indigenous women and water.

Within the developing context of catastrophic and irreversible climate change, traditional Indigenous approaches to land, including water, are increasingly appropriated by western science and capitalist colonial powers belatedly starting to realise the magnitude of this crisis. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson has pointed out that what she terms "Traditional Ecological Knowledge" developed by Indigenous peoples has been identified as "valid and useful knowledge" by environmental academics working from "Western social science perspectives"; yet they have tended to divorce this knowledge from its epistemological and decolonial frameworks in favour of casting it as "an untapped resource for the world's ecologists to tap into" (373–375). Winona LaDuke (Anishinaabe) has discussed this collision of Native and colonial worldviews over the issue of water specifically, pointing out that, while Native peoples consider water to be a unified element integral to the earth in

interconnection with other elements and forms of life, “‘western science’ sees unconnected aquifers. So it is that in the new millennium, two separate worldviews have come to live in the same land, and, some would say, they do not reconcile well” (*Recovering the Sacred* 35). Indeed, LaDuke has referred to our culture of unethical and unsustainable fossil fuel extraction and dependence as “Wiindigoo Economics,” (‘Cannibal Economics’). Colleen Kattau pithily terms this conflict an “econo-cultural vs. eco-cultural split” (116). Erdrich’s portrayal of the relationship between water and motherhood from an Anishinaabe perspective in her novels reframes this epistemological tension to challenge the flawed and dangerous western view of land and humanity as separate and subdivided, re-centring Native women and a holistic Anishinaabe epistemology.

The different relationships between characters and water throughout *Love Medicine*, *The Bingo Palace* and *Last Report* illustrate the challenges that attend motherhood and decolonial resistance with Erdrich’s characteristic variance, nuance and ambivalence. I begin this chapter by analysing the relationship Lulu, as the daughter of Fleur Pillager and an archetypal matriarchal figure, holds with water. I argue that Erdrich’s depiction of Lulu’s self-imposed exile and subsequent pregnancy on an island on Matchimanito, the Pillager lake, illustrates the Ojibwe woman-water dynamic which underpins *Love Medicine* and *The Bingo Palace*.

Extending from the narrative centre-point of Lulu’s story, I then discuss the complex relationship Lulu’s son Henry has to water. In this section my analysis focuses on the ideas of maternal comfort, escape and purification, examining Henry’s drowning and the influence of broader colonial-patriarchal forces on Ojibwe senses of place and identity.

In the third section, I consider characters at a further remove from Lulu in *Last Report* in addition to *Love Medicine* and *The Bingo Palace*, focusing on Marie Lazarre/Kashpaw, Pauline/Sister Leopolda and Agnes/Father Damien as liminal women whose complex relationships with water intersect with their respective battles with restrictive ideas of sanctity, identity and femininity. I pursue the themes of comfort, escape and purification to analyse the intersections between traditional Anishinaabe connotations of water and Christian ideas around baptism, resurrection and death in the context of Jesuit missions.

Finally, this chapter closes with a return to Lulu's descendancy to argue for a new reading of June's seeming abandonment, or even attempted killing, of Lipsha. I argue that this mysterious plot point, which drives much of Lipsha's trajectory, should be read within the context of both June and Lipsha as sacred archetypal characters who share a particular affinity with water and the water manitou Misshepesu, and that June places Lipsha in the water to position him as a future Ojibwe leader. I conclude that Erdrich's portrayal of the water/mother/survivance dynamic privileges transmotion and liminality as integral to Indigenous survivance in direct opposition to the Euro-American epistemology represented and imposed by colonial borders.

"I never did believe in human measurement" ²⁸

Lulu is a deeply maternal character and functions as a central matriarchal figure throughout Erdrich's Little No Horse novels. Despite her estrangement from her own mother, Fleur, from a young age, Lulu has positive relationships with her children and grandchildren. Like other maternal figures in Erdrich's work, Lulu is closely

²⁸ Erdrich, *Love Medicine*, 281.

associated with water, and her transitions from childhood to womanhood and motherhood take place on and around Lake Matchimanito. Having been released from the government boarding school at the end of *Four Souls*, Lulu's sense of identity and personal relationships are fractured as a young woman. Lulu has experience of both Ojibwe and non-Native social systems, and her navigation of the reservation reflects Anzaldúa's *mestiza*, the sense of "trying to swim in a new element, an 'alien' element" (19). Erdrich's use of water as the setting within which Lulu reappraises her relationships with motherhood and with her own mother positions traditional Ojibwe maternal relationships and associations not only as the intertwined practices of transmotion and survivance, but as decolonial resistance. In this section, therefore, I use the concepts of transmotion and *mestiza* to examine Lulu as a survivor of government removal of Native children to boarding schools and as an heir to Fleur as a protector of Ojibwe land and sovereignty.

Lulu's relationship with her mother and with her own sense of maternal identity are central to her sense of femininity, as Erdrich's use of water imagery to describe her early trauma illustrates. Lulu tells us, "I never grew from the curve of my mother's arms. I still wanted to anchor myself against her. But she had tore (sic) herself away from the run of my life like a riverbank. She had vanished, a great surrounding shore, leaving me to spill out alone" (*Love Medicine* 68). Lulu's unusual simile invests the riverbank with great forceful energy; the image of a violently retreating riverbank recalls Twain's observation that the Mississippi holds enormous latent power which enables it to create sudden "cut-offs," drastically altering the course of the river and thereby shattering the illusion of meaningful state borders (32). Lulu's fractious relationship with Fleur is due in large part to the latter's role as a sacred archetypal character closely aligned with holistic tribal identity and bearing an

unwavering commitment to the protection of the land. Lulu interprets Fleur's distance as an abandonment, but in fact Fleur sends Lulu to the government school and travels to St. Paul to reclaim the land around Lake Matchimanito for the survivance of the tribe and for the protection of Lulu in particular. Erdrich's portrayal of Lulu and Fleur's relationship as that of river and riverbank therefore highlights the river as a symbol of transmotion and survivance.

Perhaps discerning Fleur's larger purpose and sacrifice, Lulu admits, "Sometimes, I heard her. *N'dawnis, N'dawnis*. My daughter, she consoled me. Her voice came from all directions, mysteriously keeping me from inner harm. Her voice was the struck match. Her voice was the steady flame" (*Love Medicine* 69). Lulu's blending of traditional Anishinaabe feminine and masculine imagery in her portrayal of Fleur as a mother emphasises Fleur's role as a sacred archetype, functioning as both a matriarch and a warrior figure, a traditionally male role. As a gender-balanced character, therefore, Fleur deepens our understanding of balanced, unrestrictive Ojibwe social roles and indicates that the relationship between motherhood and water in these novels is one aspect of the relationship between the Ojibwe and land more broadly, foregrounding transmotion as an essential element of Ojibwe survivance.

Erdrich's use of the moving riverbank to illustrate Fleur and Lulu's troubled relationship lends her water imagery a varied and conflicting set of significances. For example, overcome with resentment for both the estranged Fleur and Nanapush's wife Margaret (another matriarchal figure who acts as Lulu's domineering grandmother), Lulu paradoxically seeks comfort from the lake. She recalls, "One day I couldn't stand it anymore and went down to the lake. I sat on a rock hard as my feelings and I stared at the island where Moses Pillager lived. The place was small and dark at the center of a wide irritation of silver water" (*Love Medicine* 73). Lulu's perception of the lake

as “an irritation” vividly illustrates the turbulence of her relationship with Fleur. Moreover, the particular description of the water as “silver” evokes Fleur’s inaccessibility from Lulu’s perspective: the colour silver carries no connotations of warmth or depth, but rather calls to mind both harsh, glaring light as it is reflected by the water, and the thin, brittle surface of a mirror. Lulu can only see herself reflected in the water. In one sense, then, Lulu is presented with the opportunity of redefining her sense of motherhood through her own, autonomous identity. Yet the lake and island are part of the Pillager lands, belonging to and protected by Fleur. The water is home to Misshepesu, with whom Fleur has a special affinity. Moreover, Moses Pillager’s “small and dark” island in the middle of the lake foreshadows the island cave that Lulu lives in with Moses when the two become lovers, and effectively hibernate for the winter as Lulu’s pregnancy develops. The cave calls to mind Fleur’s secondary form as a bear, another spiritual figure which Erdrich infuses with maternal significance during Fleur’s labour in *Tracks*. Erdrich thus undermines Lulu’s illusory sense of individualistic rebellion by reinforcing the profound and expansive relationship between Fleur and the lake; Lulu’s maternal identity is ultimately inextricable from her identity as Fleur’s daughter, and as a member of the Ojibwe more generally.

Indeed, upon arriving on the island Lulu initially assumes a position of maternal care in relation to Moses. A distant cousin to Lulu, Moses is the only other surviving Pillager. Nanapush and other surviving tribal members send Moses to the island as a young man, alone except for his rabble of cats, in order to trick the spirits into believing he was already dead and thereby to preserve his life. Aggrieved by Moses’s loneliness, Lulu takes on the task of relocating him in the living world. She explains, “I turned him to the front with my gaze, put his clothes on right. I pulled him

into the circle of my arms the way a mother encourages her child to walk. Touch by touch, I took down his gravehouse” (*Love Medicine* 82). By re-orientating Moses, Lulu implies that survival is contingent upon connection and progression – upon transmotion – whereas to live in the past, in isolation and denial, ensures death. Erdrich relates this redemptive, life-giving power directly to the maternal: to heal the wound caused by the retraction of “the curve of my mother’s arms,” Lulu establishes “the circle of my arms” as a maternal space with the power to retrieve Moses from a state of temporal and spatial alienation. In so doing, Lulu both autonomously ensures the continuation of the Pillager clan and reaffirms her own sense of place within Pillager lands and her identity as an Ojibwe woman.

Erdrich emphasises the relationship between motion, the maternal and water as Lulu’s pregnancy progresses. Lulu’s mobility is the primary difference between her and Moses: she realises, “He was not able to leave – I’d always known that. He was his island, he was me, he was his cats, he did not exist from the inside out but from the outside in. And so, that winter, I stayed with him in the cave as the snow fell, as the wind piled snow over us, wrapped us, sealed us in frozen stones” (*Love Medicine* 83). The baby’s gestation mirrors Lulu and Moses’s coping with the harsh weather: while the falling snow signifies the continuation of natural cycles, Moses and Lulu shelter in the cave as in a womb, protected by layers of “piled”, “wrapped”, “sealed” snow. The “stones” of the cave are “frozen”, but this does not signify death or desolation. Rather, echoing Fleur’s secondary form as a bear, the cave becomes a site of hibernation; a valued and integral part of multiple constant, interconnected natural cycles. However, Lulu, embodying an Ojibwe form of *mestiza*, recognises that she also forms part of this larger and more complex network, whereas Moses is too deeply rooted. Lulu is aligned with the water around the island, and Moses the island itself.

Having ‘mothered’ Moses and brought him back into the world of the living, Lulu has built a clearer, stronger sense of place and identity. Lulu both reinforces and harnesses this strength through transmotion, and she cannot enhance this power by continuing to devote herself exclusively to Moses on the remote island.

Lulu is forced to contend with this reality when her pregnancy reaches its late stages. She reflects, “I needed a midwife to guide me, a mother. The ice had broken and black water swelled. I couldn’t sleep. I knew that this baby, still tied to my heart, could drag me under and drown me” (*Love Medicine* 84). The broken ice and swelling “black water” – foreshadowing the breaking of Lulu’s waters and suggestive of a danger hidden by the earlier “silver” appearance of the water – indicate a transition into the next phase of a cycle, incorporating both Lulu and Moses’s relationship and Lulu’s pregnancy, expressed through the thawing weather. In short, Lulu comes to realise that the cycle of midwifery constitutes a vital part of Ojibwe maternal identity, in which elder mothers aid and guide new mothers. Lulu’s estrangement from Fleur causes a painful disruption of this cycle, but she can go on to find support and solace among the mothers of the wider Ojibwe community and as a mother herself. Thus Erdrich demonstrates that, just as rivers defy constructed borders, the Ojibwe conceptions of motherhood defy the limits of the Euro-American ‘nuclear’ family.

“There was no place for the drowned in heaven or anywhere on earth” ²⁹

Erdrich complicates the association set up between Lulu’s maternal identity and water through the death of Lulu’s son Henry. Henry suffers from severe trauma caused by his military service in Vietnam and consequently commits suicide by drowning.

²⁹ Erdrich, *Love Medicine*, 295.

Henry's younger brother Lyman witnesses his death. Lyman thereby shares in Henry's trauma; its virus-like spread echoes the decimating effects of smallpox and tuberculosis in *Tracks*, suggesting that trauma from military service among the disproportionately high number of enlisted American Indians continues the genocide of Native American peoples. Henry's relationship with water, like Lulu's, is therefore shaped by his experience of 'borderlands' identity as an Indigenous person implicated in a colonialist war.

Henry's suicide marks a divergence from the connotations of water as safe and protective, epitomised by his grandmother Fleur's triple survival of drowning and Lulu's maternal development in the middle of Matchimanito lake, indicating that colonial interventions into Anishinaabe traditions around family and land have long-lasting, deeply disruptive and divisive consequences. At the same time, Henry's death can be read as a desire for comfort and purity; rather than an act of escapism, a return to the security and wholeness of the womb and the security of inviolate Anishinaabe tradition. This dichotomy and the pain of Henry's torment reinforce the overlap between Erdrich's presentation of water in these novels and the pain and ambivalence which characterise Anzaldúa's *mestiza*.

Henry's death occurs after his return to the reservation from military service in Vietnam, which has disturbed him profoundly. We learn about Henry's trauma in *Love Medicine* when he meets Albertine and they spend a night together. In contrast with the majority of the narrative in *Love Medicine*, the encounter is told in the third person. Just as Albertine glimpses Henry's trauma and isolation, expressed through violence and a lack of self-control, from an emotional distance, the reader senses that both Albertine and Henry are alienated characters.

Henry's experience in the army literally, visibly envelops him: Albertine first notices Henry wearing a "dull green army jacket" upon her arrival at the bus terminal in Fargo (*Love Medicine* 169). Erdrich complicates Henry's military persona immediately: to Albertine, he "seemed just what she needed when he appeared"; however, Henry "needed her worse, but she didn't know that" (*Love Medicine* 169). Albertine's attraction to Henry is built on a web of projections: she is drawn to him, "Partly because she didn't know what she was looking for, partly because he was a soldier like her father, and partly because he could have been an Indian" (*Love Medicine* 169). Henry's discomfort in the town of Fargo is apparent from his movements: he is "never still. He smoked quickly, jittering, dragging hard and snapping the cigarette against his middle finger. He turned back and forth" (*Love Medicine* 171). Like June in Argus, Albertine and Henry appear isolated and vulnerable away from the reservation. Both characters are mixedblood: Albertine is the daughter of Ojibwe Zelda Kashpaw and 'Swede' Johnson, while Henry's parents are Lulu and one of her many partners, a Lamartine of French heritage, complicating their respective senses of identity. Furthermore, both Henry and Albertine are dislocated and disconnected, each unknowable to the other. Away from the reservation, therefore, both Henry and Albertine find themselves in a borderland and seeking familiarity. In this sense, Henry and Albertine mirror each other as the surface of Lake Matchimanito mirrors Lulu, and Erdrich pursues this dynamic by forcing Henry to reckon with the identity he sees reflected in memories triggered and characterised by water.

Erdrich's outline of Henry's service in Vietnam indicates that the military has occluded his personal identity: he "had been a soldier, was now a veteran" (171). Lyman suggests that Henry's Ojibwe identity is co-opted by the military in its

formation of Henry as a soldier: “I don’t wonder that the army was so glad to get my brother that they turned him into a Marine. He was built like a brick outhouse anyway. We liked to tease him that they really wanted him for his Indian nose” (*Love Medicine* 185). Lyman implies that Henry’s Ojibwe identity is compressed into an ‘Indian warrior’ stereotype, signified by his metonymic “Indian nose,” and reduced to the purpose he serves in the army: he is “turned into” a soldier, valued for being “built like a brick outhouse”. We infer from Lyman’s reasoning that Henry is knowingly and purposefully commodified by the military, dehumanised and treated as an expendable resource. Henry has served “nine months of combat” when he is “captured”; he is released “half a year” later and returns to the US “three weeks” prior to his evening with Albertine (*Love Medicine* 171). Henry’s nine months of active service is suggestive of the gestation period leading to a deeply negative rebirth and six months of captivity. When framed as a rebirth, this timescale creates connotations of extreme vulnerability and impressionability around Henry’s period of captivity. This forces the reader to understand that Henry’s experience as a prisoner of war is profoundly traumatising and actively shapes his sense of identity.

Erdrich notes that Henry was evacuated with the army “after an honorable peace was not achieved,” suggesting a sense of failure and dissonance, worsened by Henry’s return getting “fouled up in red tape” (*Love Medicine* 171). Upon his return, Henry is “routinely questioned by a military psychiatrist, dismissed” (*Love Medicine* 171). Evidently, the process is perfunctory and deeply flawed; Henry’s displacement and mental instability highlight the implications of abandonment and silencing carried by the word ‘dismiss’, in addition to and counteracting the ostensibly positive act of releasing Henry from the army. Henry’s diminishment as a passive component in the bureaucratic processes of the military is reminiscent of Erdrich’s bewilderment and

powerlessness at the Canada-US border in *Lakes and Islands*; both processes are dehumanising.

From Henry's perspective, Albertine represents a longed-for familiarity, but a familiarity fractured and spliced with his traumatic experiences in Vietnam. Albertine's presence in Fargo, alone, with "a knotted bundle", reminds Henry of displaced Vietnamese women, "with their children, possessions, animals tied in cloths across their backs, under their breasts, bundles dragged in frail carts. He had seen them bolting under fire, arms wrapped around small packages. Some of the packages, loosely held the way hers was, exploded" (*Love Medicine* 171). The concealment of bombs inside the Vietnamese women's "bundles," as well as the women's inevitable deaths, contrasts with the purpose of medicine bundles in Anishinaabe tradition. Sinclair explains that, "Like others, human beings were given a unique "essence and nature" – what is often called a *bundle*. This bundle would help them in all parts of their existence and give them tools in (sic) which they could live a sustainable and fulfilling life. It included gifts like a mind, body, heart, and spirit" (Sinclair 2). The dramatic contrast between the life-giving quality of Anishinaabe bundles and the use of similar bundles by Vietnamese women to conceal explosives indicates the degree to which the experience of fighting another colonised Indigenous people is disorientating for Henry. Due to the trauma inflicted by the war, then, Indigenous femininity contains associations of stress, danger and displacement for Henry, which he unwittingly transfers onto Albertine.

After spending the evening drinking together in Fargo, Henry and Albertine go to a motel and Erdrich further develops Henry's troubled and troubling association between femininity, water and danger. Afraid of Henry after he drunkenly tells her disturbing details of his experience in Vietnam, Albertine spends a long time in the

bathroom of their motel room so that she “*can close the door and he’ll be out there*” (174). Henry struggles to “remember where he was” and his traumatic memories of Vietnam surface, muddying his perception of reality (*Love Medicine* 175). Erdrich reinforces Henry’s displacement and directly aligns it with water when Henry moves towards the motel bathroom: he “rolled from the bed and started to the door, feeling his way along the edge of the mattress until he lost it and had to cross long steps of endless space, where he thought water lapped his ankles” (*Love Medicine* 176). Henry’s deep disorientation suggests that, in addition to the depersonalising experience of captivity, the dehumanisation of firstly operating as part of the US military and then being abruptly dismissed has served to destroy Henry’s ability to connect with and manage place autonomously. In this sense, Henry’s military service has contributed to the overarching colonial aims of the US government’s assimilation policies.

Henry enters the bathroom and confuses Albertine, sitting on the tiled floor sorting through her bundle, with an injured Vietnamese woman he encountered during the war:

She looked at him. They had used a bayonet. She was out of her mind. You, me, same. Same. She pointed to her eyes and his eyes. The Asian, folded eyes of some Chippewas. She was haemorrhaging.

Question her.

Sir, she is dying, sir.

‘And anyway, what could I have asked? Huh? What the hell?’

Albertine was looking at him, staring at him. He realized he had spoken out loud. (*Love Medicine* 176)

Triggered by the water in the bathroom and Albertine’s refuge there, Henry’s distressing memories overwhelm him. Erdrich’s use of a layered narrative structure indicates the degree to which Henry has been conditioned to the authority of the army, and recalls Lulu’s reflection in the lake. The interplay between Henry’s perceptions of Albertine, a dying Vietnamese woman and himself highlights the fact that Henry

closely identifies with the besieged Vietnamese population, suggesting that the relationship between the US and Vietnam is another mirroring of the colonial relationship between the US and Native American peoples. His disorientation reinforces the oppressive, overwhelming nature of the borderland for Henry, finding himself both within and without the settler state.

The connection between women and water in this novel is also reinforced by the Vietnamese woman's haemorrhaging; instead of the natural, health-signifying bleeding of the menstruation cycle, the woman is bleeding to death. Erdrich's specification of a bayonet as the weapon is gendered from this perspective, highlighting the targeting of women, girls and mothers by largely male forces in conflicts including the Vietnam war and the colonisation of the United States (an ongoing assault, as I discuss in the following chapters). This strategic division and distortion of gender stands in marked contrast to Erdrich's gender balanced figures, including Fleur as an archetypal warrior figure and Misshepeshu, whose gender fluidity is evocative of the flux and balance Erdrich attaches to water in unproblematic conjunction with maternal connotations. Erdrich thus implies that the rigid gender roles the US military imposes upon American soldiers conflicts with Anishinaabe tradition and presents Henry with another crisis of identity.

Erdrich continues her use of fluvial imagery to portray Henry's distance from Albertine. After having uneasy sex, the two are polarised in the motel bed. Albertine, still feeling unsafe, "got as far away from him as possible. It was, to Henry, as if she had crossed a deep river and disappeared. He lay next to her divided from her, just outside and with no way to follow" (*Love Medicine* 179). Erdrich emphasises the dysfunctionality of their failed relationship when Albertine awakes and makes "the mistake of touching him in his sleep", accidentally shocking Henry and triggering a

violent reaction (*Love Medicine* 180). Erdrich closes the loop between water, violence against Indigenous women, Ojibwe identity and Henry's trauma through his own emotional breakdown in response to his involuntary violence: "when he touched her he was weeping" (*Love Medicine* 180). Henry's emotional torment is both created and precluded by the military, and finds its trigger and release in human interaction and water imagery. In this sense, Henry is an embodiment of the river as border.

The dichotomy between Henry's role as a Marine and his oppressed humanity is evident in Lyman's description of his brother as a returned veteran: "It was at least three years before Henry came home. By then I guess the whole war was solved in the government's mind, but for him it would keep on going" (*Love Medicine* 185). The idea of the war continuing beyond its end relates Henry's trauma to the constant motion inherent to the Ojibwe worldview Erdrich presents in her writing, reminding us that the past is ever present in both the land and in Anishinaabe storytelling. Lyman remembers that, upon his return, Henry "was quiet, so quiet, and never comfortable sitting still anywhere but always up and moving around" (*Love Medicine* 186). Henry's trauma has destroyed his mode of existence, shattering his Ojibwe-centred interrelated senses of identity, place and mobility.

Lyman explains that Henry's death occurs unexpectedly while the two brothers take a road trip in their shared car. Erdrich links the movement of the river and mobility of the car in this incident, contrasting with the traditional interplay between home and mobility in Anishinaabe tradition, as discussed in Chapter 3. Lyman explains:

We started off, east, toward Pembina and the Red River because Henry said he wanted to see the high water ... The river was high and full of winter trash when we got there ... The water hadn't gone over the banks yet, but it would, you could tell. It was just at its limit, hard swollen, glossy like an old gray scar. We made ourselves a fire, and we sat down and watched the current go. As I watched it I felt something squeezing inside me and tightening and trying to let go all at the same time. I knew I was not just feeling it myself; I knew I was feeling what

Henry was going through at that moment. Except I that couldn't stand it, the closing and opening. (190–191)

Like the burden of Henry's torturous memories on his mind, the river is polluted and threatens to overwhelm its boundaries. Lyman sees the river here not as a precious, life-giving element, but "hard" and "glossy", relating it to "an old gray scar". The word "scar" also calls to mind Anzaldúa's description of the Mexico-US border as "*una herida abierta* where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country – a border culture" (*Borderlands/La Frontera* 25). Anzaldúa's translation of 'haemorrhage' into "lifeblood," contrasts here with the seemingly fixed "old grey scar," evocative of Henry's mental war wounds as well as the wounds he has helped to inflict in Vietnam. However, Erdrich's description of the river recalls the appearance of the lake when Lulu decides to join Moses on the island, presenting the river as a potential source of maternal communion for Henry. Erdrich's balancing of the "high water" with the brothers' fire, Lyman's intimate empathy with Henry and their shared sensation of "closing and opening," calling to mind contractions in labour, coalesce to imply that Henry's suicide is also a rebirth, a return to maternal safety and comfort and a reclamation of transmotion and Ojibwe balance. Survivance in Anzaldúa's borderland is contingent upon intercultural motion. Similarly, transmotion and resistance differentiate Owens's frontier from colonial borders. Henry's drowning, then, can be read as a healing conversion of the river from a fixed, sealed "old gray scar" back into a space of Ojibwe maternal communion defined by growth, movement and connection.

Indeed, Erdrich describes the moments before Henry's death in terms of a re-balancing through the meeting of heat and water. Lyman describes Henry's face as "totally white and hard. Then it broke, like stones break all of a sudden when water

boils up inside them” (*Love Medicine* 191). Henry’s transition is portrayed not as destructive but as a release, echoing the breaking of waves or, pursuing Erdrich’s maternal imagery, of waters in pregnancy. The theme of relief continues with Henry’s entry into the river:

‘Got to cool me off!’ he shouts all of a sudden. Then he runs over to the river and jumps in.

There’s boards and other things in the current. It’s so high. No sound comes from the river after the splash he makes, so I run right over. I look around. It’s getting dark. I see he’s halfway across the water already, and I know he didn’t swim there but the current took him. It’s far. I hear his voice, though, very clearly across it.

‘My boots are filling,’ he says.

He says this in a normal voice, like he just noticed and he doesn’t know what to think of it. Then he’s gone. (*Love Medicine* 192–193)

Henry’s calmness and passivity here reveal his comfort with death, the requirement to think or act lifted, self-preservation no longer his own responsibility, as in a return to the womb.

Henry’s peaceful acquiescence to the water aligns his suicide with the cleansing and comforting effects of Margaret’s purification ceremony for Fleur upon her final return to the reservation in *Four Souls*. Margaret encourages the exhausted, previously formidable Fleur to accept a sense of vulnerability and dependence while she prepares a bath of cedar water and a braid of sweet grass. Margaret chastises Fleur for not observing Anishinaabe traditions in raising her son with Mauser in St. Paul, but Fleur explains that her separation from the land and her clan prevented her from doing so: “‘How was I supposed to name him in that city? Who would dream a name for him? Who would smoke the pipe? ... I tried, n’gah,’ she said, calling me her mother, which hit me” (*Four Souls* 200–201). Thus the purification ceremony is deeply invested with maternal significance. Margaret washes Fleur in the cedar water, burns the sweet grass and sings “The song of return, the song of Four Souls, the song

of her name. I sang an old lullaby that made her cry again as she'd last heard it from her long dead mother, Ogimaakwe, Anaquot, Four Souls – she was called all of those names. I sang the song belonging to the lake, which was taught to us in dreams by the lake itself, and I sang her mother's song" (*Four Souls* 203). Finally, Margaret instructs Fleur to wear her medicine dress and spend eight days alone on the lakeshore; she says, "Forget your power and your strength. Let the dress kill you. Let the dress save you. Let yourself break down and need your boy and your girl" (*Four Souls* 206). Thus, in order to regain their respective senses of self, both Fleur and Henry must make themselves vulnerable to the land through water; they must remind themselves of their identities as descendants, and in Fleur's case as an ancestor; they must reject their roles in settler society, Henry as a fetishized, exploited Indian soldier and Fleur as a fetishized, exploited Indian wife. In the maternal waters of the reservation both Henry and Fleur find acceptance.

"all that happened began with that flow of water" 30

A network of connections between motherhood, water and Christian ideas around baptism and resurrection sit alongside Anishinaabe connotations of motherhood, balance and communion throughout *The Bingo Palace*, *Love Medicine* and *Last Report*. Sin-orientated Christian associations of water as purifying play a central role in the lifelong conflict between the deeply maternal Marie Kashpaw and her radically un-maternal biological mother Pauline, known as Sister Leopolda. However, Erdrich subverts Christian mythology of water by also using Lake Matchimanito to explore culturally blended concepts of death and gender fluidity in relation to Father Damien,

³⁰ Erdrich, *Last Report*, 11.

né(e) Agnes. In this section, my analysis of epistemologically opposed ideas around water in these novels highlights Erdrich's engagement with *mestiza* and the decolonial power she attaches to mixedblood identity and borderlands experience in her writing.

The contrast between the fluvial imagery with which Erdrich characterises Lulu's maternal development and the language of desiccation used to describe Sister Leopolda is striking. Whereas water evokes transmotion and interconnection in Lulu and even Henry's stories, Leopolda is presented as entirely devoid of any such qualities through the language of dryness and associations with the more masculine element of fire. Erdrich describes Leopolda's laugh as "a dry cackle like leaves crushed underfoot", eliminating the joy, health and companionship usually associated with laughter (*Love Medicine* 152). Instead, the "dry cackle" is more evocative of a cough and the simile comparing her laugh with crushing leaves lends it a cruel and destructive edge, recalling the environmental destruction embodied by deforestation in *Tracks* and *Four Souls*. Visiting Leopolda in her infirmity and old age, Marie reports, "As my eyes grew accustomed to the light I made her out, a small pile of sticks wrapped in a white gown. She wasn't even the kindling to start a fire, I thought" (*Love Medicine* 151). This description highlights Leopolda's success in isolating and depriving her body to an almost inhuman extent after years of self-starvation and self-mortification: her body is no longer a living, healthy whole, but a "small pile" of disparate "sticks". The fact that her body is not sufficient, in Marie's estimation, "to start a fire," conveys its extreme lack of life-giving or life-preserving potential, in contrast with both Marie and Lulu's maternal generosity. Moreover, Erdrich's reference to fire, associated with the masculine in Anishinaabe tradition, indicates that Leopolda relates to neither female nor male corporeality, suggesting a withdrawal from the physical world as well as from Anishinaabe culture. Leopolda's "white

gown”, ostentatiously reminiscent of Jesus’s shroud, illustrates her motivation: she wishes to be purely saintly, to eradicate her imperfect humanity and especially any trace of Indigenous identity. Leopolda presents sanctity and Native motherhood as mutually incompatible choices, telling Marie as a young woman, “You have two choices. One, you can marry a no-good Indian, bear his brats, die like a dog. Or two, you can give yourself to God” (*Love Medicine* 48). Thus, both motherhood and Native identity are presented by Leopolda as fundamentally incongruous with ‘successful’ Christian devotion.

Marie desires to enter the convent as a neophyte precisely to wrest control over the ultimate border post, the gates of heaven, from Leopolda. She surmises, “The real way to overcome Leopolda was this: I’d get to heaven first. And then, when I saw her coming, I’d shut the gate. She’d be out!” (*Love Medicine* 48). Similarly, Leopolda taunts Marie with the key to the larder, the rich contents of which overwhelm Marie: “It was the cheese that got to me. When I saw it my stomach hollowed. My tongue dripped. I loved that goat-milk cheese better than anything I’d ever ate ... ‘When you inherit my keys,’ [Leopolda] said sourly, slamming the door in my face, ‘you can eat all you want of the priest’s cheese’” (*Love Medicine* 50). Marie shares with the younger Pauline a pride in her light skin tone and a desire to downplay her Native heritage. Thus, emphasising the convent as an exclusive space, Erdrich sets a pattern of orphanhood or abandonment leading to cultural dislocation, positioning young womanhood and maternal relationships as a key battleground in campaigns of both colonial dominance and decolonial resistance. Erdrich here highlights the role played by the Church in the targeting and separation of Indigenous women and children as an integral part of colonialist assimilation, just as Henry witnesses the targeting of Vietnamese women and children in armed warfare.

The binary opposition between Erdrich's presentation of traditional concepts of Ojibwe motherhood and the Christian ideal carried to an extreme by Leopolda positions the use of water in Christian ceremonies as a point of overlap. Leopolda resorts to heinous violence under the guise of baptismal tropes in order, ostensibly, to spiritually purify Marie but, in reality, to establish authoritative dominance. Leopolda tricks Marie into lying on the floor of the convent kitchen to retrieve a cup from beneath the stove so that she can pour boiling water over her back. Realising that she's been manipulated into a vulnerable position, Marie tells us, "I heard the water as it came, tipped from the spout, cooling as it fell but still scalding as it struck. I must have twitched beneath her foot, because she steadied me, and then the poker nudged up beside my arm as if to guide. 'To warm your cold ash heart,' she said" (*Love Medicine* 52). After being burned, Marie laments, "She'd gotten past me with her poker and I would never be a saint. I despaired. I felt I had no inside voice, nothing to direct me, no darkness, no Marie" (*Love Medicine* 54). Rather than purifying Marie to strengthen her sense of identity, Leopolda aims to eradicate it.

Wishing to leave the convent, Marie states, "The pain had kept me strong, and as it left me I began to forget it; I couldn't hold on. I began to wonder if she'd really scalded me with the kettle. I could not remember" (*Love Medicine* 55). Not only does Leopolda's view of sanctity demand spiritual devotion and celibacy, therefore, but in the Ojibwe context, the purging of maternal capacity and feeling contributes to the long-term erosion of Ojibwe identity and community. In dramatic contrast with Margaret's restorative, loving use of water in Fleur's purification ceremony, Leopolda's use of water to inflict this assault on Marie's sense of Ojibwe identity thus directly reinterprets and repurposes an element traditionally closely associated with

Ojibwe motherhood. Marie's resistance against Leopolda's attempt to dominate and limit her sense of identity thus constitutes a form of decolonial resistance.

The decolonial significance of Marie's resistance is reinforced when she declines the chance to gain an important position in the convent. Marie attempts to take revenge on Leopolda by kicking her into the open oven, but when she fails Leopolda attacks her with an iron poker. Marie is left with a stigmata-like wound which elicits the nuns' veneration. The difference between the individualistic, self-denying, unmaternal Leopolda and her selfless, profoundly maternal estranged daughter is expressed when Marie realises that her revenge is empty: "there was no heart in it. No joy when she bent to touch the floor ... Blank dust was whirling through the light shafts. My skin was dust. Dust my lips" (*Love Medicine* 60). Marie's repetition of "dust", contrasting with the life-giving associations of water, suggests that, from a community-orientated Ojibwe perspective, the convent represents cultural death. Recognising this, Marie flees. Marie's reclamation of her mobility and rejection of the "dust" associated with Leopolda's contrived barrenness therefore plays into Erdrich's broader dynamic between Ojibwe motherhood, water, transmotion and challenging of borders.

Marie's departure from the convent also reinforces the connection between the movement of water, walking and grounded normativity in these novels, playing on Christian mythology of resurrection. Counter-balancing Leopolda's perversion of water as weapon of violent coercion, Erdrich utilises a biblical story to relate Marie's rejection of the convent and reclamation of her identity as a maternal Ojibwe figure. Erdrich ends the second chapter of *Love Medicine* as Marie is convalescing in the convent with the words, "Rise up! I thought. Rise up and walk! There is no limit to this dust!" (60). The following chapter is narrated by Nector Kashpaw and relates the

dramatic encounter during which he falls in love with Marie, whose maiden surname as an adopted daughter, Nector reminds us, is Lazarre, French for the biblical name Lazarus; the death and resurrection of Lazarus are recounted in the Gospel of John. Erdrich's use of the French "Lazarre" instead of Lazarus points to the cultural mixing of French settlers with the Ojibwe during the early period of colonisation, reflecting the constant evolution of Native societies as well as the mediation of Christian teaching according to colonial context. Marie is resurrected, like Lazarus, but her resurrection is decidedly different in that she achieves it not through Jesus's intervention but independently. Underscoring this, Marie echoes Saint Peter's words from Acts 3.6 – "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!" – but omits the invocation of Christ, implying that Marie defies the nuns and reclaims her autonomy in no name other than her own (*The Bible, English Standard Version*). Moreover, Marie's resurrection is bound up with her desire to leave the convent and return to the living world of the reservation community, rather than for "the glory of God," aligning her walking more closely with Anishinaabe relationships with land through the tradition of walking upon the earth shared by Margaret, Fleur, Lulu, Gerry and Lipsha (John 11.40).

Erdrich expands on her subversion of Christian uses of water and draws further connections between water and borderlands identity through the death of Father Damien. In preparing for his death, Father Damien echoes Lulu's transmotion by rowing across Lake Matchimanito to the island. As both Lulu and Marie's quasi-baptismal experiences help them understand and reclaim their respective senses of place and identity, so Father Damien reverts to his concealed female identity as Agnes, signalled by Erdrich's shift to female pronouns:

Rowing out to Spirit Island with cheese and crackers, candy bars, a bag of apples, and a case of wine, she stopped often to rest and to

contemplate the easy chasing waves that rippled beside her. The wind was with her, so she corrected her drift and breathed the fire from her chest and the stinging emptiness from her muscles. The air was so pure and watery that it tasted like a tonic food. Her mind was phenomenally clear. Memories came back in waves, thoughts, passages of music, old songs Nanapush had taught her. They'd sing together once she reached the island. (*Last Report* 346)

In spite of Agnes's old age and infirmity, her comfort and energy during the crossing express an assertion of freedom from constraints upon her identity, release from responsibility and autonomous approach to preparing for death. She takes time to "contemplate" the "easy" water; she expels the masculine "fire" and "stinging" from her body and allows the boat to "drift" along. The liberating liminal space of the lake allows Agnes to reunite compartmentalised aspects of her identity: like the motion of the water, her "Memories came back in waves". Like Lulu, Agnes travels to the island not in search of solitude, but for communion with Ojibwe spirits, particularly her deceased friend Nanapush; and like Henry, Agnes finds freedom from restrictive gender roles in water and death. At the end of her life, therefore, Agnes returns to water to reconcile the multiple facets of her identity and achieves a comfortable, Ojibwe-centred sense of place as an adopted Ojibwe woman.

This pattern positions water crossing as a rite of passage for Ojibwe women in which they reflect both *mestiza* and transmotion. In Agnes's case, the crossing is completed in death:

Sightless, now, she sank to earth and felt the heat of the leaping fire on her face. *I am going, I am going*, she thought. Underneath her and before her, a wide plain of utter emptiness opened. Trusting, yearning, she put her arms out into that emptiness. She reached as far as she could, farther than she was capable, held her hands out until as last a bigger, work-toughened hand grasped hold of hers.

With a yank, she was pulled across. (*Last Report* 349–50)

Agnes's death is an illustration of the fundamental interconnection between people, land and elements which characterise Anishinaabe epistemology. Having travelled

across the water, a voyage during which the air and wind currents affect her body and trajectory, Agnes is now in physical contact with the “earth” and feels heat emanating from her like “leaping fire”; as in Gerry Nanapush’s experience of transmotion in prison, sight is no longer Agnes’s dominant sense. She perceives her death not as an ending or stopping, but as a new type of movement akin to transmotion: she thinks, “I am going” and enters what is portrayed as a welcoming “emptiness” with trust and enthusiasm. Crucially, Agnes does not cross into the spirit world alone, but in communion with other spirits equally present in the land. In contrast with Leopolda’s ostentatiously symbolic white gown, Agnes is helped by humble, human, “work-toughened” hands which call to mind her long-since-deceased husband Berndt, reaffirming the Ojibwe belief in cyclicity and connection across life and death and limitless timespans. In crossing the water, then, Agnes breaks down boundaries between genders, between ethnicities and between life and death, all of which are so zealously guarded in the Catholic Church and heavily invested with western, Christian ideology in the American settler state.

Father Damien’s loyal assistant and companion Mary Kashpaw finds his body on the shore of the island and is faced with a dilemma over his burial. Erdrich tells us, “Left with the choice whether to bring him back across the lake in the canoe or to bury him here on the island, she froze ... She buried him in the lake” (*Last Report* 350–351). Understanding that Father Damien is a complex, liminal and gender-fluid figure, Mary realises that a conventional burial, according to either Anishinaabe or Catholic tradition, would be insufficient. The lake, defined by cyclicity, interconnection and flux, is entirely fitting as a resting place for Father Damien. Erdrich emphasises the relationship between Father Damien’s liminality and the water as Mary releases his body: “Father Damien’s slight figure, serene in its halo of white hair, lay just under

the waves. As the dark water claimed him, his features blurred. His body wavered for a time between the surface and the feminine depth below” (*Last Report* 351). While Agnes has to restrict and conceal her identity to comply with Catholic dogma during her life, in death she is free to occupy a “blurred”, “between” space in communion with both her Ojibwe and non-Native friends and the environment. Although Mary’s use of pronouns suggests that she lays Father Damien to rest as a man, she perceives the lake to have a “feminine depth”, resulting in comfortable balance like that of Henry’s return to the maternal security of the river.

“nothing rejected, nothing abandoned” ³¹

Erdrich’s elucidation of the links between motherhood and water as an invocation of Anishinaabe epistemology and destabilising of colonial borders reframes June’s would-be abandonment and drowning of Lipsha as a baby. Although Lipsha’s relationship with June remains deeply ambivalent, the complex associations Erdrich weaves between water, the maternal and survivance in these novels allows us to read June’s act of leaving Lipsha in the slough as one informed by Anishinaabe tradition. Conventional readings of June’s perceived rejection of her baby focus on June’s function as a tragic, displaced character. Indeed, June’s absence permeates both *Love Medicine* and *The Bingo Palace*, and Lipsha’s double loss of his mother – through her decision to leave him in the water and her subsequent death – weighs upon him as a constant burden. However, such a reading ignores June’s resilience, traditionalism and power as an archetypal figure; June survives a traumatic childhood, is adopted by matriarchal Marie Kashpaw and then traditionalist Eli and, later, becomes a siren

³¹ Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 101.

figure both on and off the reservation, sharing with Fleur the ability to cross the metaphysical border between life and death to visit and guide her son and others. In this section I draw on Anishinaabe traditions featuring the figure of the turtle, with which June is heavily associated, to argue that June's actions should be interpreted as part of the process of what Simpson terms Indigenous "resurgence" (*Dancing* 11).

June is consistently attracted to and associated with water in these novels. When June and her first husband (formerly adoptive brother) Gordie take a road trip as their honeymoon, they hitchhike for days to reach "the first lake of Minnesota's ten thousand, a small and reedy oval. 'But anyway, it's water,' June said" (*Love Medicine* 267). The couple's journey and June's relief foreshadow Erdrich's trip in *Books and Islands*, suggesting that June shares Erdrich's perception of the lakes and islands as homely and liberating. June is more at home in the water than Gordie, Erdrich tells us: "June swam without effort, rolled, dived up and down like a fish, took Gordie farther and farther, away from shore, toward the middle of the lake" (*Love Medicine* 270). June is so comfortable in the water that she makes a game of Gordie's weakness as a swimmer: "Suddenly she grabbed him. He gulped the air convulsively, then sank in her arms. They went down, Gordie fumbling, awkward in surprise. When his air ran out he panicked, twisted from June, and kicked to the surface" (*Love Medicine* 271). Thus June not only feels at home in the lake – a fluid, expansive, natural and uncontrollable space – but she is also powerful in the water, drawing a parallel between June and the water manitou Misshepesu.

June's empowerment in the lake forms a drastic contrast with her experiences earlier in life. As a child, June has a deeply dysfunctional relationship with her own mother, and the impact of this fractious relationship clearly inhibits her senses of self and maternal identity as an adult. Before she is found wandering in the woods and

brought to Marie Kashpaw for adoption, June and her elder brother Geezhig live with their abusive, alcoholic mother, Marie's adoptive sister Lucille Lazarre. Erdrich writes: "When, on good days, she sat in a chair making baskets and let June braid and brush, June imagined that she wore her mother's hair, that she sat inside its safe tent" (*The Bingo Palace* 58). Not only does June feel exposed, without a "safe tent" of long hair, but she also feels separated from her mother, permanently excluded from her mother's delimited personal safety. June's alienation is evident from Erdrich's use of the third person throughout this brief chapter, and her conspicuous absence from the intertextual narrative voices.

Lucille frequently beats Geezhig, and resorts to beating June when she can't find him. When Lucille becomes violent, Erdrich tells us, June seeks safety by sitting "high in her tree" or sleeping outside, "covered over with leaves," emphasising the distance she feels from her mother and indicating the discomfort in which this relationship places her (*The Bingo Palace* 58–59). However, June's affinity with the forest positions her in close relation to Fleur and therefore as a character with particular connections with the reservation environment and a liminal but vital role as a member of the Ojibwe. As Fleur suffers the death of her family and the extreme hardships of working to protect the Pillager lands under exploitation and persecution to ultimately emerge as a sacred warrior archetype, so June survives trauma and isolation to develop a particular and self-affirming relationship with the land and, thereby, contribute to Ojibwe survivance.

The abuse that June suffers, like that of Fleur, is predicated on her particular vulnerability as a young Ojibwe girl. During one of Lucille's violent episodes, it is too cold for June to flee outside and she goes back to sleep in "the scratchy old army blankets, where her body had hollowed a nest" (*The Bingo Palace* 58). Erdrich's

image of June's cold, lonely, uncomfortable "nest" carries none of the connotations of warmth, growth and love evoked by Lulu's early relationship with Fleur and Lulu's own maternal experience. The surplus army blankets are evocative of the long history of military intervention and the colonial capitalist hand in creating severe poverty and familial dysfunction on reservations, as does Lucille's dependence on government supplies to provide for her children, colouring June's suffering with specific, colonially-manufactured racial and gendered factors.

Returning to the cabin with her boyfriend Leonard to find June asleep in the blankets and her brother absent, Lucille flies into a rage. Erdrich describes Lucille's attack on June in a passage replete with violent light and water imagery:

Light blared. June's head, thick, rang. Then she flew and hit. Sprawled flat, she gagged for breath. Her chest was pressed flat as pages. She saw the center of a yellow wheel, churning, throwing off sparks that filled big sails.

Across golden water, her mother screamed. '*Where is he?*' June's air bubbled in and out and fear shot her toward the doorway. She nearly slipped by, twisting like a cat, but Leonard's hands were loaded springs and he caught her and scuffled her down. (*The Bingo Palace* 59)

The fear and panic June experiences are described as if she is suffocating or drowning: her disorientation transforms the cabin into "golden water" and her breathing is strained. Her distorted perception of the environment expresses the turbulence created by Lucille's abdication of maternal care, aggravated by the alcoholism and poverty which characterise the methodically ruinous policies the US government applied to reservations in the early to mid twentieth century. Moreover, Erdrich's language demonstrates that, as the victim of her mother's drunken violence, June's sense of self is severely disrupted. Light and sound are conflated as "Light blared," evoking the sensorial disorientation that accompanies a blow to the head. The lack of visual perspective, recalling Agnes's lapse into blindness at the point of death, conveys

June's powerlessness and defencelessness: she can't identify why her head "rang"; she knows only that she "flew and hit", without reference to spatial context; she is "sprawled" and then "pressed" against the floor. The extreme nature of Lucille's violence is conveyed in Erdrich's description of her chest "pressed flat as pages", suggesting an oppressive, suffocating weight. This reference carries additional significance: as Nanapush demonstrates in *Tracks*, paper, while inanimate and fragile, is powerful, and June is entirely powerless. Lucille's violence silences June, and Leonard's guarding of the door with hands like "loaded springs" amply explains June's greater comfort alone in the outdoors. Therefore the association between motherhood and water, which should be comforting and accepting as suggested by the phrase "golden water", is, in this episode, destroyed by violence and entrapment.

This disturbing episode becomes more harrowing when Lucille's boyfriend Leonard takes advantage of June's voicelessness to sexually abuse her:

There was a way a man could get into her body and she never knew. Pain rang everywhere. June tried to climb out of it, but his chin held her shoulder. She tried to roll from underneath, but he was on every side. Skeins of sparks buzzed down, covered her eyes and face. Then she was so small she was just a burning dot, a flung star moving, speeding through the blackness, the air, faster and faster and with no letup until she finally escaped into a part of her mind, where she made one promise before she went out.

Nobody ever hold me again. (The Bingo Palace 60)

This severely traumatic experience inverts the drowning imagery Erdrich employs throughout the Little No Horse novels as well as the power June enjoys in the water. The pain Leonard inflicts on June during the assault mimics the subsuming nature of water, leaving June unable to "climb out" or "roll from underneath". The language of invasion and igneous imagery coalesce with June's vision of "big sails" and the words "shot" and "loaded" to evoke the theme of conquest, illustrating the effects of cultural and physical genocide on Indigenous people on the most intimate level. As if being

dragged or thrown into dark depths, June is ever-diminishing, as “small” as a “dot”, and “flung ... through the blackness.” The horrific experience of being raped as a child leaves June irremediably alienated, displaced and depersonalised. Thus, like other characters, June associates water with a comforting freedom and liminality, but in a divergence from Anishinaabe tradition caused by her trauma, this association is riven from the idea of motherhood.

June’s trauma damages her relationships with both people and place in adulthood. Living in Fargo and working, it is suggested at the beginning of *Love Medicine*, as a prostitute, June has scant control over her environment and physical relationships, reflecting the permeability of both her childhood home and the reservation border and the attendant denial of autonomy. For example, June can only lock her room by removing the doorknob and keeping it with her, because there is “no other way of locking the battered door” (*Love Medicine* 4–5). Thus, in this sense, June maintains a dissociation between her adult existence and her Ojibwe sense of self, rooted in her traumatic childhood and the fractious reservation community.

Yet, in another sense, June preserves a strong sense of self anchored in Anishinaabe tradition. June’s comfort in water, her semi-nomadic lifestyle and her carrying around of the symbol of her home – the doorknob – relates her closely to the turtle figure. The turtle is of great importance in Anishinaabe tradition: the Great Turtle is central to the Anishinaabe creation story, becoming the land of North America during a flood and leading to the emergence of the Anishinaabe people: Simpson explains that, according to the story, “Mikinaag (turtle) volunteered to bear the weight of the earth on her back and Waynabozhoo placed the earth there” (L.

Simpson, *Dancing* 69).³² North America is known as Turtle Island for this reason in many Native cultures. The figure of the turtle highlights the equivalence and interdependence between land and water as well as the imperative to walk carefully on the land, as on “our turtle’s back” (L. Simpson, *Dancing* 68). Moreover, within Erdrich’s work, June’s association with the turtle aligns her with the matriarchal Lulu, described as “a turtle in its shell” when she protects Gerry from the FBI (*The Bingo Palace* 263).

Additionally, the painted turtle is a significant figure in several Anishinaabe stories. Two stories feature an event in which Nanabozho gives Turtle her shell, using two shells or a stone, either as a thank you or an apology (‘Native American Indian Turtle Legends’). Turtle’s shell then protects her from danger while allowing her to live in water as well as on land, within her own house which mirrors the earth. June’s alienation and duality are not necessarily purely negative reactions to her childhood, then, but can be read as self-preserving and self-empowering ways in which she lives Anishinaabe teachings while distanced from her family and home environment.

The correspondence of June to the turtle figure extends to Erdrich’s depiction of her mystifying death. The night June dies, she is with a man (calling himself Andy, but really Fleur’s son Jack Mauser, as we find out in *Tales of Burning Love*) in his car to have sex, but he falls asleep and June feels trapped beneath him, recalling Erdrich’s depiction of Leonard sexually assaulting June as a child. Erdrich tells us, “June had wedged herself so tight against the door that when she sprang the latch she fell out. Into the cold. It was a shock like being born” (*Love Medicine* 6). June falls out of the car into a blizzard, and therefore into an environment saturated with water, recalling

³² ‘Waynabozhoo’ is one of multiple spellings of the name of the Anishinaabe trickster figure. Simpson states, “Waynaboozhoo is also known as Nanabozho, Nana’b’oozoo and Nanabush” (*Dancing* 82). Erdrich’s Nanapush is a variation on this figure.

Henry's death/rebirth in the river. Erdrich dominates this passage with egg symbolism. Jeanne Smith notes that June feels "fragile" on the evening of her death, quoting, "she was afraid to bump against anything because her skin felt hard and brittle, and she knew it was possible, in this condition, to fall apart at the slightest touch" (Smith 14; *Love Medicine* 4). Smith also highlights June's companion or client "peeling back the shell of a hard-boiled egg" and Erdrich's description of June's pink top as a "shell" (*Love Medicine* 2). Indeed, Erdrich states that June fears that she could "crack wide open" lying under the sleeping Andy, while Stirrup notes that, "Cracking, splitting, falling apart, are metaphors returned to throughout the novel" (*Love Medicine* 6; Stirrup 66). While I agree that June fears such a splitting, I argue that these connotations also operate within an Anishinaabe cultural framework to relate June to the turtle figure. Her pink "shell" top and her doorknob evoke the self-containment of a turtle shell, while her experience of "being born" motherless and in the cold is more evocative of a baby turtle hatching, alone and near water. Erdrich therefore uses Anishinaabe connotations of the turtle to blend the Anishinaabe connections between motherhood and water with the Christian significance of June's Easter death to frame this incident as another instance of rebirth and Anishinaabe purification, echoing those of Henry and Fleur, in a borderland environment.

This reading positions June's death as a reclamation of her senses of place and identity within the Ojibwe community and environment, free from the oppressions of her childhood. June exercises her freedom and autonomy by leaving the car and beginning to walk in the direction of the reservation in the blizzard, disregarding the harsh weather conditions and physical barriers like fences. Indeed, June seems to be remarkably comfortable in the hostile conditions:

Even when it started to snow she did not lose her sense of direction. Her feet grew numb, but she did not worry about the distance. The

heavy winds couldn't blow her off course. She continued. Even when her heart clenched and her skin turned crackling cold it didn't matter, because the pure and naked part of her went on.

The snow fell deeper that Easter than it had in forty years, but June walked over it like water and came home. (*Love Medicine* 6)

June's comfort in the terrible weather conditions and the spiritual element of her journey place her walking in a sequence, following Fleur Pillager's walk along and return from the three-day road in *Tracks*, and Agnes's transportation from her farm towards the reservation in the flood as well as her death on the island in *Last Report*. Doubling the significance of the Christ-like image of June's walking on, or rather through, water, Erdrich implies that June sheds her turtle's shell to allow "the pure and naked part of her" to continue. June's death is thus an act of transmotion. Ultimately, June returns to the reservation to visit Lipsha and guide him towards his role in the Ojibwe community. Therefore, June's maternal role – shaping the narrative of *Love Medicine* and *The Bingo Palace* – echoes those of Fleur and Agnes as unconventional according to colonial Euro-American epistemology, but as profoundly important within Anishinaabe tradition and for the purpose of Ojibwe survivance.

Such a reading of June's maternal identity transforms our understanding of her ostensibly troubling treatment of Lipsha as a baby and the mystery surrounding Lipsha's survival of being thrown in the slough. Rather than the abandonment or attempted murder of her baby, June's act is a community-orientated decision to place her son into the care of the reservation environment which mothered her and which she trusts and respects, and by extension into the guardianship of the deeply caring matriarch Marie Kashpaw. Indeed, Lipsha possesses a gift of healing and keen intuition, allowing him to later become a positive gambler figure and nascent community leader to counterbalance Lyman's irresponsibility and jeopardising of tribal lands.

The details of the incident come to light during a conversation Lipsha has with his aunt Zelda, June's adoptive sister. Zelda tells Lipsha, "No mother, she was sure no true mother. June Morrissey, Kashpaw, whatever she was, she threw you in" (*The Bingo Palace* 49). Zelda is highly critical of June, applying her Eurocentric, western standards of family and social roles to the event and thereby further alienating the already dislocated June. What seems to trouble Zelda more than June's actions, however, is the question of how Lipsha survives being thrown in the slough. She elaborates:

'Lipsha, you were in that slough a long time.'
 'No, I wasn't.'
 She stops completely and stares at me, and then she whispers.
 '*So why weren't you drowned?*'
 And because I am mad at her for making up that stupid fucking
 story and all, I stare right back.
 '*Watch out,*' I snap my eyes at her. '*You'll take my place!*' (*The
 Bingo Palace* 51)

Zelda's fascination with Lipsha's logically impossible survival is actually validated by Lipsha's response, recalling Fleur Pillager's repeated threat against those who betray her. As Fleur's great-grandson, Lipsha is an important descendant; more significantly, Lipsha is presented as an heir to Fleur's spiritual power and relationship with water. Lipsha's heritage indicates that June leaves him in the water with confidence in her relationship with the land, as well as in full knowledge of Lipsha's inherent relationship with Misshepeshu. Lipsha's effective orphanhood generates his liminality and senses of displacement and alienation, but as a descendant of Fleur, Lulu, Gerry Nanapush as well as June, with Lipsha's liminality come power and a capacity for transmotion and survivance. Lipsha's survival of drowning is therefore a rite of passage, preconceived and spiritually supported.

Erdrich confirms Lipsha's status as a sacred archetypal figure when he reflects on his survival in the slough:

I was saved. And not by Zelda, not at first, but by something else, something that was down there with me ... it presses its mouth on mine and holds me with its fins and horns and rocks me with its long and shining plant arms. Its face is lion-jawed, a thing of beach foam, resembling the jack of clubs ... I am rocked and saved and cradled. No wonder, as *Zelda* reports it, I smiled. (*The Bingo Palace* 218)

Lipsha is rescued and protected by Misshepesu, the water manitou who protects Fleur. Lipsha is helped to breathe from the manitou's "mouth on mine"; Misshepesu "holds" and "rocks" Lipsha; the substances of "foam" and "cloud" convey both softness and ephemerality, reinforced by Lipsha's looping of this experience with his future death. Notably, Erdrich refers to Misshepesu here with gender neutral pronouns, further expanding the parameters of the relationship between the maternal and water. At no point is Lipsha afraid or in danger; it is only in trying to rationalise June's behaviour according to Eurocentric values, divorced from an Ojibwe context, that Lipsha becomes distressed.

Moreover, June's reappearances imply that her treatment of Lipsha is not an abandonment but a shift in her maternal functioning. When June visits Lipsha in the Bingo Palace, he tries to gain an understanding of her movements, revealing the interactive and transitional nature of their relationship:

I keep telling myself that my mother means me no harm and besides, it can't have been easy for her to appear. She has surely walked through fire, crossed water, passed through the great homely divide of fenced pasture and fields scoured flat by the snow. She has walked the three-day road back, the road of the dead. (*The Bingo Palace* 54)

Echoing both Fleur and Misshepesu, June demonstrates a balance between the masculine and feminine evoked by fire and water. Also like Fleur, June's ability to intervene between the living and spirit worlds confers great power upon her and suggests that her role as Lipsha's mother is more important and complex than he realises. June's invocation of transmotion suggests that Ojibwe motherhood – like water – does not and cannot correspond to colonial Euro-American standards, values

or limits. Rather, both Ojibwe motherhood and water are defined by fluidity, interaction, holism and community, and both in their traditional conceptions are vital to survivance.

Like Lulu, however, Lipsha cannot deny the pain of separation from his mother. Reflecting on what he knows of June's difficult early childhood, Lipsha tells us:

I know that she did the same that was done to her – a young girl left out to live on the woods and survive on pine sap and leaves and buried roots.

Pain comes to us from deep back, from where it grew in the human body. Pain sucks more pain into it, we don't know why. It lives, and we harbour its weight. When the worst comes, we will not act the opposite. We will do what we were taught, we who learnt our lessons in the dead light. We pass them on. We hurt, and hurt others, in a circular motion. (*The Bingo Palace* 217)

Lipsha's reference to the "circular motion" of intergenerational trauma draws a parallel between this heavy legacy and the mother/water dynamic. Although stung, Lipsha can empathise sufficiently with June through their shared experiences to gain an insight into the cyclicity and constant motion of life. Thus, without diminishing his own pain, Lipsha becomes reconciled to the experience of borderlands liminality as an Ojibwe son; he recognises, like Anzaldúa, that the ambiguities which define his relationship with June are "not comfortable but home" (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera* 19). This constitutes an important stage in Lipsha's progression towards familial connection and an autonomous, place-based sense of identity. Thinking about his father Gerry, Lipsha later states, "He and my mother, June, have always been inside of me, dark and shining, their absence about the size of a coin ... and the thing is I never knew until now it was a thin piece of ice they had put there" (*The Bingo Palace* 259). Read in relation to Erdrich's exploration of water and motherhood, the ice

Lipsha feels can be abstracted from its conventional negative connotations and thought of as a necessary moment in the constant, life-giving cycle of life.

Furthermore, Lipsha reveals his tacit understanding of June's actions from an Anishinaabe epistemological perspective when he relates the tale of Fleur's attempted self-drowning: she "tried to kill herself by loading her pockets with stones and marching into Matchimanito Lake. Only, here's what stones she picked: the very ones that rested by her bedside, the ones that she had always talked to. The perfect ones. The round ones. They knew her and so they helped her. They wouldn't let her sink. Spirit stones, they floated her up" (*The Bingo Palace* 45). When Zelda tells Lipsha, then, that it was difficult to retrieve the gunnysack in which he lay in the slough as a baby because "June had added *rocks*," we infer that June too knows which stones help (*The Bingo Palace* 50–51). Like the turtle concealing her eggs, June leaves Lipsha in the earth's maternal waters, in safety and confidence, to begin a process of transition and transmotion that will lead him to his place in the tribe and in the land. His survival mirrors that of the Ojibwe, reclaiming the fluidity of water over the fallacy of the frontier and proclaiming emergence in defiance of colonial hegemonic narratives.

Part 3

“A tangle of red tape” ³³

Permeability and Voice

³³ Erdrich, *The Round House*, 36.

Chapter 5

Jurisdiction and Justice

In her 2012 novel *The Round House*, Erdrich explores the direct effects of colonial borders on and around the reservation in a late twentieth century context through the rape of an Ojibwe woman by a non-Native man and the ensuing search for justice. The text centres on the issue of conflicting legal jurisdictions as a key factor in the longstanding crisis of sexual violence against Indigenous women in the United States and the dismal prosecution record for these crimes. This novel thus constitutes Erdrich's most explicit engagement with the theme of borders. In this chapter, I examine the novel's central themes of jurisdiction and justice in relation to colonial social boundaries and hierarchies and Ojibwe relationships with land. I posit that Erdrich's use of space in *The Round House* suggests that the Indian reservation system is designed to order, control and ultimately negate tribal senses of place and identity as part of what Wolfe terms "the logic of elimination," and that Erdrich aligns trauma inflicted by violence against Native women's bodies with intergenerational trauma and trauma of the land arising from histories of settler violence, oppression and destruction (387). I argue that characters' attempts to secure community and bodily autonomy therefore represent the pursuit of Indigenous self-determination and sovereignty.

In *The Round House*, as in earlier novels, Erdrich localises this (trans)national issue and its historical context. As legal scholar Jasmine Owens remarks, "It is important to remember that the rape of American Indian and Alaska Native women is not a new phenomenon"; indeed, Indigenous legal studies scholar Sarah Deer, a member of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation, points out that "the United States was

founded, in part, through the use of sexual violence as a tool”; “were it not for the widespread rape of Native American women, many of our towns, counties, and states might not exist” (J. Owens 522; Deer, ‘Sovereignty of the Soul’ 459). Thus the construction of borders and sexual violence against Native women are two intertwined methods by which colonial power established hegemony in the United States.

The narrator of *The Round House*, Joe Coutts, is thirteen years old when his mother, Geraldine, is violently raped by a white man. The rapist, Linden Lark, deliberately chooses the location of the eponymous round house to carry out the attack. Erdrich notes that “sacred place[s]” like the round house are common to many reservations: “There is a kiva, or there is a sweat lodge, round places, the tepee is round” (‘Conversation’). The round house thus represents Anishinaabe sacred places and, thereby, traditional Anishinaabe epistemology and Ojibwe relationships with land. The novel’s round house is a secluded old “log hexagon”, located “on top of a slight rise” at the “far side of Reservation Lake” from Joe’s home, accessible only by a “two-track bush road” (*The Round House* 68–69). Joe explains:

During the old days when Indians could not practice their religion – well, actually not such old days: pre-1978 – the round house had been used for ceremonies. People pretended it was a social dance hall or brought their Bibles for gatherings. In those days the headlights of the priest’s car coming down the long road glared in the southern window. By the time the priest or the BIA superintendent arrived, the water drums and eagle feathers and the medicine bags and birchbark scrolls and sacred pipes were in a couple of motorboats halfway across the lake. (*The Round House* 70)

The round house allows the Ojibwe to carry on traditional spiritual practices in private during a period of aggressive forced assimilation. Thus, Mary Paniccia Carden notes, “the round house functions as a site of Native survivance” (98). Lark’s attack on Geraldine is rendered all the more violent and reprehensible for his conscious decision to commit his crime at the round house; this positions Lark as the latest actor in a

tradition of Euro-American, patriarchal authoritarian violations of this sacred place and, thereby, of Ojibwe culture.

Erdrich has spoken forcefully about her intentions in writing *The Round House*; she reflects that the theme of sexual violence against Native women is “extremely timely, and has been timely for a long time” (Dartmouth). She has commented that the statistics of violence against Indigenous women “haunted me for many years before I could really figure out how to approach it” (‘National Book Award Winner’). The statistics are indeed staggering. Deer explains:

Native women experience the highest per capita rate of rape in the nation. National Crime Victimization Survey data consistently reveal a very high rate of rape against Native women, an average annual rate of 7.2 per 1,000 persons, compared to 1.9 per 1,000 persons for all races. The ‘one in three’ statistic was originally published in a 2000 report on the National Violence Against Women Survey, which concluded that 34.1 percent of Native women will be raped during their lifetime (meaning that the more accurate statement is *more* than one in three Native women). (*The Beginning and End of Rape* 4)

It is important to note that rape is a notoriously under-reported crime; Deer concludes that “the federal statistics represent at best a very low estimate” and comments that “Rape, in particular, is experienced at such high rates in some tribal communities that it becomes ‘normalized’” (*Beginning and End* 5). Moreover, a graphic pamphlet produced in 2016 by the Native American Women’s Health Education Resource Centre to inform young Native women about sexual assault is entitled, “What To Do When You’re Raped,” demonstrating the degree to which rape has become normalised and even expected in Indigenous communities (Bonner; emphasis mine).

When Dianne F. Herman introduced the concept of the American “rape culture” in the 1970s, she emphasised problematic legal parameters. Herman posits that rape:

could be defined as sex without consent, therefore involving either domination or violence. Instead, rape is legally defined as sexual

intercourse by a male with a female, *other than his wife*, without the consent of the woman and effected by force, duress, intimidation, or deception as to the nature of the act ... The implication of this loophole is that *violent, unwanted* sex does not necessarily define rape. Instead, rape is *illegal sex* – that is, sexual assault by a man who has no legal rights over a woman. In other words, in the law’s eyes, violence in legal sexual intercourse is permissible, but sexual relations with a woman who is not one’s property is not. (Herman 43–44)

The legal conception of rape is thus premised on property and domination, mirroring the concerns of colonisation. It is important to bear in mind that Native American peoples are still categorised as “domestic dependent nations” in the United States, placing Indigenous tribes in a not dissimilar legal relation to the United States to the traditional, sexist formulation of marriage in which a wife is effectively the property of her husband.³⁴ Thus the legal subjugation of women compounds with colonial hierarchy; as settler colonialism utilises and manipulates the law in order to devalue and dispossess Indigenous peoples, Native women are effectively afforded lower legal standing as either human beings or ‘property’. The combined forces of rape culture and settler colonialism thus place American Indian women in a position of extreme vulnerability.

Erdrich focuses *The Round House* specifically on the anomalously high rate of interracial rape experienced by Native women. Deer explains:

As a baseline, the vast majority of rapes in the United States are intraracial, meaning that victims are usually attacked by persons of their own race. The only exception to this general rule is AI/AN [American Indian/Alaska Native] women, who report that the majority of assailants are non-Native. The original 1999 Bureau of Justice Statistics report concluded that about nine in ten American Indian victims of rape or sexual assault had white or black assailants. Another

³⁴ Although Erdrich’s novel is not concerned with marital rape specifically, the facilitation of this form of rape by the law plays a significant role in the perpetuation of rape culture. It is worth noting that marital rape became a crime in all 50 states in 1993, but state law created statutory loopholes to protect those accused of marital rape from prosecution in several states including Erdrich’s home state of Minnesota. Partially in response to a case taken by Jenny Teeson against her former husband which resulted in a 45-day sentence for an ‘invasion of privacy’ conviction rather than one of rape, the Minnesota statute was only repealed in May 2019; the law took effect in July 2019.

report indicated that over 70 percent of the assailants were white.
(*Beginning and End* 6)

This statistical outlier reveals a deep-seated racist influence on the position of Native women in American society which, Erdrich demonstrates, is not only facilitated and aggravated by legal weaknesses, but is in fact inscribed in law through jurisdictional conflicts. Lark commits the attack at the round house not only because the site is sacred to the Ojibwe, but because he knows that it will be virtually impossible for tribal authorities to investigate and successfully prosecute him for a major crime committed there. This is because three classes of land – tribal trust, or land held in trust for the tribe by the US government, state, and ‘fee’, meaning reservation land owned by an individual – converge at the round house, making it almost impossible to identify the appropriate investigating authority. Joe’s father, Antone Coutts, known as Bazil, is a tribal judge; yet justice eludes the family because of the jurisdictional web, or what Deer terms a “vacuum of justice,” within which the crime is committed (Deer, *Beginning and End* xiii). Feeling hopelessly failed by the legal system, Joe ultimately kills Lark. While he feels painfully ambivalent about the act in relation to justice, Joe feels that shooting Lark is the only way in which he can save his family from Lark’s constant threat.

Erdrich refers explicitly to several legal reforms since the late nineteenth century which created this vacuum. For example, Bazil says:

Take *Johnson v. McIntosh*. It’s 1823. The United States is forty-seven years old and the entire country is based on grabbing Indian land as quickly as possible in as many ways as can be humanly devised ... [Justice] Marshall vested absolute title to the land in the government and gave Indians nothing more than right of occupancy, a right that could be taken away at any time. Even to this day, his words are used to continue the dispossession of our lands. (*The Round House* 267)

Erdrich demonstrates here that settler colonialism, property-based law and the justice system function together in the deliberate and continued dispossession and genocide

of Indigenous peoples. Deer discusses four key legal developments leading to this situation in her seminal work *The Beginning and End of Rape: the Major Crimes Act, Public Law 280, the Indian Civil Rights Act and Oliphant v. Suquamish*. The 1885 Major Crimes Act “provides the federal government with criminal authority [over ‘major’ crimes] on many contemporary reservations, meaning that a rape survivor will navigate a federal criminal justice system if she reports the rape to law enforcement” (35). The result of this deeply flawed Act is that tribes and the government “share ‘concurrent’ jurisdiction” (Deer, *Beginning and End* 36). Yet the “federal government has largely controlled the development of contemporary tribal legal systems,” leaving tribal authorities largely unequipped to deal with major crimes (Deer, *Beginning and End* 37). On the other hand, “Until recently, there was no acknowledgement of this critical obligation of the federal criminal justice system, and the vast majority of rape cases in tribal communities were rarely adjudicated in federal criminal court” (Deer, *Beginning and End* 37). As Erdrich’s portrayal of Lark indicates, this legal loophole is widely known; Deer suggests that non-Native predators, especially – statistically – those who are white men, “may target Native women and girls precisely because they are perceived as marginalized and outside the protection of the American legal system” (*Beginning and End* 9). Amnesty International state that the neglect of reservations as “areas of effective lawlessness” actively “encourage[e] violence” against Indigenous women (Grenier and Locker 8).

For reservations affected by the termination-era Public Law 280, imposed unilaterally by the government in 1953, Deer explains, “criminal activity and violence fall under the authority of the state. However, many of the states have not responded with effective law enforcement” and tribal courts in these states have lost federal funding, leaving “many victims of crime without recourse in either the state or the

tribal system” (*Beginning and End* 38). Thus responsibility for the prosecution of serious crimes on reservations is shared by under-resourced tribal legal systems, under-resourced state authorities and the over-subscribed federal justice system.

An outcome of the 1968 Indian Civil Rights Act (ICRA) was “a limit on the punishment a tribal court can impose” (Deer, *Beginning and End* 40). Today, tribes may “sentence offenders to one year of incarceration, a five-thousand-dollar fine, or both – which still amounts to a misdemeanor under American law” (Deer, *Beginning and End* 40). This law has had severe consequences for the prosecution of sexual violence on reservations, as tribal courts are effectively prevented from presiding over serious crimes which warrant substantial sentences. As a result, “If the federal or state systems choose not to prosecute, the victim is left at the mercy of the perpetrator” (Deer, *Beginning and End* 41).

Finally, Deer discusses the 1978 Supreme Court decision *Oliphant v. Suquamish*. In *The Round House*, Bazil identifies this law as “the one I’d abolish right this minute if I had the power of a movie shaman ... Took from us the right to prosecute non-Indians who commit crimes on our land” (268). Based on the ICRA, Jasmine Owens explains, this judgement “stripped tribal courts of the right to try non-Native offenders who violate tribal or federal law in Indian Country” (508). In addition to an abject failure to protect Native people from sexual violence or to secure justice for survivors, this law reinforces the “vacuum of justice,” rendering the reservation permeable to predators and vulnerable to denials of tribal sovereignty (Deer, *Beginning and End* xiii). Erdrich’s novel is excoriating in its presentation of the consequences of the *Oliphant v. Suquamish* judgement.

Erdrich’s examination of the failure of the US political and legal systems to attain justice for Indigenous people calls attention to the unstable definition of justice

under settler colonial hegemony. The *Oxford English Dictionary* offers multiple definitions of justice. The primary meaning states that the word refers to the “administration of law or equity,” two clearly divergent concepts; the first is understood as a “rule of conduct imposed by authority,” while the second is presented as the “quality of being equal or fair” (‘Justice, n.’; ‘Law, n.1’; ‘Equity, n.’) Yet other definitions of justice include, “Punishment of an offender,” a “place or instrument of execution,” “due legal process,” and “Judicial authority or responsibility” held by a person or an institution (‘Justice, n.’). The western concept of justice therefore depends heavily on political influence on the law and the hierarchical authority of the nation state. By contrast, Indigenous discourse centres on ‘law’ rather than ‘justice.’ John Borrows presents Native American law not as a set of rules decreed and regulated by higher authority, but as teachings to be learned from elders, discussed and passed onto the next generation (39–40). Borrows’ title – “Drawing Out Law” – implies that Indigenous law is predicated on autonomous engagement, interpretation and group consensus to inform one’s own behaviour, as opposed to the didacticism of western law. Borrows points out that official law, in Canadian and American contexts, not only “facilitates” Aboriginal dispossession but also imposes legal differentiation and changes upon Native peoples, while remaining “tenuous” and changeable itself (51, 55). The differences between federal, state, Indian and tribal legal systems in addition to distinct systems of traditional Indigenous teachings further complicate the disparities between Native and non-Native understandings and applications of justice under settler colonialism.

Within Erdrich’s body of work, the attack on Geraldine is disturbing, but not unprecedented: both Fleur and June are raped in earlier texts. Remarking on the weak language used to shirk national responsibility for this crisis, Deer argues, “Using the

word *epidemic* to talk about violence in Indian country is to depoliticize rape ... Instead, rape is a fundamental result of colonialism, a history of violence reaching back centuries. An epidemic is a contagious disease; rape is a crime against humanity” (*Beginning and End* x). Erdrich’s sustained engagement with the intertwined histories of land dispossession, cultural oppression and sexual violence highlights this political significance, positioning settler colonial borders, most particularly around the reservation, as the vital context around Lark’s attack on Geraldine. As a result, the reservation is rendered what I term in this chapter ‘negated space’, in opposition to ‘place’. This dynamic reinforces the connection between survival and decolonial resistance, as expressed by Vizenor’s term *survivance*, and the subversive significance of Erdrich’s characters’ continual commitment to Indigenous sovereignty.

This chapter therefore explores the themes of jurisdiction and justice through Erdrich’s use of place and negated space in the novel. I begin by discussing Geraldine’s relationship to the reservation through her roles as a tribal enrolment officer and mother and her relationships to the family home and local hospital following the attack. I then examine Bazil’s overt struggles with jurisdiction and justice as a tribal judge through Erdrich’s presentation of his office, study and courtroom and an altercation with Lark in the reservation supermarket. Finally, I explore Joe’s developing sense of place and the ways in which this is shaped by Lark’s presence, progressing from a juvenile sense of security to a reassessment of places of personal and tribal significance, and his resulting insight into the reservation as a place of containment and erasure. I argue, however, that Erdrich continues to invoke decolonial resistance and Native *survivance* in this novel through her radical interrogation of the concept of justice.

“Territory ... infinitely permeable from the privileged outside but safely containing that which is already within”³⁵

Geraldine Coutts is an archetypal Erdrich mother. As a non-narrating protagonist, Geraldine mirrors Fleur and June, two other Ojibwe mothers who are subjected to sexual violence and whose voices are also absent from the narratives of *Tracks* and *Four Souls*, and *Love Medicine* and *The Bingo Palace* respectively. Thus Erdrich intimates in several interconnected texts that the travesty of non-Native men’s de facto freedom to commit sexual violence against Native women is an unrelenting, intergenerational crisis which targets not only individual women, but the very functioning of maternal identity and relationships as fundamental aspects of Native traditions, as discussed in Chapter 4.

Whereas Fleur and June are deeply solitary and often – in June’s case, permanently – absent from the reservation, Geraldine’s social position ostensibly sets her apart from the preceding mother figures. Upon becoming aware of Geraldine’s extended absence from the family home on a Sunday afternoon, Joe reflects, “A missing mother. A thing that didn’t happen to the son of a judge, even one who lived on a reservation” (*The Round House* 8). When juxtaposed with other incidences of sexual violence in Erdrich’s writing, it is clear that Joe’s complacency is ill-founded: not only is Geraldine vulnerable to attack as an Indigenous woman and mother, but her prominent social status and official position in fact heighten her vulnerability. Geraldine is targeted by Lark due to her position within the Ojibwe community; by attacking a Native woman who is an Ojibwe mother, sister and daughter, a figure of power and authority over tribal enrolment and the wife of a tribal judge, Lark strikes

³⁵ Owens, *Mixedblood Messages*, 27.

at the heart of the Little No Horse community and Ojibwe sovereignty on multiple levels.

Geraldine's professional role as a "tribal enrollment specialist" in the tribal offices recalls Nanapush's ability to inhabit and manipulate settler systems from within (*The Round House* 6). As "head of a department of one," Geraldine possesses considerable power over Ojibwe citizenship, history and, therefore, sovereignty (*The Round House* 6). Although ostensibly limited by the institutional parameters around Native identity and land rights set by the United States government, as discussed in Chapter 2, Geraldine's position allows her to work subversively, protecting Ojibwe voices, narratives and identity. Like Lulu, Geraldine's social role positions her as an Ojibwe matriarch; also like Lulu, her work makes her a target for settler oppression.

Joe describes Geraldine's work as if clandestine, suggesting that her job is politically sensitive and potentially dangerous, as borne out by Lark's attack:

My mother's job was to know everybody's secrets. The original census rolls taken in the area that became our reservation go back past 1879 and include a description of each family by tribe, often by clan, by occupation, by relationship, age, and original name in our language. Many people had adopted French or English names by that time, too, or had been baptized and received thereby the name of a Catholic saint. It was my mother's task to parse the ever more complicated branching and interbranching tangle of each bloodline. Through the generations, we have become an impenetrable undergrowth of names and liaisons. (*The Round House* 174)

Erdrich's outline of Geraldine's job exposes the arbitrariness of colonial standards of definitive, quantified Native ethnic identity. Joe invokes the longer, holistic temporality of Anishinaabe tradition by referring to "the area that became our reservation" and emphasising the historical scope of the census rolls, as well as the multiple facets of Ojibwe identity. The "interbranching tangle of each bloodline" calls attention to the intricacy and vitality of tribal relationships by connecting the idea of bloodlines with blood vessels, variant, interconnected and essential; intrinsically

connected with the land as well as the community, belying concepts like blood quantum. The word “interbranching” also links with Erdrich’s metaphor for the tribe, an “impenetrable undergrowth,” calling to mind the positively associated ideas of growth and nature, which do not respect artificial boundaries. Geraldine’s job, therefore, places her in a potentially subversive position at the intersection of Ojibwe society and an authoritative colonial system: as both mother and enrolment officer, she seeks to connect tribal members, uphold family ties and sustain the history and continuation of the tribe; as Carden puts it, “Geraldine facilitates the reknitting of clans” (103).

In order to perform this work, Geraldine must “know everyone’s secrets,” a necessarily intimate role, and convert this information into quantifiable and verifiable knowledge for colonial authorities. Joe tells us that Geraldine is scrupulous in her handling of information: “My mother kept her files locked in a safe. No one else knew the combination of the safe” (*The Round House* 175). The paradoxical nature of Geraldine’s role presents a security issue. The information to which she is privy need not be written down in Anishinaabe oral tradition. Because she is required to keep files, however, the secrets become a risk and, as it transpires, a weapon. Geraldine’s careful protection of Ojibwe enrollment documents recalls Nanapush’s premonition in *Tracks* that the Ojibwe would become “a tribe of file cabinets and triplicates, a tribe of single-space documents, directives, policy. A tribe of pressed trees” (*Tracks* 225). Yet Geraldine’s matriarchal authority over the files preserves Ojibwe autonomy in spite of bureaucratic colonial systems.

It is Geraldine’s knowledge of a secret relationship and ‘illegitimate’ child between the young Native woman Mayla Wolfskin and the governor of South Dakota Curtis Yeltow, whom Lark initially hopes to extort, which makes her a target. Mayla’s

disappearance and the governor and Lark's respective corrupt interests form the subplot of the novel. While Geraldine recovers in bed, having refused to disclose the details of the attack, Basil implies that he intends to meet Yeltow, mentioning that "he is trying to adopt a child" who "looks Indian" (*The Round House* 184-185). Having secured Geraldine's attention, Basil continues, "She is Lakota or Dakota or Nakota or anyway Sioux, as the governor says. But she could be any tribe. Also that her mother—... She has disappeared" (*The Round House* 185). Basil's account provokes a visceral response from Geraldine, "groping" her way out of bed with "a weird howl" to "retch" and "cr[y] out" (*The Round House* 185). Geraldine then reveals that she was raped and beaten in the vicinity of the round house; that Lark attempted to kill her but his failure provided her with a chance to escape; that Mayla had also been there, gagged and bound, with her baby. Geraldine states that Mayla had "begun the enrollment process for her child" whose father she had "listed," but she keeps Mayla's secret of the father's identity (*The Round House* 186). Geraldine had gone to the round house because Lark had secretly forced Mayla to call her and claim, "*My life depends on that file,*" in order to blackmail Yeltow (*The Round House* 188). Even after Geraldine tells Basil and Joe the details of the attack, she refuses to reveal the information in the file. Joe tells us, "She needed to know the baby was safe. [That] Mayla was safe" (*The Round House* 191). Geraldine's dedication to her job thus far exceeds her bureaucratic duties; her primary, deeply maternal concern is the personal safety of individual tribal members, especially Ojibwe girls and mothers, and by extension the collective safety of the Ojibwe.

Geraldine informs us that, during the assault, Lark boasts about his legal knowledge: "I won't get caught, he said. I've been boning up on law ... I know as much law as a judge. Know any judges? I have no fear. Things are the wrong way

around, he said. But here in this place I make things the right way around for me” (*The Round House* 189). Here Lark confirms that his use of the round house is a direct representation of what he would like to do to the Ojibwe reservation: he turns a sacred place into a place of entrapment, violence and exploitation. Moreover, he manipulates existing laws which should protect the Ojibwe in order to commit the crime without fear of conviction. Erdrich thus draws parallels between Indian removal, the ambivalence of both round house and reservation as places of spiritual importance and spaces of containment, and Lark’s abuse of legal loopholes. These parallels make it clear to the reader that rape and other forms of abuse are the founding features of settler colonial hegemony and continue to function as its supporting structure.

Geraldine manages to escape from Lark while he looks for dry matches by running to her car, retrieving the hidden spare key and locking herself inside to drive away. The car facilitates both Geraldine’s survivance and her intense withdrawal as a method of self-preservation, foreshadowing the negation of the family home as a meaningful place. When Bazil and Joe arrive home shortly after Geraldine, they find her unable to move from the car:

We walked up the dirt driveway. Alongside it in a strict row, Mom had planted the pansy seedlings she’d grown in paper milk cartons. She’d put them out early. The only flower that could stand a frost. As we came up the drive we saw that she was still in the car. Sitting in the driver’s seat before the black wall of the garage door. My father started running. I could see it too in the set of her body – something fixed, rigid, wrong. When he got to the car, he opened the driver’s side door. Her hands were clenched on the wheel and she was staring blindly ahead ...

I was just behind my father. Careful even then to step over the scalloped pansy leaves and buds. He put his hands on hers and carefully pried her fingers off the steering wheel. Cradling her elbows, he lifted her from the car and supported her as she shifted toward him, still bent in the shape of the car seat. (*The Round House* 9–10)

The juxtaposition of Bazil and Joe’s natural, “dirt”-centred physical mobility – walking, running, stepping and lifting – and Geraldine’s immobility, evoked by the

double-entendre of “still” as both adjective and temporal adverb, is striking. Geraldine is wholly contained and immobilised at the dead-end of “the black wall of the garage door.” Geraldine’s escape and return home by car recalls the interplay between home and mobility discussed in Chapter 3 and signifies that Lark’s attack has forced shifts in the ways in which Geraldine engages with her environment. Thus the experience of being raped fractures Geraldine’s relationships with her home, her family, the land and her sense of Ojibwe identity.

Geraldine’s immobility contrasts with her ‘jurisdiction’ as a mother, typically in control of the internal and external space of the home, signified by the flowers she has planted; they are arranged “in a strict row” which Bazil respects despite the emergency. The pansies can be read as an optimistic symbol; although contained in “paper milk cartons”, like Geraldine inside the car, the pansies are hardy enough to “stand a frost”; they retain the ability to survive and grow after the thaw. On the other hand, Erdrich’s description of Geraldine carries connotations of extreme freezing, indicating deep physical and psychological trauma: her posture is, “fixed, rigid, wrong”; she appears to be unseeing and unfeeling; lifted from the vehicle, she remains “bent in the shape of the car seat.” The severity of Geraldine’s frozenness emphasises the paradox of the delicate flower seedlings’ demanded resilience and highlights social expectations of Native women to simply endure extreme trauma. Amnesty International note that “Impunity for perpetrators and indifference towards survivors contribute to a climate where sexual violence is seen as normal and inescapable rather than criminal, and where women do not seek justice because they know they will be met with inaction” (Grenier and Locker 9). Thus the jurisdictional limitations on and around the reservation function to subjugate and further immobilise Indigenous women, echoing the social purpose of colonial borders. Not only does Lark’s attack

violate Geraldine's bodily autonomy, therefore, but it enacts colonial intrusion upon Ojibwe families and homes, fulfilling the ultimate settler goal of rupturing traditional Indigenous relationships with land.

Erdrich demonstrates the social conditions surrounding the attack through Geraldine's treatment at hospital, in the nearby town of Hoopdance. Like the reservation, the hospital is exposed as embordered space; as "territory" (L. Owens, *Mixedblood Messages* 26). When Joe arrives at the waiting room, a pregnant patient asks him:

Don't you Indians have your own hospital over there? Aren't you building a new one?

The emergency room's under construction, I told her.

Still, she said.

Still what? I made my voice grating and sarcastic. I was never like so many Indian boys, who'd look down quiet in anger and say nothing. My mother taught me different. (*The Round House* 11–12)

In this exchange, Erdrich once again plays on the word "still." The woman comments on the fact that the tribal hospital's emergency room is 'still' under construction, suggesting a typically slow government project, and suggests that the Ojibwe should nonetheless be treated at their "own hospital over there". Joe's challenging of the woman's pointedly ambiguous language demonstrates his keen awareness of racist attitudes. The woman others Joe and his family by referring to them as "you Indians," simultaneously collapsing the humanity of individual Ojibwe members and reducing the tribe to thirteen-year-old Joe as its sole representative – "aren't *you* building a new one?" (emphasis mine). She situates the hospital as vaguely "over there", without reference to the reservation as a legitimate area under Ojibwe sovereignty, instead marginalising the tribe spatially as well as socially. Her objection to Joe's mother's presence in the hospital illustrates the reservation's purpose of containment and erasure from a settler colonial perspective and reinforces territorial boundaries.

Joe's mobility within the hospital is severely limited, reflecting the pressure of localised colonial territorial boundaries. The spatial confines of the waiting room result in a grotesque invasion of privacy: the woman speculates aloud, "Looked like that poor woman had a miscarriage or maybe – her voice went sly – a rape" (*The Round House* 12). The woman's words re-enact the violation Geraldine endures by signalling to Joe that neither he nor his mother is entitled to privacy in this off-reservation environment. Moreover, the woman's comments imply a popular callous awareness of the acute problem of sexual violence against Native women in American society. Thus Erdrich draws a parallel between inequitable access to public space and basic social facilities like hospitals, sexual violence against Native women and colonial territorial borders.

Joe is unable to ignore the woman's words, and they are all the more devastating given his young age:

Those two words stabbed my thoughts, as she had meant them to do. Miscarriage. A word I didn't altogether understand but knew had to do with babies. Which I knew were impossible. My mother had told me, six years before, when I'd pestered her for a brother, that the doctor had made sure that after me she could not get pregnant. It just could not happen. So that left the other word. (*The Round House* 13)

Erdrich's use of the word "stabbed" highlights the emotional violence of Joe's trauma and places the family's suffering within a centuries-long sequence of settler colonial violence against Native peoples. By emphasising the word "miscarriage," Erdrich signals the longer, painful history of injustice in the medical system suffered by Native American women and connects it with cycles of colonial violence and trauma. Joe's memory of his mother's certainty that "the doctor had *made sure* after me that she could not get pregnant," conferring agency onto the doctor rather than his mother, suggests that Geraldine was subjected to forced sterilisation (emphasis mine). The history of forced sterilisation of Indigenous women in the United States represents the

institutionalised intrusion of colonial power upon bodily autonomy and tribal sovereignty. Moreover, Joe's difficulty in interpreting and naming the acts of which his mother has been made a victim connects Geraldine's trauma, her family's shared trauma and the disempowering force of settler colonial hegemony. In order to try to comprehend his mother's condition, Joe is forced to choose between words and concepts he does not fully understand, echoing the assimilatory force and cultural violence of pervasive colonial narratives as well as the potentially (re-) traumatising effects of trying to give words to horrific acts or, as Toni Morrison writes, the "unspeakable unspoken"; "a terrible story about things one would rather not know anything about" ('Unspeakable Things Unspoken' 176; 183).

Prior to the attack, Joe and Bazil rely on Geraldine for physical and emotional nourishment and care; she is indispensable to the functioning of the house as a family home. While she is in hospital, therefore, Joe has the impression that "her absence stopped time" (*The Round House* 6). When Geraldine is discharged from hospital and immediately withdraws to her bedroom, therefore, the house loses its vitality. Joe reflects:

The air seemed hollow in the house, stale, strangely flat. I realized that this was because in the days since we'd found my mother sitting in the driveway, nobody had baked, fried, cooked, or in any way prepared food ... I called for my mother softly, and walked halfway up the stairs until I could see that the door to my parents' bedroom was shut. I eased back down the stairs into the kitchen. (*The Round House* 27)

Joe is literally distanced from Geraldine by the bedroom door and the stairs, and he no longer receives motherly comfort and care through meals. This interruption of the routine happenings of the family home is symbolised by a stopped clock: "Everything had stopped. Even the clock's ticking. My father had unplugged it when we came home from the hospital the second night. I want a new clock, he'd said. I stood there looking at the old clock, whose hands were meaninglessly stopped at 11:22" (*The*

Round House 28). Incapable of resuming life as usual in the wake of the attack, Joe can only gaze longingly at the tantalisingly recent past in the knowledge that his familial relationships have been altered irrevocably, a splitting denoted by the numbers displayed on the clock, 11.22.

The Coutts' stopped clock recalls the stopped clocks of Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, similarly indicative of an irrevocable shift in a family's dynamics caused by hostile social conditions. In McCarthy's text, the stopped clocks read "1:17" (45). The time draws a parallel between the onset of apocalyptic environmental and social developments, the protagonist's devotion to his son as a Christ-like figure and Revelation 1.17: "When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, 'Fear not, I am the first and the last'". However, the verse break enforces an unnatural caesural pause, forging a rupture between the first part of Jesus's sentence and the remainder, in which he proclaims his resurrection: "and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades" (Rev. 1.18). McCarthy's invocation of only the part of the sentence which belongs to Revelation 1.17 challenges the reader to consider whether the Christ-like imagery associated with the son is empty, and whether the protagonist's devotion to his survival is futile. Joe immediately reads his family's clock's stopped time of 11.22 as "meaningless." Indeed, Revelation Chapter 11 ends at verse 19, as heaven is opened and war brews. The inherent meaninglessness of the stopped clock's reading and Bazil's intention to buy a new clock illustrate the father and son's instinctive wish to make sense of their traumatic experience by appealing to an authoritative belief system, not that of Christianity but that of justice, as well as the system's inherent incapacity to offer comfort.

Upon Geraldine's return from hospital, the family initially attempts to regain a sense of normality in what Joe calls a "false interlude" (*The Round House* 49). The illusion is shattered when Bazil accidentally frightens Geraldine by entering the kitchen without her hearing. Erdrich's depiction of the ensuing scene illustrates Geraldine's emotional withdrawal spatially: she stands "backed up to the sink"; Bazil remains "a few feet before her with his hands out, vainly groping in air the shape of her, as if to hold her without holding her"; the couple are separated by a "smashed and oozing casserole" on the kitchen floor (*The Round House* 51). Geraldine is positioned at the limits of the kitchen, decentred from her familial position, her habitual space vacant and negated. Geraldine's reaction emphasises the degree to which she feels vulnerable to Lark; it demonstrates the profound effects of the reservation's porous borders and potential for colonialist aggression to permeate the home as well as the reservation. The displacement of Geraldine from her role in the family and home thus extends the pattern of sexual violence and destruction of the family home Erdrich establishes in earlier novels, from Fleur's loss of the Pillager lands and her rape at the hands of the Argus men to the sexual abuse of June as a child and her consequent alienation from the Lazarre home and, ultimately, the reservation. In short, the violation of Ojibwe land and sovereignty plays out in the violation of the home, the family and Ojibwe women's bodies.

Geraldine's shock causes her to return to her bedroom in a deeper withdrawal from her family. The effect is that Geraldine's bedroom begins to function as an exclusion zone, in which Joe and Bazil feel unwelcome and uncomfortable. Bazil attempts to create an illusion of normality, connecting Geraldine's withdrawal to the bedroom with natural cycles in the environment to imply that time will allow her to recover from the trauma of the attack; Joe tells us, "When the warm rain falls in June,

said my father, and the lilacs burst open. Then she will come downstairs” (*The Round House* 99). Basil’s optimism proves unfounded, however, and Geraldine’s reclusion extends into the summer months. Her isolation leads Basil to sleep in Geraldine’s sewing room. Basil’s use of the “cold little room” expresses a new, painful distance between him and Geraldine (*The Round House* 92). The image of the “narrow daybed” evokes the newly strict, tense spatial orientation of the house after the attack, echoing the substantiality the borders between tribal trust, state and fee land suddenly seem to possess (*The Round House* 92).

Joe’s confusion over the distance between his parents betrays his limited comprehension of his mother’s trauma as well as flawed assumptions about healing. He tries to relate Geraldine’s withdrawal to medical recovery; he notes that, “Even when one of my parents had the flu or a cold, they slept in the same bed. They never sought protection from each other’s illnesses” (*The Round House* 92). Joe naïvely expects Geraldine to undergo a clear, progressive and definitive recovery, as if from an illness; his expectations echo the demand for hardiness of Geraldine’s pansies. This emphasis on the responsibility and resilience required of Native American women following sexual assault is perpetuated through (otherwise valid and necessary) messages like those in the NAWHERC *ABC Handbook*, such as, “Get emergency contraceptive,” “Call the clinic or emergency room nearest you – Make sure they have emergency contraceptive in stock, and check what hours they are open!” and “The pharmacy can be a very long way away, so you’ll have to find someone with a car who can take you. Gas is expensive, so you’ll need money for that” (Bonner 6, 10, 16). Moreover, Joe’s phrase, “protection from each other’s illnesses” suggests a degree of contagion, whereby Basil needs to be protected from Geraldine while she heals. This equation of post-sexual assault trauma with illness both diminishes the

seriousness of the trauma and conveys an expectation that Geraldine simply must recover in time, illustrating the relative normality accorded to sexual violence against Indigenous women. The weight of this expectation compounds with the hostility with which Geraldine is regarded at the hospital in Hoopdance and Lark's virulent misogyny to maintain the colonial hierarchy which subjugates Native American women.

The severity of Geraldine's trauma is shared by the house, highlighting a connection between colonial abuses of land and of Indigenous peoples. Joe recalls, "It had now been over a week since she had walked up those stairs, and the bedroom had taken on a fusty odor. The air was heavy with her breath, as if she'd sucked out the oxygen" (*The Round House* 101). The house has taken on Geraldine's pain during her recovery. Moreover, the deepening imbalance within the family home is reflected in the land itself. Erdrich indicates by the father and son's failure to revive Geraldine's plants that the cyclical processes of growth and renewal have been stunted; Joe tells us, "Dad had dumped the seedlings and dirt in the back and burned the bottoms of the milk cartons with the trash, destroying signs of our neglect. Not that she noticed" (*The Round House* 99). Erdrich here reminds us of the symbiosis between the land and all forms of life in Anishinaabe tradition, and thereby emphasises the communal and environmental violation associated with such an attack in the context of Ojibwe culture. Erdrich thus suggests that the joint traumas of the violent rape and the invasive subsequent investigation induce profound ruptures of natural cycles and relationships, intensifying the effects of arbitrarily erected borders and imposed social hierarchies.

The fracturing of familial and spatial relationships which ensues from the assault and Geraldine's reclusion extends to Joe and Basil's paternal relationship. Joe asks his father:

What about Mayla Wolfskin, Dad? Is she alive?

That's the question.

What do you think?

I think not, he said softly, looking down at the floor.

I looked down at the floor, too, at the swirls of cream in the gray of the linoleum. And the darker gray and the small black spots a vertigo surprise once you noticed. I perused that floor, memorizing the randomness. (*The Round House* 191)

Here Erdrich highlights the spatial impact of the incident on several levels. Bazil and Joe are isolated from Geraldine and from each other; unable to maintain eye contact, they both look at the floor. Their disconnection and focus on the dark floor reinforce Bazil's doubt to foreshadow the revelation that Lark has indeed killed Mayla and that her body will never be recovered, although her baby is found safe and well. Joe's reference to "a vertigo surprise" and his impulse to gaze at the floor, "memorizing the randomness," express the severity of the family's disorientation. Erdrich's reference to linoleum recalls the material's role in *Four Souls*, when Margaret first implemented division from the land. The "swirls of cream" in the grey linoleum, simultaneously evoking movement and stasis, echo the stopped clock reading 11.22, reinforcing the rupture in Geraldine's senses of place and identity.

Moreover, the apparent "randomness" of the "swirls of cream" in the floor chimes with what Joe sees as the "meaningless" time of 11.22 not only to evoke disorientation, but also to remind us that the assault is neither random nor meaningless. Through the call-back to Margaret's cabin and the loss of Nanapush and Fleur's allotments, Erdrich reminds us that linoleum is a mass-produced item, a repeated image on industrialised material. Just as distance permits us to detect patterns in materials like linoleum, the repetition of the rape of Ojibwe women across Erdrich's novels indicates that the attack upon Geraldine is inextricable from broader histories and systems of settler colonialism.

Eventually, Geraldine does return to the family home; however, her return signifies not a complete healing but a new stage of resistance. As Carden points out, “It is only when Geraldine realizes that Mayla Wolfskin’s infant daughter once again needs her protection ... [that the] ‘unkillable mother’ rouses from her exile and reclaims her familial and tribal roles” (100). Geraldine’s reclamation of her matriarchal role requires a reclamation of place, of both her home and of the reservation, indicating a concurrent assertion of bodily autonomy. Geraldine’s return to her familial and social environments is therefore a refutation of the colonial supremacy personified by Lark and a statement of personal and communal survivance; a “new emergence” (L. Simpson, *Dancing* 51).

“Fences, ditches, walls, hedges, razor wire” ³⁶

As a tribal judge, Bazil enjoys considerable power within the Ojibwe community and broader US society. While Geraldine is treated in hospital, Bazil uses his position to co-ordinate the initial investigative procedures as efficiently as possible; Joe tells us, “My father had insisted that they each take a statement from my mother because it wasn’t clear where the crime had been committed – on state or tribal land – or who had committed it – an Indian or a non-Indian” (*The Round House* 16). Bazil’s social privilege allows him to coordinate as rigorous a response to the crime as possible, exerting his influence across jurisdictional boundaries. Yet the case ultimately goes unsolved from a legal perspective; the jurisdictional impasse precludes justice. Tereza M. Szeghi analyses what she terms the novel’s “jurisdictional tangle” as a “critique of the ways reservation boundaries are drawn, understood, and enforced. The borders

³⁶ Linebaugh, *Stop, Thief!*, 2.

surrounding reservations, as Erdrich indicates, are both under- and overdetermined” (408). Under-determination of these borders allows for high rates of crime to continue unabated on reservations, while their concurrent legal overdetermination prevents tribal authorities from prosecuting non-Native criminals, as Deer’s statistics attest. Bazil’s relationship to space and place illustrates the workings and effects of the simultaneous, selective under- and overdetermination of reservation borders.

Joe explains with pride that Bazil, highly educated and relatively privileged among residents of the reservation, can access national institutions that most people, especially Native people, can’t. Joe admires “the diplomas on [Bazil’s] wall – University of North Dakota, University of Minnesota Law School – and the plaques recognizing his service in law organizations. He had a list of places he was admitted to practice that went all the way up to the U.S. Supreme Court. I was proud of that” (*The Round House* 50). Bazil’s right of admission to every level of the US legal system is indicative of enormous individual achievement and significant progress in Indian law. However, these multiple, distinct institutions also indicate layers of spatialised exclusivity. Like Geraldine, Bazil’s work is shaped by the limitations of his office, as prescribed by the US government. As Carden notes, Bazil operates within “a legal structure that has imposed matters of land title as the defining standard of justice, stranding Native peoples in a labyrinth of reservation-related laws, policies, court cases, and jurisdictional claims that maintain settler domination” (104). Carden’s use of the word “stranding” is an evocative description of what Deer terms the legal “vacuum of justice” on the reservation (*Beginning and End* xiii). The relationship between the reservation and the US government is dictated by legally enshrined settler colonial conceptions of land as the framework around Native sovereignty. In this sense, colonial borders limit and define tribal justice. Indeed, Carden writes that, in

The Round House, “As tribal judge, Joe’s father negotiates a legal system that actively undermines Native sovereignty” (104). Although Bazil’s work is ostensibly committed to Ojibwe sovereignty, then, in reality it functions as part of the “slow violence” of settler colonialism (Nixon 3).

Like Nanapush’s disdain for colonial authority, Bazil demonstrates ambivalence towards his profession when he explains harmful legal judgements to Joe. His criticism of the justice system and the legal failure which underpins the narrative force us to question whether these are examples of what Audre Lorde terms “master’s tools”, and whether justice is achievable in a tribal context under colonial hegemony (160). Simpson argues that a more effective approach is to disregard the ‘master’s house,’ altogether, and to focus instead on Indigenous sovereignty in a productive manner, rather than on the destruction of colonialism. She writes, “I am very concerned with how we (re)build our own house, or our own houses. I have spent enough time taking down the master’s house, and now I want most of my energy to go into visioning and building our new house” (L. Simpson, *Dancing* 32). Erdrich’s depiction of Bazil’s limited power within the American legal system illustrates the degree to which the houses of both ‘master’ and ‘servant’ are intertwined in settler colonial contexts.

At the beginning of *The Round House*, Erdrich conveys Joe’s idealistic adoration of his father through Bazil’s study and office. Reflecting on his summer days at home prior to Geraldine’s attack, Joe tells us he “sneaked inside, and slipped into my father’s study. I took out the law book my father called *The Bible*. Felix S. Cohen’s *Handbook of Federal Indian Law*. It had been given to my father by his father; the rust-red binding was scraped, the long spine cracked, and every page bore handwritten comments” (*The Round House* 4). Joe tries to absorb the knowledge that

informs Basil's legal practice from a young age; he feels that, "by reading [Basil's] law book I had inserted myself into his world" (*The Round House* 5). Erdrich here conveys in spatial terms that, initially, Joe is deeply invested in Basil's ability to serve justice. However, Joe's childlike sneaking, his idolisation of the book and of his father as well as the fantastical sense of entering Basil's "world" lend his memory a fanciful tone, suggesting that Joe's belief in Basil's power is naïve.

When the father and son begin their own investigation into the attack, they visit Basil's office to retrieve a selection of case files. "We're taking them home, said my father. This was a thing he did not do. His study at home was his retreat from all that went on in tribal court. He was proud of leaving the week's turmoil where it belonged. But today, we loaded the files into the backseat" (*The Round House* 51). Basil's attempt to divide his work and home lives is indicative of dissatisfaction in his legal practice. Whereas his files stay at his office, his inherited, well-used copy of Cohen's *Handbook* is kept on the bookshelf in his study. Erdrich thus suggests that there are discrepancies between the form of justice Basil can exercise in the courtroom and the principles of Indian law he has learned from his father. Erdrich emphasises the constrictions which shape Basil's work through his fountain pen and handwriting, which Joe tells us is "meticulous, almost Victorian, that spidery style of another age" (*The Round House* 63). Like Nanapush a century earlier, Basil has been educated in a Christian, Eurocentric system. The statement, "of another age," both reflects the long history upon which Indian law is based and intimates that at least elements of the law, and the way in which Basil is forced to practise it, are unfit for purpose in contemporary society, as Geraldine's case proves. The way in which Basil is forced to practise law, and therefore the type of justice he is able to serve, are thus defined and regulated by colonial authority.

Bazil has successfully practised law for decolonial purposes in the past, however. He discusses a case in which George and Grace Lark, the deceased parents of Linden Lark, were successfully sued by tribal members for overcharging elderly Ojibwe customers at their supermarket, located on fee land surrounded by tribal trust land: “I was able in that case to claim limited jurisdiction over a non-Indian-owned business, said my father. The case held up on appeal. There was some pride in his voice” (*The Round House* 59). Bazil’s pride emanates from the fact that he has managed to serve tribal justice in spite of *Oliphant v. Suquamish*. Bazil’s achievement fails to impress his son, however; Joe is forced to contend with the realisation that the principles and goals of Bazil’s legal practice are enormous, but the stakes of each case are low and progress is infinitesimally slow. Even small increments of progress like that achieved by Bazil in this case can be undone by unfavourable appeals or changes in the law. Erdrich demonstrates that, in response to the slow violence of colonialism, Native peoples work towards a painfully slow justice and plot a slow journey towards sovereignty.

In Geraldine’s case, Lark’s ability to manipulate the limitations of jurisdiction with virtual impunity places the investigation in a bind. Frustrated by the failing investigation, Joe challenges the value of Bazil’s work. Bazil tries to explain his purpose to Joe by building a sculpture out of cutlery and utensils on top of a rotting dish he takes from the fridge. Joe tells us, “with cool absorption he laid a large carving knife carefully on top of the frozen casserole and all around it proceeded to stack one fork, another fork, one on the next, adding a spoon here, a butter knife, a ladle, a spatula, until he had a jumble somehow organized into a weird sculpture” (*The Round House* 266). On top of the cutlery, Bazil “precariously” places “the other four butcher knives my mother always kept keen. They were good knives”; Bazil tells Joe, “That’s

Indian Law” (*The Round House* 266). Basil’s sculpture advocates for the potential power of Indian law, even within the colonial legal structure: the butcher knives, which Geraldine takes care to keep “keen,” are “good knives,” signalling that Basil’s practice has value. Basil believes in using the tools available for the task at hand, be they the ‘master’s’ tools or otherwise; yet he takes account of the implications of the relevant setting and foundations in his work. Erdrich thus suggests that sovereignty begins and ends with the intensely local, with the protection and reclamation of familial and tribal security and land. Indeed, by performing this demonstration in the kitchen using a dish, Basil reclaims the space negated earlier by Geraldine’s terror of Lark. This reclamation of the traditionally feminine space of the kitchen, central to several of Erdrich’s novels, highlights the importance of the matriarchal role to Ojibwe sovereignty, and Basil’s commitment to the interrelated protection of both Indigenous women and tribal sovereignty.

However, Erdrich clarifies that Basil is forced to be pragmatic in his work and that Indian law serves only a particular type of justice. Trying to help his son understand his meaning, Basil prompts Joe to explain the significance of the mouldy food at the base; Joe responds, “Uh, rotten decisions?” (*The Round House* 267). Basil replies, “You’ve been into my dad’s old Cohen *Handbook*. You’ll be a lawyer if you don’t go to jail first” (*The Round House* 267). Basil’s response bears greater significance than the simple witticisms about lawyerly dishonesty it resembles. Here Basil summarises Joe’s personal quandary as well as the paradox of tribal jurisdiction on the reservation: due to the weaknesses and discrimination inherent in the legal system, the pursuit of justice necessitates the transgression of certain boundaries. In this case the boundaries are those of Basil’s office, but eventually Joe performs the ultimate transgression by killing Lark in an entirely illegal fashion. Basil’s quip

foreshadows the complex, self-sacrificing but equitable form of justice to which Joe resorts, and which Bazil and the Ojibwe community endorse. Joe's situation is a microcosm of the difficulties involved in pursuing justice on the reservation: the Ojibwe are forced to choose between various, conflicting concepts of justice and methods for administering it, if they are not denied justice completely.

Similarly, referring to the banal cases Joe finds so disappointing, Bazil explains the difficult and occasionally subversive nature of his job:

These are the decisions that I and many other tribal judges try to make. Solid decisions with no scattershot opinions attached. Everything we do, no matter how trivial, must be crafted keenly. We are trying to build a solid base here for our sovereignty. We try to press against the boundaries of what we are allowed, walk a step past the edge ... *We want the right to prosecute criminals of all races on all lands within our original boundaries.* Which is why I try to run a tight courtroom, Joe. What I am doing now is for the future, though it may seem small, or trivial, or boring, to you. (*The Round House* 268–269)

Bazil's use of construction metaphors to explain his purpose to Joe forms an inverse image of the compulsive land development in the frontier era and early twentieth century explored in *Four Souls*. Bazil's concern with building "a solid base here for our sovereignty" heralds a reclamation of the negated space of the reservation and an ongoing attempt to revitalise traditional Anishinaabe relationships with the land. Bazil also implies that an Indigenous-centred reorientation of boundaries is necessary to this task. By pushing "against the boundaries of what we are allowed," Bazil challenges what Szeghi terms the "overdetermined" borders which limit tribal jurisdiction (Szeghi 408). Rather than choosing between dismantling the master's house with the master's tools or rebuilding a new house, Bazil, like Nanapush, charts an in-between course, setting skills, knowledge and power derived from colonial systems to the overarching task of Ojibwe sovereignty. Bazil reflects the *mestiza* capacity to subsume and harness; as Anzaldúa writes, "The possibilities are numerous once we decide to

act and not react ... The work of *mestiza* consciousness is to break down the subject-object duality that keeps her a prisoner and to show in the flesh and through the images in her work how duality is transcended” (*Borderlands/La Frontera* 101-102). In Owens’s terminology, then, Bazil’s navigation of colonial limits contributes to the revision of the ‘frontier’.

Yet Lark’s actions following the attack exemplify what Szeghi terms the ‘under-determination’ of reservation borders. Because the jurisdictional negative space of the reservation precludes Lark’s apprehension, he continues to live freely and traverse the reservation at will. Jasmine Owens explains that the mobility granted by the porosity of tribal borders presents Indigenous victims and authorities with further difficulties beyond investigation: “Perpetrators sometimes escape prosecution by fleeing to a different jurisdiction. Because jurisdictions are rigidly separated into state, federal, or tribal land, perpetrators can easily cross borders to escape prosecution” (512). With such limited legal recourse and unenforceable tribal boundaries, the Coutts family and the Ojibwe tribe suffer an effectively omnipresent threat.

Erdrich illustrates the extreme degree to which Lark is able and willing to violate tribal sovereignty in an incident set in the tribal supermarket. The supermarket is located within reservation boundaries, so that Lark’s appearance there is indicative of his literal crossing of the reservation border. Joe explains that the reservation supermarket is an important social facility for the tribe: “For real food our people had traveled off reservation twenty miles or more to put our money in the pockets of store clerks who watched us with suspicion and took our money with contempt. But with our own grocery now, run by our own tribal members and hiring our own people to bag and stock, we had something special” (*The Round House* 283). The father and son’s unexpected encounter with Lark in the supermarket is a further illustration of

the privilege and attendant mobility Lark's whiteness and wealth grant him. His use of the supermarket is ostentatiously invasive, recalling the melodramatic descent of the FBI upon the Senior Citizens' residence to interrogate and arrest Lulu in *The Bingo Palace*.

When Joe and Bazil recognise Lark inside the supermarket, they attack him immediately. Bazil's rage suggests that the location heightens his sense of violation: in his office, study or courtroom, Bazil is meticulously and performatively measured, whereas in the supermarket he becomes instinctively aggressive. His emotional response to the sight of Lark in the supermarket reveals the falsity of the contrived division between emotional impulses and strictly objective, logical judgement in the legal sphere. The exposure of this false sense of separation between emotion and reason, foundational to a system of justice which severely disadvantages Indigenous peoples, also highlights the need for Native tradition-based, balanced legal systems in reservation environments.

Lark's reaction to the attack is chilling. Joe remembers, "Lark seemed to be smiling. If you can smile while being choked and can-beaten, he was doing it. Like he was excited by our attack" (*The Round House* 285). The pleasure Lark takes in Joe and Bazil's violence demonstrates that the incident has been pre-empted; he succeeds in causing further distress to the Coutts family. Joe tells us, "That was when my father had his first heart attack – it turned out to be a small one. Not even a medium one. Just a small one. But it was a heart attack" (*The Round House* 286). Even Bazil's heart attack is subject to arbitrary quantification. However, Bazil's suffering foreshadows Joe's terror and torment when he decides to kill Lark, and both father and son's respective suffering illustrates the "Ripple Effects of Trauma" stemming from Lark's attack on Geraldine (Deer, *Beginning and End* 10).

Lark's careful planning draws attention to his motivations. During the attack on Geraldine, he proclaims, "I suppose I am one of those people who just hates Indians generally and especially for they were at odds with my folks way back", referring to the tribe's successful case against his deceased parents for their discrimination against Ojibwe customers (*The Round House* 188). The rightful prosecution of the Larks marks progress in Ojibwe sovereignty, which enrages Lark. The outcome of the case contrasts dramatically with the miscarriage of justice in *The Plague of Doves*, in which Ojibwe tribal members are lynched by local white men as scapegoats for a murder; referring to the fact that neither the (white) original murderer nor any member of the mob was ever brought to justice, Bazil points out to Joe, "Lark's great-uncle was in the lynching party. Thus, I think, the contempt" (*The Round House* 247). Thus Lark's violence is directly related to intergenerational white supremacy and a desire to subjugate the Ojibwe under the legal protection of a colonialist justice system.

Highlighting the extent of Lark's white privilege and access to power and authority, Bazil informs us that Lark previously "got into politics for a while" and "became unpleasantly aware of the jurisdiction issues on and surrounding the reservation" (*The Round House* 62). Lark's views were made clear when he "wrote a crank letter to the *Fargo Forum*" containing what Bazil terms "the usual – let's dissolve reservations; he used that old redneck line, 'We beat them fair and square'" (*The Round House* 62). Lark's use of the phrase "fair and square" is deeply ironic. The inherent unfairness of the reservation system and the extreme discrimination inherent to the violent histories to which Lark refers are abundantly evident. The word "square" evokes arbitrary, geometric borders, as well as restrictions upon the pursuit of justice in reservation contexts. Erdrich thus suggests that the reservation and, indeed, Ojibwe

sovereignty are poorly served by fragile legal arrangements which are habitually, flagrantly defied with devastating consequences.

Joe and Bazil debate justice at various points in the novel. Joe expresses a simplistic but pure, emotional conception of justice which Bazil, as a judge and as a wounded, worried husband and father, struggles with profoundly. Bazil admits, “I wish I could hang him. Believe me. I imagine myself the hanging judge in an old western; I’d happily deliver the sentence. But beyond playing cowboy in my thoughts, there is traditional Anishinaabe justice. We would have sat down to decide his fate. Our present system though...” (*The Round House* 230). Here Bazil contemplates radically different forms of justice. The figure of “the hanging judge in an old western” implies a change of roles and an abdication of responsibility for due process. The phrase “the hanging judge” insinuates that hanging is a foregone conclusion. It also calls to mind the travesty recounted in *The Plague of Doves*, in which the hanging is an affront to any brand of justice. To play the “hanging judge” would therefore align Bazil with Lark, who favours Posse Comitatus (*The Round House* 62). Bazil raises “traditional Anishinaabe justice” as an alternative, in which the Ojibwe community would settle on an appropriate punishment by consensus. Traditional Ojibwe law is so at odds with US federal and state law, however, that traditional law conflicts with his life’s work as a judge. Bazil is left with the “present system” which is manifestly inadequate and intrinsically unjust. Ultimately, Joe takes the matter into his own hands and the debate over tribal and colonial Euro-American forms of justice is inconclusive.

After Joe kills Lark, Bazil continues to wrestle with the question of justice. He tells Joe:

Any judge knows there are many kinds of justice – for instance, ideal justice as opposed to the best-we-can-do justice, which is what we end up with in making so many of our decisions. It was no lynching. There was no question of his guilt ... Lark’s killing is a wrong thing which

serves an ideal justice. It settles a legal enigma. It threads that unfair maze of land title law by which Lark could not be prosecuted. His death was the exit. (*The Round House* 357)

Bazil's view is that Lark's killing serves "an ideal justice" in an abstract sense, necessitated precisely because of the "unfair maze of land title law". His death brings an end to a period of extreme danger and protects Geraldine from a violent aggressor. Unlike the example of "the hanging judge" in the "old western," and unlike the killings in *The Plague of Doves*, Bazil is satisfied that Lark's death is "no lynching." Yet, Bazil explains, "The question of who killed Lark must be asked. There was no justice for your mother, his victim, or for Mayla, and yet justice exists" (*The Round House* 357). Lark's death provides "the exit" from a crisis, but it is still "a wrong thing" which does not contribute to Ojibwe sovereignty, and therefore cannot prevent similar attacks and failed investigations in the future. Moreover, the word "maze" articulates the uncertainty that this type of justice engenders. Joe argues that justice has been "Unevenly applied, Dad. But he got what he deserved" (*The Round House* 357). The unfortunate outcome of this form of justice is that it changes nothing in terms of law and social hierarchy. Lark is prevented from raping or murdering again, but there is no impediment to any other potential perpetrator.

Bazil remains dissatisfied with this last-resort form of justice and continues to seek a way of rebalancing his family and the reservation community. He tells Joe:

That person who killed Lark will live with the human consequences of having taken a life. As I did not kill Lark, but wanted to, I must at least protect the person who took on that task. And I would, even to the extent of attempting to argue a legal precedent.

What?

Traditional precedent. It could be argued that Lark met the definition of a wiindigoo, and that with no other recourse, his killing fulfilled the requirements of a very old law. (*The Round House* 358)

Bazil's reference to wiindigoo law as a legal precedent illustrates his respect for and commitment to the concept of justice and tribal sovereignty. Bazil desires to protect

not only Joe and Geraldine but the tribe as a whole, as well as to strengthen Indian law and Ojibwe sovereignty more broadly. Julie Tharp reminds us that Bazil is primarily concerned with the future, validating this slow justice; she points out that, “By choosing Joe as narrator, Erdrich gestures to that future. She asks the reader to think generationally, not just in the sense that these laws affect generations of people but also that it may take generations to change them” (31). Although Lark is rightfully killed and the family succeed in protecting each other to a great extent, Erdrich highlights the impact of this narrow, dissatisfying and self-destructive form of justice by ending the novel in an emphatically mournful tone: “The sentence was to endure ... We passed over in a sweep of sorrow that would persist into our small forever. We just kept going” (*The Round House* 371).

“justice is relieved of responsibility” ³⁷

Central to *The Round House* is the impact of Lark’s attack on Joe’s senses of place and identity. The novel is narrated by Joe as an adult reflecting upon the summer of 1988 when he was a thirteen-year-old boy. The novel therefore falls, to an extent, into the *bildungsroman* genre. Accordingly, Joe’s sense of identity, his relationships and, above all, his sense of place are substantially altered by the end of the summer. Indeed, Joe comments that, during this summer, he learned, “to lead a life apart from my parents” (*The Round House* 95). The particular historical context of parent and child separation in the reservation environment renders Joe’s statement highly charged. Erdrich thus suggests that sexual violence against Native women and the attendant “Ripple Effects of Trauma” are part and parcel of the unabating settler colonial project

³⁷ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 10.

of “elimination”; Joe’s “life apart” is not the outcome of natural growth and maturation, but a traumatic result of one of many strategies to separate, limit, control and ultimately assimilate Native people into Euro-American society, expressed tellingly in spatial terms (Deer, *Beginning and End* 10; Wolfe 387). In this section, I examine Joe’s developing awareness of jurisdiction as an influence upon the reservation environment and of justice as a multiple, ambivalent concept through his relationships with the family home, the round house and the reservation golf course.

As a child, Joe’s sense of place is rooted largely in the outdoors surrounding the Coutts house, as he spends his days roaming freely with his friends. After the assault, Joe’s childhood mobility gradually reduces as his role in the family, and therefore the home, shifts. The novel opens with Joe’s memory of his activities on the day Geraldine is raped, prior to his realisation that she is missing. Joe clearly wishes to protect the family home, exhibiting confidence in his sense of place. Joe also conveys a comfortable, shared sense of purpose with his father as they work together to tidy up the exterior of the house. Joe recalls:

Small trees had attacked my parents’ house at the foundation. They were just seedlings with one or two rigid, healthy leaves. Nevertheless, the stalky shoots had managed to squeeze through knife cracks in the decorative brown shingles covering the cement blocks. They had grown into the unseen wall and it was difficult to pry them loose. My father wiped his palm across his forehead and damned their toughness. I was using a rusted old dandelion fork with a splintered handle; he wielded a long, slim iron fireplace poker that was probably doing more harm than good. As my father prodded away blindly at the places where he sensed roots might have penetrated, he was surely making convenient holes in the mortar for next year’s seedlings. (*The Round House* 3)

Erdrich imbues this passage with ambivalence. Although Joe and Bazil work diligently, they use inappropriate tools for the job, and Joe suspects that Bazil – poking “blindly” and damaging the mortar – is actually aggravating the problem. Erdrich conveys a sense that the pair are fighting a losing battle. Indeed, the slow degradation

of the Coutts house foreshadows the state of dereliction in which Joe finds the sacred round house later in the novel. While growth in nature is often presented positively, it can also have negative connotations; it's worth noting that, while writing *The Round House*, Erdrich was diagnosed with breast cancer, a disease which encapsulates negative potentialities of growth. Erdrich's portrayal of the saplings' attack on the house reflects the ever-advancing encroachment of settler colonial power upon tribal lands. Like Bazil's use of unsatisfactory laws, Joe and Bazil's implements and approach are ill-suited to the task, but are the best options currently available. Erdrich thus aligns Joe and Bazil's thankless work to protect the building with the long history of Native sovereignty in the United States, from exploitative and violated treaties to the contemporary discriminatory legal system. Joe's diligent efforts to remove the trees implies that his comfortable sense of place in the reservation as a child will inevitably be eroded by colonial influences.

Erdrich underscores Joe's naïve self-assurance when he takes it upon himself to examine what he has found out to be the scene of the crime, the round house. Joe's interaction with the round house triggers and illustrates his changing sense of place on the reservation. He remembers, "The place seemed peaceful. There was no door. There had been one, but the big plank rectangle was now wrenched off and thrown to the side. The grass was already growing through the cracks between the boards. I stood in the doorway. Inside, it was dim although four small busted-out windows opened in each direction" (*The Round House* 70). Joe's sense of place is clearly still informed by his Anishinaabe sense of place, learned from his Mooshum, or grandfather, and Cappy's traditionalist brother and father: he initially emphasises the way the place feels – "peaceful" – rather than how it looks. As Joe analyses the scene more deeply, he explores the round house temporally as well as spatially, and connects historical

events with the present state of the structure; the door has been “wrenched off” and “thrown” aside; the windows, one for each of the cardinal directions as is so important in Anishinaabe spiritual tradition, are “busted-out”; even the gaps between wooden boards are described as “cracks”, suggesting breakage and force. Joe thus becomes aware of violent and violating incidents at the round house, including the attack upon his mother, which affect his emotional connection to it. Importantly, Joe stops “in the doorway” to examine the round house. His position literally on the threshold demonstrates not only his age, moving from childhood to young adulthood, but also his changing sense of place.

Erdrich demonstrates that Joe’s traditional connection to the round house is essential to his investigation. When he first arrives, Joe tells us:

There was a moment of intense quiet. Then a low moan of air passed through the cracks in the silvery logs of the round house. I started with emotion. The grieving cry seemed emitted by the structure itself. The sound filled me and flooded me ... I knew. He had attacked her here. The old ceremonial place had told me – cried out to me in my mother’s anguished voice, I now thought, and tears started into my eyes. (*The Round House* 70-71)

By associating the round house with the female human body, specifically Joe’s mother’s body, Erdrich reminds us that the land is a living environment which is also subjected to abuse under colonisation. The “low moan of air” between “the silvery logs” echoes the movement of air within the rib cage, and the repetition of the word “cracks” compounds with the image to evoke Geraldine’s pain. Joe comes to think of the round house and his mother as connected, sharing her “anguished voice” as well as her horrific experience. In this context, Erdrich’s emphasis on the round house’s “ceremonial” purpose links Geraldine, the archetypal Ojibwe mother, with both the land and traditional Anishinaabe spirituality as well as with Fleur and Lulu, other matriarchal figures who survive extreme suffering. Lark’s decision to use the round

house as the location for the attack therefore carries profound significance for Ojibwe sovereignty, and its consequences are illustrated in the sustained disruption of Joe's sense of place. Joe thus communes with both Geraldine and the land's response to trauma, and mirrors their responses by performing self-preservation through increasing isolation.

By bearing witness to the sorrow the round house has been imbued with, Joe develops a new perception of the sacred structure and of the reservation. Joe reconstructs Lark's likely movements on the day of the attack and realises that "the attacker had bet on this lonely place remaining deserted. Which meant he had to have known something about the reservation, and meant more planning" (*The Round House* 71). In perceiving the round house to be "lonely," Joe reveals his own loneliness having been separated from his mother during her recovery and from his father while he tries to care for his wife and advance the investigation. Joe's insight into Lark's movements makes him aware of the reservation in a new way; no longer a place of freedom, security and community, it now seems "deserted," or negated.

Although Geraldine survives the attack, Joe gains a premature understanding of mortality, particularly with regard to Native history, which he associates with the reservation environment. His new discomfort with cycling through the cemetery reflects the loss of his childlike detachment from the idea of mortality. He reflects that the cemetery now, "unnerved me. I had recently seen a ghost. One was enough, and my father had told me how they visited the cemetery when he worked [there]" (*The Round House* 116). Joe lists some of the deceased whose graves are located in the cemetery, including that of Holy Track, a victim of the lynching whose story is recounted in *The Plague of Doves*. Joe informs us, "they'd taken the boy's body there because he was only thirteen. My age. And hanged. Mooshum remembered it" (*The*

Round House 116). In addition and connection to his sense of place, Joe's understanding of Ojibwe history and therefore his own identity and mortality are thus influenced by his trauma and displacement.

Joe comes to see the cemetery as a symbol of the reservation itself, encapsulating the expedited journey from open land to contained land to grave. Directly linking the reservation with death, colonialism and Christianity, Joe reflects:

They lived and died too quickly in those years that surrounded the making of the reservation, died before they could be recorded and in such painful numbers that it was hard to remember them all without uttering ... *and the white man appeared and drove them down into the earth*, which sounded like an Old Testament prophecy but was just an observation of the truth. (117)

Joe's reference to "Old Testament prophecy" calls to mind the early justification for colonialism through the claim of manifest destiny. His comment on the Old Testament-like language of the phrase also raises the issue of discourse concealing the true nature of colonial history, as noted by de Tocqueville (397). Thus Erdrich draws out connections between the changing use of tribal lands, the negation of tribal place under the authority of Christian colonial power and discourse, and the language of jurisdiction and justice.

Erdrich extends the interconnected themes of death and land into the Coutts home through Joe's witnessing of Geraldine's disorientation during her recovery. Erdrich conveys the attack's corrosive effect upon Joe's mother's identity in her description of Geraldine's gaunt appearance:

Her face was a pale smudge in the dim air, and her features were smeared with weariness. She'd become weightless, all jutting bones. Her fingers bit hard into my arms. Her voice was fuzzy, as if she'd just woken.

I heard you two. What were you doing out there?

Digging.

Digging what, a grave? Your father used to dig graves.

I shook her arm off and drew back from her. The spidery look of her was repellent, and her words so strange. I sat down in the chair.

No, Mom, not graves. I spoke carefully. We were digging up the dirt in your vegetable garden. Before that, I was planting flowers. Flowers for you to look at, Mom. (*The Round House* 102)

Reflecting Joe's increasing perception of the reservation as negated space, Geraldine seems to be disappearing: she is a "smudge," "smeared," "weightless" and "fuzzy." Geraldine's appearance echoes her mental state: disempowered, forced into a liminal position as a traumatised survivor still at risk of assault, she seems not fully present. Her withdrawal as a means of self-protection has developed into self-erasure, and Joe's gift of flowers carries overtones of burial and mourning. Moreover, recalling Faulkner's Addie Bundren, Geraldine fears that Bazil has reprised the job he held as a young man tending the cemetery and is digging her grave while she is still alive, or rather dying. Geraldine thus feels disconnected from her husband and son and out of step with the everyday workings of a life which no longer makes sense to her, suggesting that Lark has succeeded in his mission to destroy the function of maternal identity and matriarchal power in Ojibwe society. Thus Geraldine, Joe and Bazil are all affected by the colonial negation of space which Joe identifies in the cemetery.

Joe comes to the decision to kill Lark in a meditative state close to sleep. Joe thinks in spatial terms: he understands that the Ojibwe are under threat from Lark as long as he is "free to walk this earth," and he accepts his course of action: "This act was before me" (*The Round House* 309). Should Lark stay away from the reservation, Joe would not pursue him: "If Lark moved or skipped out or was poisoned like a dog or caught for some reason, I would be free" (*The Round House* 319). The murder is a burden to Joe; he is not driven by a desire for revenge or any urge for violence, but by a commitment to protect his family and the Ojibwe community, which he conflates with the reservation environment. Since there is no other way to stop Lark, tribal law around wiindigoos is applicable and justifiable here, as Bazil explains. Joe's killing of

Lark thus constitutes an execution, serving a particular kind of justice. However, it also incurs great self-sacrifice and does not serve Ojibwe sovereignty in the settler colonial context. Indeed, Joe refers to himself as a “murderer” (*The Round House* 342).

Linda Wishkob, Linden Lark’s estranged twin sister who is adopted into the tribe as a baby, tells Joe that her brother plays golf alone early in the mornings, and it is in the highly ordered environment of the golf course that Joe resolves to kill Lark. The golf course represents a sequence of developments extending from the period of removal and national construction which Erdrich depicts in *Tracks* and *Four Souls* through Mauser’s mansion and references to Thoreau’s building and surveying. The golf course is the ultimate deracinated, superficial space, demanding intense re-landscaping in its creation and excessive energy and resources in its maintenance. Traditional exclusionary practices at golf clubs lend the golf course associations of social and cultural exclusivity in addition to its horticultural distinctness: Nancy Kamp notes that “private clubs have restricted membership based on such criteria as race, religion and gender” as well as tacit class-based discrimination (91). Golf clubs have thus functioned as a bastion of white patriarchal Eurocentrism in the US. In this sense, the golf course is a colonialist example of Foucault’s “heterotopia” (Foucault and Miskowiec 24). Joe’s resolve to shoot Lark on the golf course thus lends the killing decolonial import, connecting Lark’s death with land reparations.

Joe practises getting to and from the golf course early, unseen: “just after sunrise I rose and sneaked downstairs. I told my parents that I was getting in shape for fall cross-country – and I did run. I ran the woods trails where I would not be seen. I was getting good at skirting yards and using windbreaks for cover” (*The Round House* 329). Erdrich’s description of Joe’s route illustrates his isolation and liminality. Joe’s covert running along edges and between homes under the cover of trees stands in

marked contrast with the artificial, carefully maintained environment of the golf course. His vantage point is indicative of the power dynamics and epistemological framework undergirding systems of jurisdiction and justice on the reservation: “I found the spot marked out just at the edge of the bushes where I could stand, nearly hidden. From there I could sight and aim just about any place Lark might be on the green” (*The Round House* 331). Joe is radically marginalised, while Lark moves freely around the course as around the reservation; like his centred position on the green, the law is centred on those who uphold and benefit from white patriarchal colonialism, rather than on those who need protection.

Despite his ostensible liminality, Joe is unknowingly supported by the community and land. When Lark appears on the green, it seems to Joe that the “scent of minerals began to seep out of the earth” (*The Round House* 331). Like his interaction with the anguished round house, the ghost who visits him and his meditative dream state, Joe is subconsciously attuned to the natural environment in ways which undermine the spatial ordering represented by the golf course. When Joe shoots Lark poorly, he becomes sensorially overwhelmed: “Please, no, please, no. I thought I heard those words, but I could have said them. Lark was trying to get up again ... He locked eyes with me. Their blackness knocked me backward” (*The Round House* 332). Erdrich again portrays the effect of Lark’s aggression in spatial terms: the word “locked” connotes Joe’s involuntary freezing when action is imperative; the phrase “knocked me backward” suggests his reclamation of autonomy and progress is jeopardised by Lark’s very survival. However, Joe’s best friend Cappy has secretly accompanied him to the golf course every day. Emphasising his passivity, Joe tells us: “The rifle was lifted from my arms. Cappy stepped forward beside me. I didn’t hear the shot. All sound, all motion, had stalled in the sullen air. My brain was ringing”

(*The Round House* 332). Rather than isolation, Joe finds support and communion in the reservation environment. Thus, by turning away from the ordered space of colonial environments and power, and towards the living Ojibwe community and tradition, the reopened 'frontier,' Joe and the Ojibwe work towards a decolonial justice.

Both boys are profoundly affected by the killing, asking "What are we now?" and wishing to "sterilize [their] insides" by turning to alcohol, fulfilling the familiar pattern of substance abuse as a response to trauma (*The Round House* 339). Both boys sacrifice a part of themselves in order to achieve some measure of justice. Joe worries that his spirit "was fleeing now because of what I'd done" and that he might "become a wiindigoo" (*The Round House* 343). Joe and Cappy have to live with the consequences of their actions, which amount to being haunted by Lark: "I was not exactly safe from Lark. Neither was Cappy. Every night he came after us in dreams" (*The Round House* 359). Joe and Cappy's ongoing trauma symbolises the degree to which the reservation borders remain permeable; abstract justice does nothing to promote Ojibwe sovereignty or amend settler colonial systems of neglect and negation. Moreover, Cappy dies shortly after the shooting in an alcohol-fuelled car accident involving Joe and their other friends Zack and Angus. Cappy's death suggests that, according to wiindigoo justice, only Joe can legitimately kill Lark; in helping Joe, Cappy sacrifices himself. Joe's loss of his best friend intensifies his sense of guilt and adds to his personal trauma; Erdrich thus suggests that wiindigoo justice is an imperfect solution to a critical problem created by irreparably broken systems of law and justice on the reservation.

Mayla Wolfskin's unsolved disappearance constitutes another failing of this abstract justice. Joe eventually receives confirmation of Mayla's death and the location of her body from an elderly, alcoholic, homeless tribal member named Bugger Pourier.

Joe informs us, “To look for Bugger you looked behind places” (*The Round House* 360). Wholly dislocated and disenfranchised, Bugger constitutes an unreliable witness, but Joe realises that, due to his dislocation, Bugger is the only person who knows the truth about Mayla. Joe finds Bugger in hospital: “He was in a room with three other men. His foot was in a cast and rigged for traction, though I wondered if that was necessary for his foot to heal or meant to tie him to the bed” (*The Round House* 361). In the hospital, like Geraldine, Bugger is deprived of his privacy and autonomy. Joe jogs Bugger’s memory by reminding him that he had previously ridden around the reservation on Joe’s bike saying, “I needa see if it was just a dream” (*The Round House* 315). Eventually, Bugger remembers: “He began to sob in dry wrenches. He kept crying about her. He mumbled about construction and I knew. She was in the construction site, the earth mounded over her” (*The Round House* 362). By linking Mayla’s murder and disappearance with construction and burial, Erdrich connects her death with the lynching victims who rest in the cemetery and draws a parallel between colonial construction in *The Round House* and its earlier iteration in *Four Souls* with Mauser’s exploitation of Fleur’s land. Erdrich thus suggests that the “logic of elimination” is literally and figuratively foundational to the United States and, as a colonially constructed environment, the reservation offers the Ojibwe little protection (Wolfe 393).

Joe’s actions, compounded with his knowledge of Mayla’s death and her body’s whereabouts, result in deep alienation, illustrating the insidious effects of the negated space of the reservation. He bears the burden of the knowledge of Mayla’s death alone, further illustrating the continuing spread of trauma: “I’d never tell anyone. There was in me ... a disconnect so profound I could think of nothing but obliteration. I would somehow find the means to get drunk” (*The Round House* 363). That Joe

survives this period, particularly having lost Cappy, and goes on to become a lawyer himself must give the reader a glimpse of hope within a bleak ending. Erdrich implies, however, that without radical structural change down to the foundations of the colonial state, the most that Native peoples can hope to achieve is survivance rather than justice.

Chapter 6

Storytelling and Testimony

Throughout *The Round House*, Erdrich pursues a conflict between oral storytelling and settler colonial restrictions on expression and identity through the theme of testimony. The central plot of the novel, the frustrated investigation of Linden Lark for the rape and attempted murder of Geraldine Coutts, hinges upon Geraldine's legal testimony. Geraldine's initial withholding of her testimony and extreme reluctance to speak to any legal authorities seem to be caused by her severe trauma and the imperative not to further endanger Mayla Wolfskin or her baby. Moreover, Mayla's voice is missing from the narrative and, other than the narrator Joe, no character finds out about Mayla's murder or where her body is located. However, an understanding of traditional Native oral storytelling as potentially politically transgressive demands closer analysis of Geraldine's choices. I argue in this chapter that Geraldine's withholding of her testimony from legal authorities constitutes a reclamation of her autonomy and an empowerment of her voice, otherwise devalued by the colonial justice system.

Unusually among Erdrich's novels, *The Round House* features a single narrator. Since the entire novel is narrated in retrospect by Joe as an adult, having followed in his father's footsteps and entered the legal profession, neither Geraldine nor Mayla controls the narrative, drawing attention to the power dynamics of patriarchal settler colonialism and the devaluation and occlusion of Indigenous female voices under colonial hegemony. Indeed, the novel's layered narrative recalls the missing voices of other female Ojibwe characters whose voices go unheard, including Fleur and June. The novel thus highlights Erdrich's deep concern with the crisis of

missing and murdered Indigenous women and her long-sustained engagement with traditional Native oral storytelling, and presents violence against Native women and restrictions upon Native female voices as joint forces within patriarchal colonial oppression.

Erdrich's exploration of the transgressive and decolonial potential of testimony builds upon Native American oral storytelling traditions. N. Scott Momaday (Kiowa) describes traditional Native American storytelling as a practice which has the power to overcome temporal, spatial and bodily limits: "In the ultimate achievement of the storyteller's purpose, he projects his spirit into language and therefore beyond the limits of his time and place. It is an act of sheer transcendence. Spiritually he will survive as long as his words survive. He inhabits his vision, and in the telling his vision becomes timeless. The storyteller and the story told are one" (27). Momaday here expresses a unity of story and storyteller which overcomes bodily, temporal and spatial boundaries, projecting the storyteller into a state of permanent presence in a permanent present. He states that the continuation of traditional stories constitutes the survival of the storyteller, implying an unshakeable survivance stretching from the earliest colonial incursions into the future of the settler colonial state. This view defies colonial historical narratives and hegemony. Traditional Native American storytelling can therefore function as a transgressive act of decolonial resistance, rupturing western epistemological boundaries and asserting Native sovereignty. I have argued throughout this thesis that Erdrich's novels are such stories of survivance; the connection of oral storytelling with witnessing, testimony and highly politically charged themes in *The Round House* positions this novel as Erdrich's most explicit engagement with storytelling as decolonial resistance.

My understanding of Erdrich's engagement with borders has encompassed the literal and the figurative, attending to progressively more abstract borders throughout this thesis. I began by tracing the development and effects of reservation and allotment borders, and the practices and institutions which manifest and regulate them; I then examined mid-twentieth-century Ojibwe experiences of colonial borders through concepts heavily impacted by borders – home and mobility, motherhood and water; and in the previous chapter I discussed Erdrich's presentation of the legal system as a figurative superstructure policing colonial borders and Ojibwe sovereignty. In this chapter, I extend my focus to metaphysical borders based in Euro-American epistemology, creating artificial boundaries between mind and body, human and land, life and death, as well as between past, present and future. Building upon Momaday's view of Native storytelling as transcendent, I argue that Erdrich presents storytelling in this novel as transgressive of these imposed, figurative colonial borders, and as such as a powerful practice of decolonial resistance.

Erdrich's use of oral storytelling traditions within her writing has been discussed at length, as have other Native American writers' engagements with oral storytelling in literature. This blending of oral and literary storytelling has in the past been considered somewhat controversial. Louis Owens asserts:

Native American writing represents an attempt to recover identity and authenticity by invoking and incorporating the world found within the oral tradition – the reality of myth and ceremony – an authorless 'original' literature. Yet through the inscription of an authorial signature, the Indian writer places him- or herself in immediate tension with this communal, authorless, and identity-conferring source, at once highlighting the very questions of identity and authenticity the new literature attempts to resolve. (*Other Destinies* 11)

Owens identifies an opposition between the oral tradition and “the new literature,” suggesting that the very act of writing constitutes a departure from the “communal” and “authenticity.” Similarly, Adamson reads *Tracks* as a text which “threatens to alter

the shape of the oral tradition by bringing it into a new, written, pattern,” clarifying that “Erdrich is aware of the potential danger of setting oral stories into writing” (‘Why Bears Are Good to Think’ 35). The “danger,” we infer, is that in writing down and disseminating stories which have been traditionally shared orally, the author would curtail the transcendental, transformative power of orally shared stories which bear significance for tribal identity. This concern reflected broader anxieties within Native studies over the misappropriation of Indigenous culture in Euro-American society, epitomised by the debate over the role of theory produced by non-Native scholars in the analysis of Native literature.

More recently, owing at least in part to the generation of rich literary theory by Indigenous scholars in recent decades, the use of oral traditions in Native American literature has been considered less problematic. Vizenor sees postmodernism as wholly complementary to Native oral traditions, arguing, “The postmodern opened in tribal imagination; oral cultures have never been without a postmodern condition that enlivens stories and ceremonies, or without trickster signatures and discourse on narrative chance – a comic utterance and adventure to be heard or read” (‘Preface’ x). Vizenor’s focus on the trickster as definitive of Native storytelling grants writers considerable licence to cross boundaries and blend storytelling modes as part of the ‘enlivening’ of narratives, and he draws an equivalence between stories which are “heard or read.” In the same vein, Adamson argues that Simon Ortiz’s views on “how a language might be seized and transformed parallel Bakhtin’s”; the comparison does not limit Indigenous stories to Euro-American frameworks but rather, Adamson insists, “American Indian people are seizing and transforming English and making it meaningful in their own terms because the stake in the process of ‘liberating’ language is survival” (*American Indian Literature* 119). Erdrich presents the relationship

between oral storytelling and written literature as, on the one hand, the very definition of Ojibwe identity and, on the other, subject to her artistic preference and trickster-like autonomy: “The meaning [of ‘Ojibwe’] that I like best of course is Ojibwe from the verb *Ozhibii’ige*, which is ‘to write.’ Ojibwe people were great writers from way back and synthesized the oral and written tradition by keeping mnemonic scrolls of inscribed birchbark. The first paper, the first books” (*Books and Islands* 10-11). According to Erdrich, then, not only is storytelling in multiple forms vital to Ojibwe identity, but the freedom to adapt and interpret is inherent to both Anishinaabe culture and storytelling. In this sense, the idea of a boundary between oral and literary storytelling constitutes a false binary much like illusory, imposed colonial borders, positioning narrative autonomy in the face of inept and unjust colonial legal systems as a powerful statement of decolonial resistance.

Geraldine’s primary role in the narrative and in the investigation is that of a surviving witness. In this sense, Geraldine’s narrative continues a tradition shaped by Nanapush’s narration of *Tracks* and *Four Souls*, positioning her testimony as a community-anchored instance of decolonial storytelling. Prama Tagore identifies testimony as a key method of decolonial resistance in the context of retelling colonial histories and giving voice to colonised peoples. Tagore defines testimony “first as a process of witnessing and accountable listening, then as a form of historical memory, and finally as a mode of subaltern resistance and agency” (6-7). Thus decolonial testimony, for Tagore, begins not with speaking but with listening and contextualising the witnessed event. Tagore’s presentation of testimony reflects aspects of oral storytelling: it is inherently communal. Moreover, Tagore states that the process culminates in “resistance and agency,” positioning testimony as an endless, cumulative and empowering historical process.

Emphasising that her particular focus is upon testimony of colonisation,

Tagore continues:

While the colonizer actively erases memories of colonization enforcing a state of denial, forgetfulness, or what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has called ‘sanctioned ignorance,’ remembering colonial history is important to colonized subjects for a number of reasons. For colonized subjects, remembrance not only functions as a way of holding on to (sic) identity in the face of cultural genocide and devastation but also functions politically as a basis for making claims for reparations and justice. (68)

Tagore’s emphasis not only upon voice and agency but also upon listening, accountability and remembrance expands the burden of testimony in a way which is reflected in *The Round House*. Erdrich’s novel makes it clear, however, that testimony in settler colonial society is more complex and fraught than questions of memory or speech, which form Spivak’s focus in her controversial examination of the subaltern woman. Erdrich’s connection of testimony with storytelling illustrates that Indigenous women must not only be witnesses themselves, but witnessed – listened to and engaged with – by Native and non-Native communities and authorities as people first and evidence second; that testimony of crimes facilitated by settler systems is decolonial testimony; and that the form, boundaries and outcomes of Native testimony, as of Native literature, must be set by the storyteller and her community, and not by colonialist authorities.

The structure of this chapter reflects Erdrich’s focus on female Indigenous voice. Although the novel is narrated by Joe and his narrative is heavily influenced by his powerful father, Geraldine’s story and Mayla’s missing story form the crux of the text. Erdrich’s navigation of suppressed or withheld female voices exposes greater capacity for male characters, including Linden Lark and Joe’s Mooshum, to speak, and also to speak for female characters in the novel. Erdrich’s implication that Native women’s voices are perceived as subversive of the patriarchal colonial structure is

crucial to her presentation of storytelling in the novel; therefore this chapter is structured to foreground Geraldine's testimony, moving onto the indirect revelation of Mayla's story, and finally turning to Mooshum's functioning as a conduit for a powerful story of Indigenous female survivance.

I argue, then, that Geraldine's withholding of her story from legal authorities is a defiant statement of autonomy, and indicative of the importance of survivance and self-determination for the Ojibwe as a whole, and especially for Ojibwe women. I further argue that Geraldine's subsequent decision to tell the story of her brutal attack to her husband and son as a means of healing, rather than as part of a legal investigation, positions her act of storytelling as a significant act of resistance against the silencing of Native women and the appalling levels of violence against Indigenous women throughout North America.

Geraldine's story leads to the second-hand, partial revelation of Mayla Wolfskin's story. The relationship between Geraldine and Mayla, as two Indigenous mothers, emphasises Erdrich's focus on the connections between motherhood, storytelling and the survival of the community, honouring Native mothers and traditional Native storytelling as vital agents of decolonial resistance and survivance. Moreover, Mayla's disappearance and extreme voicelessness call attention to Indigenous women whose stories go unheard. The fact that Mayla's disappearance goes unresolved while Joe recovers her story draws attention to the implications of such disappearances: definitions of the verb 'to disappear' vary from the transient, "To cease to be visible; to vanish from sight; to become invisible," to the absolute, "To cease to be; to pass out of existence or use; to come to an end" ('Disappear, v.'). Although Lark aims to 'disappear' Mayla definitively, within an Anishinaabe cultural context Mayla's body and spirit continue to form part of the world beyond her death,

and Joe's retelling of her story to the reader preserves her identity. Thus Mayla forms a parallel with June Kashpaw's death and spiritual presence. Mayla's story is also echoed through assaults on Indigenous female bodily autonomy and suppressed voices in historical and contemporary settings in Erdrich's two most recent novels, *LaRose* and *Future Home of the Living God*. These parallels reinforce the severe and widespread emergency of Native women's disappearances as a recurring, driving theme in Erdrich's work.

I finally examine Mooshum's storytelling, centring on the story about Buffalo Woman he tells Joe over the course of several nights in his sleep, as this story is crucial to Joe's evolving understanding of Indigenous female survivance in relation to Ojibwe justice, history and identity, and to Erdrich's engagement with storytelling as transcendent and transgressive in this novel. Mooshum's story traces the theme of the murder of Ojibwe mothers as part of the wider history of colonisation, drawing a parallel between the last buffalo and the survivance of Ojibwe women and their children. The story demonstrates the intergenerational continuation and importance of traditional oral storytelling. Mooshum also relates his family's story of mixedblood identity and migration to the historically important First Nations resistance leader Louis Riel, linking the Canadian border with Indigenous persecution and the construction of colonial states. I argue, therefore, that Mooshum's story both evokes and invokes transgression of colonial borders and both portrays and enacts transmotion and survivance.

“Words are spoken with great care” ³⁸

Geraldine’s refusal to recount the traumatic attack to the investigating authorities, and to eventually tell Bazil and Joe what happened only in private, signals a dichotomy in the text between story and testimony. Indeed, the *Oxford English Dictionary* illuminates the legalistic and Christian authoritarianist connotations of the word ‘testimony’: it is defined as, “Personal or documentary evidence or attestation in support of a fact or statement; hence, any form of evidence or proof,” and, “A written certificate, a testimonial”; etymologically, the term relates to ‘testament’ and the Old Testament account of Moses’s transcription of God’s law, denoting “The Mosaic law or decalogue as inscribed on the two tables of stone,” and therefore, “The precepts (of God), the divine law” (‘Testimony, n.’). ‘Testimony’ thus signals a legal and religious covenant, imposing a hierarchical authority structure and a dehumanising, absolutist emphasis on “evidence or proof” to qualify a “fact”. Within the context of sexual violence against Native women, such privileging of western epistemology, demanded subservience to authority and orientation towards Judeo-Christian beliefs makes ‘testimony’ a fundamentally colonialist, subjugating concept. Moreover, the law, in its western development, is closely aligned with patriarchal authority; indeed, Lacan’s psychoanalytical theory identifies a “correlation between Law and the paternal metaphor” (Roof 104). Thus Erdrich demonstrates that attempts to force Indigenous female victims like Geraldine to give testimony in a format that suits the purposes of a patriarchal, colonialist legal system are re-violating and re-traumatising, positioning

³⁸ Momaday, *The Man Made of Words*, 15.

testimony as part of the patriarchal colonial system of oppression which facilitates sexual violence against Indigenous women.

Tharp writes that Erdrich's use of testimony in *The Round House* "makes a witness of the reader," placing the reader in a doubly uncomfortable position, empathising with Geraldine's severe trauma and also passively participating in the authorities' attempts to induce her testimony (25). As the narrator, Joe too occupies a difficult position of concurrent empathy and complicity, resulting in feelings of guilt and shame. The result is a highly layered narrative of shared trauma. By placing the reader in the position of a witness but one kept at a distance, Erdrich forces the reader to attend to issues of voice in the novel, highlighting the political limitations and transgressions associated with Geraldine's testimony as a Native female victim of sexual violence in a highly patriarchal settler colonial society.

In the immediate aftermath of the attack, traumatised and terrified by the prospect of further attack, Geraldine does not tell her family or the investigating authorities what happened. In Tharp's words, the attack "renders her voiceless" (29). While she is being treated in hospital in the immediate aftermath of the attack, Geraldine asks a nurse to fetch Joe. His first words are, "What happened?" (*The Round House* 14). While she wishes to reassure her son, Geraldine does not yet tell the story:

She didn't answer. Tears leaked from the corners of her eyes. She blotted them away with a gauze-wrapped fist. I'm all right, Joe. Look at me. See? And I looked at her. But she was not all right. There were scrapes of blows and the awful lop-sidedness. Her skin had lost its normal warm color. It was gray as ash. Her lips were seamed with dried blood. (*The Round House* 14)

Geraldine's response implies that the simple fact of her physical survival and presence should be adequate comfort to Joe. Her very form has been brutally altered, and she is almost literally a shadow of her former self; Erdrich's simile to describe Geraldine's pallor, "as gray as ash," is a stark reminder that Lark intended and tried to murder her

by setting her on fire. Geraldine's body tells its own story of survival but also of the most extreme violence. Yet Geraldine's insistence upon her presence as proof that she is self-evidently "all right" denotes an assumption that her testimony is superfluous, or worthless, or beyond her power of expression. Moreover, in contrast with Joe's comment that, in the hospital room, "There was no blood, anywhere," Geraldine's lips are "seamed with dried blood" (*The Round House* 14). Erdrich thus presents Geraldine's voice as the most severely brutalised part of her being. Not only does this reflect the pain and trauma inflicted upon Geraldine by Lark, but it also reflects perceptions of Geraldine's testimony as a witness within the patriarchal, colonialist justice system.

Although the investigation founders on a lack of information, Geraldine refuses to disclose more details about the attack for weeks. When Joe becomes frustrated by Geraldine's denial of the file she had gone to her office for on the day of the attack, she rebuffs his questions and criticisms:

Now you listen to me, Joe. You will not badger me or harass me. You will leave me to think the way I want to think, here. I have to heal any way I can. You will stop asking questions and you will not give me any worry. You will not go after him. You will not terrify me, Joe. I've had enough fear for my whole life. You will not add to my fear. You will not add to my sorrows. You will not be part of this ... It is all a violation. (*The Round House* 104–105)

Geraldine's refusal to tell the story of the attack points to constrictions around her voice on a larger scale. Her extensive instructions pivot her from a position of defensiveness to one of control, a manoeuvre which is possible only against her son; Geraldine would have no such power in a court delivering testimony. Indeed, Amnesty International note, "A common response to such crimes is blame, but directed at the survivor rather than the perpetrator" (Grenier and Locker 33). Thus Geraldine can

reasonably expect the delivery of her testimony in any legal setting to be closely examined at best and so hostile as to be revictimizing and retraumatizing at worst.

While Joe's youth and his own trauma must be taken into account, here Erdrich portrays Joe as insensitive to his mother's emotional state and lacking in understanding about how telling, and indeed not telling, her story affects her sense of autonomy. Geraldine's alignment of Joe's questions with the horrific violence and terror she has endured suggests that Joe's incomprehension is gendered, preventing him from empathizing with his mother on the basis that, as male, he does not share her vulnerability. Indeed, Geraldine's statement, "I've had enough fear for my whole life" could refer to the attack as inordinately traumatizing, but it can also be read as an indication that Geraldine and other Native women live in constant fear of such an attack. When Geraldine asserts, "You will not be part of this", she both warns Joe not to put himself in danger and tries to exclude Joe from colonial systems of law and justice as well as (the interrelated) rape culture. In doing so, however, Geraldine also enforces a separation between herself – her identity and voice – and the interwoven external systems of investigation and authority for which Joe is trying to act. Erdrich thus positions colonial authorities investigating the attack as equally as violative as the experience of violent rape.

Indeed, Geraldine's exhortation to Joe to remain apart from the "violation" of the investigation reminds us that the masculinity of the law is intimately connected with the legal facilitation of rape culture. Herman's explanation of the legal definition of rape as "*illegal sex*" highlights the bias of "the law's eyes," raising connotations of judgement of victims and voyeurism as inherent to the colonial justice system's approach to sexual violence against women (44). Herman's emphasis on the legal parameters and *appearance* of sexual assault cases recalls the etymological link

between ‘testimony’ and Moses’s stone tables as visual, physical, unquestioned proof of God’s word, implicitly devaluing the voice as a lesser medium of testimony.

Erdrich conveys Joe’s capacity, even as a relatively naïve thirteen-year-old boy, to exercise the force of the male gaze over the female voice through his relationship with Sonja. A former stripper, Sonja is married to Joe’s volatile Uncle Whitey. Joe’s description of Sonja illustrates his infatuation with her – or rather, with her body: “Whitey had married a younger woman – a tall, blonde, weather-beaten ex-stripper – who now worked the gas station register ... Sonja was her name, and I liked her the way a boy likes his aunt, but I felt differently about her breasts – on them I had a hopeless crush” (*The Round House* 29–30). Joe’s differentiation between Sonja and her breasts exposes Joe’s tendency to dehumanise Sonja in order to indulge his sexual objectification of her body. When Sonja asks Joe to leave so that she can dance for elderly Mooshum as a birthday gift, Joe refuses and threatens to tell Whitey about the money he finds (Yeltow’s bribe to Mayla, which Lark unwittingly hides) and they secretly share:

I’m not leaving. I sat down next to Mooshum, on his low cot.
 You are too! Sonja stared at me. Joe! Her face hardened in a way I had not seen before. Get outta here, she ordered.
 I won’t, I said.
 No? She stood, hands on her hips, and puffed air into her cheeks, mad.
 I was mad, too, but what I said surprised me.
 You’re gonna let me stay. Because if you don’t, I’ll tell Whitey about the money ... Sonja narrowed her eyes until the blueness turned black. So it’s you and Whitey. Okay then. (*The Round House* 254–255)

Joe’s insistence upon staying to watch Sonja, leveraging his knowledge of information which he knows would provoke Whitey to violence against her, reinforces the power the male-legal gaze wields over the female voice.

Similarly, Basil’s multiple attempts to trigger Geraldine’s testimony reinforce her lack of autonomy and the emotionally violent, retraumatising effects of asking her

to relieve the experience. Bazil tells Joe, “We’ll have to break through her denial,” connoting a paternalistic disregard for Geraldine’s emotional state in favour of accessing the legal ‘truth’ (*The Round House* 175). When FBI agent Soren Bjerke visits the house to try to speak to Geraldine, Bazil enters the bedroom to ask Geraldine to comply; Joe hears, “No!” and, “the crash of what I knew was the breakfast tray, a clatter of silverware skidding across the floor” before Bazil emerges, his face “glossy with sweat” (*The Round House* 176). Erdrich’s presentation of Bazil’s strangely strenuous exchange with Geraldine and the FBI agent waiting for permission to enter carries overtones of interrogation. To defend herself, Geraldine disconnects from the three male questioners in the room by lying “hunched” on the “far edge of the mattress” and then curling “into a smaller ball” (*The Round House* 176). When Bjerke questions Geraldine, Joe recalls, “she waited us out. She didn’t turn to us. She didn’t move. It seemed an hour that we sat in a suspense that quickly turned to disappointment and then to shame” (*The Round House* 176–177). The image is akin to a hunting scene, the men staking out Geraldine’s den. The men’s adversarial attitude is evident in their transition from “suspense” to “shame” when the excitement of the adventure has dissipated and their chase has failed. Geraldine’s defensive position, hiding childishly in her bed, illustrates the highly gendered legal system in which female victims of sexual violence are often made to feel more like suspects and are subjected to invasive questioning, which mimics the power imbalance which defines acts of rape, both in terms of “force, duress, intimidation, or deception” and in the sense of a victim being “property” (Herman 44). In fact Geraldine remains in extreme danger and telling the story of the attack is the only way in which she can be protected; yet to speak intensifies her vulnerability and places a bureaucratic value on her voice, further diminishing her autonomy.

Bazil's eventual coaxing of the story from Geraldine rests on his strategic adoption of regular, informal conversation rather than confrontation. In other words, Bazil substitutes storytelling for interrogation. Bazil recognises Geraldine's fragility and exhaustion, and so he takes on the burden of speaking himself in order to ease the act for her later: "My father tried to keep a conversation going every night, and when I had exhausted my meager store of the day's doings, he forged on, a lone paddler on an endless lake of silence, or maybe rowing upstream" (*The Round House* 177). Erdrich's use of water imagery signifies the shift in the family dynamic caused by Bazil's use of storytelling. By comparing Bazil to "an endless lake of silence, or maybe rowing upstream," Erdrich situates Bazil in a realm defined by femininity and motherhood, in contrast with the masculine, paternalistic environment of the court. Moreover, as "a lone paddler," Bazil risks being overpowered by the water, reversing the earlier power dynamic in which, as one of three men, Bazil attempted to intimidate Geraldine into speaking. Thus Bazil demonstrates respectful deference to Geraldine, positioned now as a storyteller only in a voluntary capacity. Indeed, as he runs out of daily occurrences to discuss, Bazil's one-way conversations develop into storytelling on his part, calling to mind Nanapush's compulsive storytelling as a means of saving Fleur's life as well as his own in *Tracks* and restoring the communal aspect of traditional oral storytelling.

Bazil mentions that the following day he will visit the Governor of South Dakota in Bismarck to pursue the case. Bazil mentions that the governor "is trying to adopt a child" and Geraldine's horror jolts her from her silence (*The Round House* 184). Geraldine's subsequent questions indicate that the governor's plans for adoption are closely linked to the attack, and we realise that part of the reason for Geraldine's silence is her desire to protect the still-missing Mayla and her baby daughter as well

as herself. Geraldine's silence is partially driven by a terror of what may have happened to Mayla, and a fervent hope that nothing has. Thus Erdrich indicates that, in Anishinaabe tradition, storytelling is recognised as a powerful act which has direct effects upon the community, particularly from a maternal perspective. Geraldine implicitly realises the transgressive potential of storytelling as well as the dangers it presents.

Geraldine is therefore compelled to tell Bazil and Joe the story of the attack in order to ascertain what has happened to Mayla. As Carden observes, "It is only when Geraldine realizes that Mayla Wolfskin's infant daughter once again needs her protection that she is able to 'overcome' her rapist's 'threats' and leave her bedroom. Taking action to preserve her community, 'the sleeping woman' and 'unkillable mother' rouses from her exile and reclaims her familial and tribal roles" (Carden 100). When eventually delivered, Geraldine's testimony is horrific and deeply moving. Geraldine speaks in a trance-like state, and Joe perceives her speech as a moment of crisis which threatens to eliminate Geraldine's voice completely: illustrating his bewilderment and loneliness, he reflects, "My father did not look at me because his gaze was locked with my mother's gaze. I think if he'd let go she would have collapsed forever into silence" (*The Round House* 186). Joe senses that Geraldine risks being diminished completely, illustrating the purpose of rape culture in patriarchal colonial society. Geraldine's relationship with Bazil is presented as a lifeline, in contrast with her earlier rejection. Bazil enables Geraldine to tell the story of the attack, therefore, by drawing out connections between the attack and the wider community and reminding Geraldine of her important role within the tribe. In contrast with the diminishment caused by the rape and trauma, Bazil creates circumstances within which Geraldine can tell her story as a means of healing.

Despite Basil's support, the retelling of the assault clearly has a retraumatizing effect on Geraldine, as well as Joe and arguably Basil:

All of a sudden my mother raised her hands and waved and pushed this way and that as if she was struggling with the air. Her arms moved with disconcerting violence, punching, blocking, pushing. She kicked and twisted.

It's over, Geraldine, my father said, terrified, trying to hush her. It's all right now. You're safe.

She slowed and then stopped. She turned to my father, staring out of the covers as out of a cave. Her eyes were black, black in her gray face. She spoke in a low, harsh voice that grew large between my ears.

I was raped, Basil. (*The Round House* 185)

Geraldine's admission illustrates survivance, demonstrating not only the active assertion needed to survive multiple levels of trauma as a Native woman, but also the pain, vulnerability and self-sacrifice which attend survivance in this context. Thus Erdrich supplements Vizenor's generally positive formulation of survivance with what Deer terms the "Ripple Effects of Trauma", highlighting the systemic, intergenerational nature of settler colonial oppression (Deer, *Beginning and End* 10). Survival of such trauma engenders further trauma, and the process of healing in community is thus a double-edged sword, presenting Native women like Geraldine with an additional dilemma over disclosure. Thus, even the process of healing potentially exacerbates the cycle of intergenerational trauma.

The Round House is not the first novel in which Erdrich has explored intergenerational trauma through a suppressed post-traumatic Ojibwe female voice using the device of a highly layered narrative; in *Love Medicine*, Erdrich deals with June's experiences of sexual exploitation and violence through third-person narrative and multi-vocal, second-hand reports. Similarly, in *Tracks*, Fleur suffers a rape as a young, isolated woman working in Argus and later experiences a crisis of identity after her failed marriage to the exploitative Mauser. As Tharp points out, "Significantly,

Fleur is a victim of rape, and like Fleur, Geraldine Coutts, a rape victim and a central character in *The Round House*, is silent through most of the novel and must rely upon others to piece her story together as best they can” (26). Tharp’s use of the phrase, “piece her story together” highlights the fact that the court confers greater authority on those who receive and opine on a testimony than on the witness. Tagore expands on Fleur’s significance as a rape victim, categorising *Tracks* “as one example of literature as historical testimony” (25). Elaborating, Tagore argues that, “Emblematic of this history of fragmentation and loss, Fleur is figured as a symbolic and living reminder of ‘the ones who disappeared’” (70). When we take into account the many other Ojibwe and mixedblood characters directly related to these women who struggle with their own respective senses of identity – including Fleur’s estranged daughter Lulu, her many husbands and her troubled sons Henry and Lyman; June’s aggrieved adoptive mother Marie Kashpaw, her heartbroken lovers Gordy and Gerry, her isolated niece Albertine as well as her alienated son Lipsha; Geraldine’s own family and Mayla – we can read Erdrich’s intertextual novels as a never-ending examination of the proliferation of trauma throughout the Ojibwe community, across time, unheard or unheeded by colonial authorities.

Indeed, Basil’s concern for Joe reflects the traumatic nature of bearing witness and the guilt that can arise for victims in relating their stories. Joe remembers:

All day my mother’s words had seeped up through the surface of all I did, like a dark oil.

In her right mind, she never would have described all that happened in front of you.

I had to know. It’s good I know, I said.

But it was a poison in me. I was just beginning to feel that. (*The Round House* 193)

Joe’s experience of his mother’s testimony as a “poison” suggests that he perceives Geraldine’s depression, anxiety and isolation after the rape as similar to a recovery

from illness. His comparison of the story to “a dark oil” forms connections between the ambivalence of testimony – vitally important, painful, jeopardising – to the ambivalence of oil – valuable, exploited, finite, a dangerous and environmentally damaging substance. In this sense, the shared and intergenerational trauma inflicted on Geraldine attacks her and her family in a way that echoes LaDuke’s formulation of the extraction and processing of oil as “Wiindigoo Economics,” or “Cannibal economics ... – an economic system that destroys the source of its wealth, Mother Earth” (LaDuke, ‘Cannibal Economics’). Although it is vital for Geraldine to ‘extract’ or express her testimony, doing so is a fundamentally hazardous, self-destructive process. Moreover, as Tagore explains:

The process of reading these works may also involve a certain reliving or ‘passing on’ of violence and trauma, since to be witness to such a tale is to enter into it, come to inhabit it, and be haunted by it. At the same time, I argue that it is precisely this very visceral, affective response of listeners that holds the potential for historical and individual silencings to enter into a realm where they may be collectively acknowledged, reworked, and, ultimately, transformed in ethically – and politically – actionable ways. (26)

On a metatextual level, then, the pathos of Joe’s own trauma serves to emphasise and re-enact the trauma of testimony upon the reader. In this sense, Erdrich inverts the disparity Owens identifies between oral storytelling and literary fiction to allow the reader to witness Geraldine’s private, harrowing testimony alongside Joe. Thus Erdrich’s layered narrative portrays the pain and difficulties but also the possibility of expressing what Morrison terms the “unspeakable unspoken” (‘Unspeakable Things Unspoken’ 176).

Geraldine’s outline of the attack demonstrates Lark’s awareness of the legal implications of the information Geraldine receives from Mayla as well as the import of the location. Reflecting the enduring power of the male gaze in contrast with Geraldine’s vulnerability, Joe tells the reader that Geraldine recalls, “I couldn’t see.

He tied my hands behind me ... He turned me around and marched me... held my shoulder. Step over this, go that way, he said. He took me somewhere. Where? said my father. Somewhere” (*The Round House* 186-187). Lark deliberately disorients Geraldine; as her fractured sense of place demonstrates, the effects of this element of the attack are especially traumatising. Erdrich’s description of the attack, particularly the word “march,” recalls the trope of traumatic forced migration in Native American history and illustrates the devastating violation of removing human autonomy in this fashion. Erdrich also builds a link between the idea of forced marching and the motivation of an official document – between the missing file and treaties – drawing the reader’s mind to the process of Indian removal which was driven by a voracious colonial desire for land and legalised by duplicitous bureaucracy. Indeed, Deer links Indian relocation, forced walking and violence against Native women through a historical travesty now commemorated by a hiking route named Amanda’s Trail: “U.S. soldiers accompanied Amanda [a blind member of the Coos tribe, kidnapped by US Cavalry], forcing her to walk the eighty miles to ensure that not a single Coos person was left to roam free within the borders of the state of Oregon” (*Beginning and End* 59). It is important to note that, like Lark’s abandonment of Mayla’s baby, Amanda was forced to leave behind her eleven-year-old daughter Julia, as her father was white. Geraldine’s forced march to the round house thus extends a historic precedent whereby colonial US authorities target Native female bodily autonomy as part of claiming authority over space.

Indeed, the fracturing of Geraldine’s self-expression is rooted in Lark’s assault upon her personal and Native identity, beyond the physical violence of the attack. Geraldine tells Bazil and Joe that Lark tells her, “my feeling is that Indian women are – what he called us, I don’t want to say” (*The Round House* 188). Even in safety and

confidence, Geraldine's voice is limited by Lark's viscerally offensive aspersions on Native identity. Lark makes a more overt comment on Geraldine's voicelessness during the attack when he says, "Maybe I should burn the evidence. You know, they're just evidence" (*The Round House* 190). Thus Lark equates Geraldine to a piece of inanimate evidence from which information can be gleaned, as opposed to a sentient, cognisant, unified human body and voice. Lark's attack thus represents the most extreme logical conclusion to the processes of gendered dehumanisation, which shape Joe's earliest sexual experiences, marking an exclusion of subjectivity and emotion, habitually associated with femininity, in favour of factual information, associated alongside logic and reason with masculinity. Moreover, the equivalence between Native women and evidence extends Nanapush's premonition of the Ojibwe's reduction to a "tribe of pressed trees" with particular focus on the treatment of Indigenous women and their bodies as resources; just as Mauser married young Ojibwe women including Fleur to acquire their land and fell their trees, so Ojibwe women continue to be reduced to the status of evidence and property (*Tracks* 225). Similarly, in 2016's *LaRose*, Erdrich recounts the story of the first LaRose, after whom several of her descendants are named, whose body is stolen for scientific study of tuberculosis. The only information LaRose's husband Wolfred has about his wife's remains is a "pile of papers" (*LaRose* 237). Erdrich later reveals that LaRose "traveled th[e] world as a set of stolen bones" (*LaRose* 341). Erdrich thus illustrates the importance of storytelling as a recovery of voice and identity; as what Tillett terms a "re-member[ing]" of ancestors and history, in a painful but healing act of decolonial resistance (78).

Indeed, Erdrich's narrative strategy of withholding, jeopardising and layering Geraldine's testimony conveys the collective impact and significance of legally

facilitated sexual violence against Native women. Deer notes that, “In Indian country, violence is not always experienced as an individual; some forms of violence manifest as systemic yet invisible structures that accomplish the trauma of violence on a large scale” (*Beginning and End* xvii). Elaborating, she explains that, “Each woman’s life is connected to many other women’s lives – daughters, sisters, mothers, cousins, and friends” (*Beginning and End of Rape* 10). While this interconnectivity theoretically offers opportunities for collective support and healing, Erdrich emphasises in her novels the interpersonal and intergenerational effects of shared trauma. The constancy of trauma across historical periods also builds on Erdrich’s engagement with traditional Anishinaabe temporality to demonstrate the unbroken continuation of sexual violence against Indigenous women as a function of colonialism.

Erdrich thus presents Geraldine’s testimony as representative of and interconnected with instances of Ojibwe testimony throughout the colonial period. Geraldine’s personal testimony illustrates the importance of traditional oral storytelling as a way of recognising and healing trauma as well as challenging the constrictions placed on legal testimony under settler colonial hegemony. Geraldine’s ultimate delivery of her story defies the disempowerment of Native female voices and thereby enacts Ojibwe survivance and invokes resistance to colonial authority.

“if it’s bloodless, slow-motion violence, the story is more likely to be buried” ³⁹

Joe’s narrative performs a ‘re-membering’ of Mayla’s story, echoing the recovery of June and LaRose’s respective stories and thereby positing the voicing of missing and murdered Indigenous women’s stories as a fundamental aspect of Erdrich’s project.

³⁹ Nixon, *Slow Violence*, 16.

Yet, within the text, Joe keeps Mayla's story a secret and, from a legal perspective, her disappearance remains unsolved, presenting Joe's actions as a point of conflict between his Anishinaabe traditionalism and his legal and social boundaries in settler colonial society, most particularly in his role as a lawyer. Thus, as an example of a female Native voice and body suppressed and erased but 're-membered' through Joe's narrative, Mayla's story reinforces the connection built throughout the novel between survivance and storytelling as interwoven modes of decolonial resistance.

Geraldine's story rescues Mayla from total absence from the narrative. When Geraldine relates her story of the attack to Joe and Bazil, she remembers, "There was a call. It was Mayla. I only knew her by her family. She's hardly ever been here. Just a girl, so young!" (*The Round House* 186). Geraldine's interaction with Mayla is distanced: the two women do not speak in person, but on the telephone; Geraldine speaks in her professional capacity as a tribal enrolment officer, while Mayla makes the call hurriedly under duress and extreme stress. Geraldine remembers that Mayla had said she "had no car," indicating that Lark had already pushed her car into the lake and was forcing Mayla to call Geraldine to the site of the attack (*The Round House* 186). Thus Mayla's own voice is parleyed in the text through other characters' voices to facilitate their exploitation and violation of her. Moreover, Mayla is only known to Geraldine, and presumably to other members of the Ojibwe, "by her family"; her individual identity is elided. Additionally, Mayla lives at a distance from the reservation, the site of communal and familial sense of place and identity. Therefore, due to US policies around Indian relocation away from reservations and strict regulations on tribal enrolment, Mayla has no voice on the reservation. It becomes Geraldine's matriarchal duty to 're-member' Mayla and protect her baby daughter.

Elided from the narrative, Mayla is unknown and essentially unknowable. Any impressions characters give the reader of Mayla's identity are based on her appearance or circumstances and generated from assumptions. During her testimony, for example, Geraldine describes Mayla, emphasising her young age and traditionally feminine clothes and make up: she is, "Just a girl," "an Indian girl," a "quiet girl," (*The Round House* 187-188). Geraldine reports, "such a pretty smile, pretty teeth, pink lipstick," creating a sense of Mayla as pleasant and placid (*The Round House* 188). Together with her quietness, the description of Mayla's mouth indicates that she is already voiceless; her identity is implicitly reduced to her appearance, as if she were a doll. Geraldine remembers that Mayla's "hair was cut so nice. She wore a knit dress, pale purple. White shoes" (*The Round House* 188). Mayla's light, pastel colour palette is evocative of clothing kept 'for best'. We can infer that Mayla prepares her appearance for her visit to the tribal enrollment office, suggesting both that Mayla has little access to such institutions of power and that she anticipates her appearance to be of significance in relation to the enrollment of her baby into the tribe. Geraldine's emphasis upon Mayla's appearance, quietness and powerlessness casts Mayla as a visual object; she is afforded no more influence or importance in person than she is as a bureaucratic case file in the tribal enrollment office.

In contrast with her appearance that day in Geraldine's office, in the round house Mayla is "tied up" and "taped up" (*The Round House* 188). Whereas previously Mayla's mouth had drawn Geraldine's attention, it is now concealed. Whereas, in the hospital, Geraldine's blood-seamed mouth conveys the suppression of her voice, Mayla's voice is completely erased. Mayla's communication is thus reduced to the expression she can convey through her eyes. Geraldine recalls, "Mayla and I looked at each other. She didn't blink just kept moving her eyes to the baby, then me, back to

the baby. I knew she was saying to me I should take care of her baby” (*The Round House* 188). Mayla’s final communication is thus made when she is already in a voiceless state, robbed of her autonomy. Like her phone call to Geraldine, Mayla’s only expression is forced and shaped by Lark.

Mayla’s vulnerability as a young Native mother is highlighted when Geraldine notices that Mayla’s baby’s eyes resemble those of her mother: “her eyes, so tender. Like Mayla’s eyes. Big, brown eyes. Wide open. She saw everything and she was confused but she wasn’t crying because her mother was right there so she thought things were all right” (*The Round House* 188). Erdrich’s emphasis on Mayla and her (nameless as well as voiceless) baby’s eyes is an important reminder of their respective subjectivities and the harrowing reality of experiencing and witnessing violent abuse. Moreover, Mayla’s agency is removed to the point of infantilization; neither she nor her baby can walk or speak. Inversely, Erdrich implies through such intergenerational patterns that the baby girl will experience the same abuse as Mayla, and indeed Geraldine, as a Native woman.

Lark’s disregard for Mayla’s child is amply evident when it transpires that, having killed Mayla and hidden her body in a construction site, he leaves the baby to be found “in the furniture section at Goodwill” (*The Round House* 248). His choice of the “Goodwill” carries connotations of charity, placing the baby in a decades-long sequence of Native children traumatically removed from their parents under paternalistic pretexts. Moreover, the corrupt Governor Yeltow of South Dakota subsequently attempts to adopt the (his) baby from a “Rapid City social service agency” (*The Round House* 248). While the baby is ultimately reunited with her grandparents, with whom she remains, she is placed in a deeply precarious position which calls to mind legal procedures to facilitate the removal of Native children from

their families, such as the imperialist invasion of the Toose sisters' house orchestrated by Zelda in *The Bingo Palace*. The treatment and voicelessness of both Mayla and her baby thus form part of the US government's history of simultaneously paternalistic and abusive relations with Native peoples. Indeed, the Indian Child Welfare Act was passed in 1978 in response to the inordinately high rate of Indigenous children - as many as 25%-35% - being removed from their families, usually to be placed in non-Native communities ('About ICWA'). In *Future Home of the Living God*, currently Erdrich's most recently published novel, Erdrich highlights the interrelation between the history of Indian child removal, abuse of Native female bodies and 'dystopian' oppressive exploitation of women as the reproductive apparatus of society through the figure of Cedar, who is both illegally adopted out of the Ojibwe as a baby and later abducted so that extreme fundamentalist authorities can control the dwindling supply of healthy babies. Thus Erdrich suggests that removal of Indigenous children is and has always been an official practice in what constitutes a dystopian oppressive reality for Native women.

Lark's bungled plan to financially extort Yeltow is a motivating factor in the attack on Mayla and Geraldine, and his greed exacerbates his racist preconceptions to fuel his abuse of both women. In this sense, echoing Fleur, Mayla also falls into a decades-long pattern of objectification and exploitation by white settler men seeking wealth. In his monologue in the round house, Lark debates his actions, revealing his attitude towards Mayla:

I suppose I should have sent you down with your car, he suddenly turned on Mayla. But, honey, I couldn't. I just felt so sorry for you and my heart split wide open ... He struck Mayla, and struck me, and struck her again and again and turned her over. You want to tell me where the money is? The money he gave you? Oh, you do? Oh, you do now? Where? He ripped the tape away. She couldn't talk, then she gasped out, My car. (*The Round House* 189)

Lark not only wants to get revenge on Mayla for rejecting him and to gain personally from Yeltow's hush money, but he equates Mayla to objects of quantifiable monetary value. Like his abandonment of the baby among second-hand furniture, and the commodification of Fleur and June's respective bodies, he considers leaving Mayla in the car to drown, implying that her value and identity are comparable and relative to the vehicle. Lark only delays murdering Mayla in order to find out where she has hidden the money from Yeltow. One of Mayla's few reported lines of dialogue is her forced response to Lark's interrogation. His subsequent re-silencing of Mayla demonstrates her lack of human value not only in Lark's eyes, but also within rape culture and settler colonial society; he continues, "Don't talk no more. I don't want to hear it, he said to Mayla. You are still money in the bank, he said to the baby" (*The Round House* 189). Since the baby cannot yet talk, Lark's statement illustrates the extent to which his appraisal of Native female agency and identity is facilitated in patriarchal settler colonial society and perpetuated and aggravated by rape culture. Moreover, Lark not only suppresses his victims' voices but he is also enabled to speak *for* them: he leaves "a note pinned on the baby's jacket informing the finder that her parents were dead" (*The Round House* 248). Lark's ability to not only manipulate the narrative but also overwrite Mayla's voice serves to underscore Mayla's juxtaposed lack of agency.

Erdrich's emphasis on the violence of Lark's suppression not only of Mayla's voice but of her very agency forms a parallel with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's controversial figure of the subaltern woman, a concept formulated in postcolonial theory to signify a wholly powerless and voiceless female member of an oppressed ethnic minority within the Third World. In her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Spivak argues that, because the subaltern has no access to power or upward social

mobility, the subaltern effectively has no voice (Spivak et al. 15). Spivak concludes in this essay that, “There is no space from which the sexed subaltern subject can speak,” and that the “subaltern as female cannot be heard or read” (Spivak 307, 308). As a disadvantaged, exploited young Native woman who is prevented from accessing any upward mobility, Mayla could be considered a Fourth World example of the subaltern woman.

In her original essay, Spivak gives the example of the traditional Hindu practice of *sati* to illustrate the figure of the subaltern woman and the proscription of the act by colonial British authorities:

The Hindu widow ascends the pyre of the dead husband and immolates herself upon it. This is widow sacrifice ... The abolition of this rite by the British had been generally understood as a case of ‘White men saving brown women from brown men.’ ... Against this is the Indian nativist argument, a parody of the nostalgia for lost origins: ‘The women actually wanted to die.’ ... One never encounters the testimony of the women’s voice-consciousness. (297)

Spivak explains that *sati* is narrated in patriarchal political discourse by both anti-colonial Indigenous Hindu commentators and the British colonial power. The voice of the self-immolating widow, the subaltern woman, is so completely elided that her very subjectivity is socially occluded. Erdrich enacts this elision in *The Round House* by situating Mayla entirely in the past throughout the narrative and presenting her story exclusively through the voice of more privileged characters including Geraldine, Basil and Linda Wishkob as well as the violent, deliberately overwriting voice of Linden Lark. Thus, while Mayla’s story is of paramount importance to both the plot of the novel and to readers as witnesses to the crisis of sexual violence against Native women, we can neither hear nor see her in the narrative; she “cannot be heard or read” (Spivak 308).

Mayla's relation to Spivak's *sati* widow figure reaches distressing proximity through the theme of immolation. The last recorded sighting of Mayla alive is at the point of Geraldine's flight from the round house while Lark looks for a box of dry matches. When Joe examines the round house, he realises that Lark would have thrown the gas can into the lake to avoid being linked to Geraldine's evidence. With his friends, Joe proceeds to search the lakeshore for evidence, and they come across a site where "Older kids made fires on the beach" (*The Round House* 76). The residue of the fires draws attention to fire's Anishinaabe connotations of masculinity and destruction in Erdrich's work as well as Spivak's analysis of *sati*. The death of the subaltern woman, by murder or self-immolation, it seems, ensures the complete erasure of her voice.

Yet, as foreshadowed by his sightings of ghosts in the novel, Joe succeeds in uncovering Mayla's story. Joe's Anishinaabe sense of place allows him to engage with the land in order to read, or listen to, its own story, both of the recent past and of its longer history. Through Bugger Pourier, Joe also engages with the wider Ojibwe community. Joe utilises Anishinaabe epistemology in order to successfully trace Mayla's story and locate her body, thereby 're-membering' her subjectivity. Joe's dedication to the recovery of Mayla's story forms a counterpoint to Spivak's theory of the subaltern woman, exposing its insufficiency to analyse the position of Indigenous women in settler colonial contexts. Erdrich thus reminds us that decolonialism in the US must centre Indigenous experience and be orientated around Indigenous epistemologies. Moreover, by recounting Mayla's story to the reader, Erdrich's narrative exemplifies the transcendent and transgressive potential of Native storytelling. Indeed, Tagore argues that Erdrich writes about "the lives and experiences of women who, for the most part, remain missing from the official

archives of public history” but that she “map[s] some of the ways by which processes of remembrance, through bodily and literary transmission, are able to transform such historical ‘hauntings’ into an account that can be acted upon in the present” (66). In this sense, by illustrating the power of Ojibwe storytelling across the metaphysical boundaries of life and death, humanity and land, Erdrich advocates storytelling as a means to overcome colonial borders.

However, Joe’s failure to report the information about Mayla’s body draws a parallel between the voicelessness of Native women in the US and the chronic under-reporting of sexual violence. As Deer notes, “because more than half of violent crimes in the United States are never reported to police, relying on law enforcement report data does not yield accurate results about the true extent of violent crime” (*Beginning and End* 3). Amnesty International quote an anonymous Native survivor of sexual violence who states simply, “Most women who are beaten or raped don’t report to the police. They just shower and go to the clinic [for treatment]” (Grenier and Locker 2). The executive director of the Spirits of Hope Coalition, an Oklahoma-based advocacy group for Native victims of domestic violence, endorses this view, explaining, “Women don’t report because it doesn’t make a difference” (Grenier and Locker 4). The outcome of such a lack of confidence in the investigation of these most serious crimes is that victims’ voicelessness is perpetuated through the mirror-image of an unresponsive authority, as demonstrated when a relative of a young rape survivor says, “I don’t know what to do anymore. I don’t get any answers” (Grenier and Locker vi). Rather than simply perpetuating an image of Indigenous (or subaltern) women as voiceless, then, Erdrich’s novel highlights the power of land- and community-connected storytelling to ‘re-member’ and heal violated subjectivities. Erdrich’s presentation of transgressive storytelling thus verbalises and emphasises the urgency

with which a new, victim-centred and, crucially, decolonial approach to sexual violence against Indigenous women is needed.

“remembering, visioning and creating a just reality” ⁴⁰

In dramatic contrast to Mayla, Joe’s Mooshum, or grandfather, Seraph Milk, is defined by his storytelling and therefore by his voice. Under settler colonial hegemony, Mooshum’s voice is afforded relatively little social power; yet Erdrich demonstrates in both *The Round House* and *The Plague of Doves* that Mooshum’s traditional oral storytelling retains considerable power and influence within the reservation environment. Mooshum’s influence on Joe also positions his voice as a force of resistance against colonial authority. In this section I analyse Mooshum’s telling of the story of Buffalo Woman as an invocation of Ojibwe sovereignty which transcends and transgresses colonial borders.

Mooshum’s story centres on the young Nanapush and a journey he undertakes many decades earlier than the novel’s 1988 setting. Mooshum’s characterisation is highly reminiscent of Nanapush; both are simultaneously wise and foolish old men and figures of leadership in their respective families and the Ojibwe community. Like Nanapush, Mooshum is a mediatory character: his old age means that he has witnessed vastly different and difficult times for the Ojibwe, which he brings into the present through his stories; he recalls travels across the Canadian borders and the fight for sovereignty led by Louis Riel, whose execution, Kevin Bruyneel points out, was deemed necessary by the Canadian government in order to validate the Canadian border; and Mooshum is keenly aware of his Métis heritage, which he demonstrates

⁴⁰ Simpson, *Dancing*, 33.

through his creolised speech (Bruyneel 716). Mooshum's retelling of one of Nanapush's stories places the two men in parallel in dramatically different periods, evoking the expansive, non-linear temporality of Anishinaabe tradition. Mooshum thus demonstrates the relationship between traditional Anishinaabe oral storytelling, mixedblood identity, Vizenor's transmotion, and resistance against colonial borders.

The most significant instance of Mooshum's storytelling in *The Round House* is an episode of sleep-talking. Mooshum has no recollection of telling his story when he awakes, but it is witnessed by Joe when he stays over at his aunt and uncle's house as respite from the tense Coutts home. In one sense, the fact that he tells the story while asleep suggests that Mooshum's story belongs to the realm of what Carl Jung terms the "collective unconscious," a "deeper layer" of the unconscious which "is not individual but universal" and "has contents and modes of behaviour that are more or less the same everywhere and in all individuals" (Jung 3–4). However, Mooshum's dream story highlights the importance of dreams in Anishinaabe tradition specifically: Susan Elaine Gray describes dreams in Ojibwe culture as "vehicles of prediction, guidance, and foreshadowing" (211). Moreover, Smallman notes that in "Algonquian cosmology, dream life was as real as waking time," drawing Mooshum's story into the Anishinaabe constant present and positioning it as highly relevant to Joe's task (23). Mooshum's story also recalls the power and sentience of stories in Native oral storytelling traditions, as characterised by Erdrich's description of rock paintings in *Books and Islands* (50). Thus Mooshum's passivity means that he effectively functions as a conduit for a profoundly important, traditional story which Joe must hear in order to gain a better understanding of the history of the round house and wiindigoo justice.

Reflecting upon the first evening he spends at Clemence's house, sharing a bedroom with Mooshum, Joe recalls:

I fell immediately asleep. Sometime after moonrise, for there was light in the room, I woke. Mooshum was talking all right, so I rolled over and stuck a pillow over my head. I dozed off, but something he said hooked me in, and little by little, like a fish reeled up out of the dark, I began to surface. Mooshum was not just talking in the random disconnected way people do, blurting out scraps of dream language. He was telling a story. (*The Round House* 210)

Mooshum's story does not really begin until he has secured Joe's attention, emphasising the story's instructive purpose. Erdrich's spatial representation of Joe's gradual awakening is suggestive of an entry into a different realm; not only does Mooshum's retelling of Nanapush's story transcend western metaphysical boundaries to draw the past into the present, then, but it effectively allows Joe to transcend these boundaries also. Erdrich's use of fishing and aquatic imagery draws a parallel between Joe and Erdrich's archetypal characters Lipsha, June and Fleur, all so deeply associated with water and mobility between physical and spiritual planes. Within the context of colonially imposed borders and the restriction and repeated invasion of tribal land, Mooshum's story is thus positioned not only as a transcendental experience for Joe, but particularly as a transgressive one. Moreover, Erdrich's presentation of the story as potentially transgressive and capable of overpowering Mooshum as a conduit implies that the story itself, like the rock paintings she visits on the journey depicted in *Books and Islands*, is sentient in its own right, beyond the control of the storyteller. Robin Wall Kimmerer (Potawatomi) explains, "We are told that stories are living beings, they grow, they develop, they remember, they change not in their essence, but sometimes in their dress" (386). This understanding of storytelling confers Indigenous traditions with radical power to ensure survivance and preserve sovereignty.

In his sleep, Mooshum tells the story about Nanapush rescuing his mother Akiikwe when she is falsely accused of being a wiindigoo and his subsequent buffalo hunt, which saves the tribe from starvation during the hardship experienced as a result of the establishment of the reservation. The story centres on the burden placed on mother figures to survive not only in the interest of themselves and their children, but also to ensure the continuation of tribal traditions. Mooshum says:

Her name was Akiikwe, Earth Woman, and like her namesake she was solid ... She had a shrewd heart and an endless stare, with which she kept her children in line. Akii and her husband were never stingy, and as I say they were always very good at finding food even in the dead of winter – that is, until the year they forced us into our boundary. The reservation year. (*The Round House* 210)

Here Erdrich directly relates the imposition of the reservation border to the threat of starvation. The spatial restrictions enforced by the reservation boundaries curtail the tribe's traditional way of life without providing alternative means of sustenance. Mooshum explains, "We hunted all the animals before the Moon of Little Spirit and there wasn't even a rabbit left. The government agent had promised supplies to tide us over for the loss of our territory, but these never came through" (*The Round House* 211). Mooshum's brief introduction to the story concisely expresses the dishonesty with which the US government pursued Indian removal as well as the catastrophic effects of the spatial construct of the reservation upon the Ojibwe, forced unnecessarily into a state of starvation. Janet Fiskio points out that colonial authorities used hunger "to torture and subjugate First Nations peoples ... using food as a political tool" and that "colonization produced famine as indigenous peoples in the United States and Canada were removed from their territories and confined to reservations, unable to engage in subsistence practices and forced into dependence on government food aid," which was often insufficient or withheld to disempower tribes (238). In this sense, starvation was used as a colonial tool in the same way as rape.

Mooshum also indicates that the reservation border and its disastrous consequences for the Ojibwe are symptomatic of the greater environmental devastation caused by westward expansion; the detail that there was not “even a rabbit” left to hunt indicates a collapsed ecosystem. The impact of rampant colonial land development is evident in the decline of these animal species, recognised not as separate form of life in Anishinaabe tradition but as integral to the interconnected and balanced world. Mooshum elaborates mournfully the next night when he subconsciously continues his story, “Ah, those first reservation years, when they squeezed us! Down to only a few square miles. We starved while the cows of settlers lived fat off the fenced grass of our old hunting grounds ... Those were bad years. Nanapush saw his people starve and die out ... They were nowhere. Dying” (*The Round House* 216). Mooshum here clearly presents the reservation as negated space; the tribe “were nowhere”. Yet his story enacts survivance through self-determination by imbuing this negated space with meaning for the Ojibwe; in an ironic inversion of the colonial mapping depicted in *Tracks* and *Four Souls*, the Ojibwe inscribe the land with meaning and transform space into place.

Mooshum continues, “We left our boundaries and ranged back up into Canada, but the caribou were long gone, there were no beaver left, no muskrats even” (*The Round House* 211). Mooshum’s reference to the Canadian border highlights the fact that the imposition of colonial borders operates on both micro and macro scales, and that Native peoples’ senses of place and identity have been at best disregarded and at worst purposefully annihilated. Erdrich also reminds us that the imposition of such borders fundamentally altered Native peoples’ citizenship rights overnight, at both the Canadian and the Mexican borders. Indeed, as Carden notes, “Repeated references to Geraldine’s family history recapitulate the larger movements of Anishinaabe history

in which Buffalo Woman intervenes. Joe emphasizes Geraldine's father's Métis/Michif (Ojibwe and French) heritage, reporting that his family 'came down over the border' from Canada following the hanging of Louis Riel" (102). Bruyneel explains that Louis Riel embodied Native resistance to borders: "As the embodiment of the sovereign ban, Riel could never be a full member of the Canadian polity without upsetting its boundaries because his political figure served to demarcate those boundaries" (716). Mooshum's remembrance of Riel and use of Riel's campaign of resistance to contextualise his story reinforces the 'transmotive' power of storytelling as a means of transgressing colonial borders and challenging colonial power. Moreover, Mooshum's use of the pronoun "we" broadens the temporal context of his story, indicating that the fallout from imposed colonial borders remains apparent in contemporary US society, contributing to such travesties as the crisis of sexual violence against Native women.

Mooshum goes on to recount Akiikwe's search for food to sustain her family, and her unreliable husband Mirage's worsening treachery. He says that Akiikwe:

chopped an ice hole and with great effort she and her husband kept it open day and night, so they fished there until she hooked a fish that said to her, *My people are going to sleep now and you shall starve*. Sure enough, she could not get another fish after that. She saw Mirage looking at her strangely, and she looked strangely back at him. He kept the children behind him as they slept and the axe with him in his blanket. He was tired of Akii so he pretended he could see it happen. Some people in these hungry times became possessed. A wiindigoo could cast its spirit inside of a person. That person would become an animal and see fellow humans as prey meat. (*The Round House* 211)

The fish which Akiikwe catches recalls Joe's sense of being "hooked in" to Mooshum's story, foreshadowing Joe's future as a tribal leader, both as a legal practitioner and as a storyteller. Erdrich here extends the parallel between the imposition of borders and starvation to directly relate the phenomenon of the

wiindigoo to both colonisation and the theme of violence against Native women, and Native mothers specifically.

Mirage intends to use the fear of the wiindigoo as a pretext for his wife's murder; however, Mooshum explains that tribal law on wiindigoo justice is complex: "The thing to do was you had to kill that person right away. But not before you had agreement in the matter. You couldn't do it alone. There was a certain way the killing of a wiindigoo must be done" (*The Round House* 211). Erdrich emphasises the central role played by consensus in tribal law, in stark contrast with the white mob rule under which Mooshum's friends are hanged in *The Plague of Doves*. He elaborates, "The only person who could kill a wiindigoo was someone in the blood family. If her husband killed her, Akiikwe's people might take revenge. It could have been a sister or a brother, but they refused" (*The Round House* 212). These stipulations raise interesting questions around the defence of Joe's killing of Lark as wiindigoo justice. Although Joe feels anxious and guilty about the shooting, he had tacit consensus from his parents, his friends and other members of the community including Linda Wishkob, Linden Lark's biological sister. In fact Linda is instrumental in arranging and concealing the killing. Yet, having been adopted into the tribe as a baby, Linda is arguably no longer a member of Lark's family, leaving him without any living relatives. In a broader sense, Smallman explains, "the windigo is about transformation" and "sometimes represented the collapse of the family and social structure" (28, 47). In order to reinstate cultural and familial security and Ojibwe sovereignty over the reservation environment and community, then, Joe modifies, and risks misapplying, wiindigoo justice. The intricacies of applying wiindigoo justice set forth in the story demonstrate the degree to which tribal sovereignty is hindered by the

incursion of colonial authority. Erdrich suggests here that the oppression of tribal voices results in the necessary adaptation of traditional justice.

In Mooshum's story, Akiikwe is repeatedly tied up and escapes each time (*The Round House* 212-213). The story of Akiikwe echoes the assault on Geraldine and Mayla in this regard. The physical restraining of the three women calls to mind the spatial constraints of the reservation border: the boundary is a manifestation of the Ojibwe and their land being literally and figuratively bound. Akiikwe and Geraldine's respective escapes stand in stark contrast with Mayla's death and hidden body; Erdrich thus highlights the reclamation of mobility as vital to Ojibwe survivance, as embodied by Gerry Nanapush.

When Mirage and his accomplices attempt to drown Akiikwe, Erdrich emphasises the connection between Joe as the receiver of Mooshum's story and preceding characters associated with storytelling – Nanapush – and water – Fleur, June and Lipsha – by placing Akiikwe in direct interaction with the fish underwater. "Akiikwe told her son that while she was underwater the fish spoke to her and said he felt sorry for her, and that she should have a hunting song. She sang this song to her son. It was a buffalo song. Why a buffalo song? Because the fish missed the buffalo" (*The Round House* 213). Erdrich here underscores the importance of confidential, traditional oral storytelling to Ojibwe survivance. This approach positions Geraldine's testimony, her revelation of Mayla's disappearance, as well as her own very survival as acts of survivance on behalf of the Ojibwe collectively. The private surroundings of each story – underwater, Geraldine's bedroom and Mooshum's bedroom – oppose the appalling violation of Lark's use of the round house for his attack and form a counter-stance to the colonial hegemony signified by borders. Erdrich thus implies that Native

reclamation of space enacts the principle of self-determination, a vital aspect of Native sovereignty.

Akiikwe instructs Nanapush to search for a buffalo, even though it seems like a hopeless cause. She explains, “All the animals miss the buffalo, but they miss the real Anishinaabeg too. Take the gun and travel straight into the west. A buffalo has come back from over that horizon. The old woman waits for you” (*The Round House* 214). Erdrich here turns the trope of westward expansion on its head, enacting a reclamation of colonised land and traditional Native ways of life. The horizon functions as a natural, ephemeral border; visible and yet entirely illusory, showing up colonial borders as such also. Akiikwe’s reference to the buffalo as the “old woman” continues the story’s theme of holistic interrelation between species and land, and its parallel between surviving mothers or, as Tharp notes, “unkillable” mothers, and Native tradition functioning as decolonial resistance.

Akiikwe survives and urges Nanapush to search for the buffalo in order to ensure the survival of the tribe. Nanapush’s use of the buffalo song reflects Mooshum’s storytelling to Joe: the act of hunting is not sufficient alone but must take place within a ceremony in which Nanapush, evoking Basil’s fragile appeal to Geraldine for information, engages with the buffalo as a supplicant. Mooshum says:

Nanapush sang the buffalo song at the top of his lungs, driving onward. And at last, in that white bitterness, the buffalo heard his song. It stopped to listen. Turned toward him. Now the two were perhaps twenty feet apart. Nanapush could see that the creature was mainly a hide draped loosely over rickety bones. Yet she’d been immense and in her brown eyes there was a depth of sorrow that shook Nanapush even in his desperation ... Nanapush sang the song again because he knew the buffalo was waiting to hear it. When he finished, she allowed him to aim point-blank at her heart. The old woman toppled over still watching Nanapush in that emotional way, and Nanapush fell beside her, spent. (*The Round House* 217-218)

Nanapush demonstrates great respect for the buffalo and for Anishinaabe tradition. His journey is less a hunt and more a plea to the buffalo for help and guidance. The buffalo sacrifices herself to save Nanapush and feed the tribe; as Mooshum says, “Many people were saved by that old woman buffalo, who gave herself to Nanapush and his unkillable mother” (*The Round House* 219). More importantly, however, the buffalo also gives Nanapush knowledge to ensure extended Ojibwe survivance. Exhausted, Nanapush commits the folly of climbing inside the buffalo, which freezes in the storm. Mooshum elaborates, “while unconscious, he became a buffalo. This buffalo adopted Nanapush and told him all she knew” (*The Round House* 218). Thus Erdrich further emphasises the role of mothers in Anishinaabe tradition as keepers of knowledge and protectors of the tribe. The buffalo instructs Nanapush on how to apply wiindigoo justice in the future, saying, “wiindigoo justice must be pursued with great care. A place should be built so that people could do things in a good way” (*The Round House* 220). Here the buffalo’s sacrificed body – her “hide draped loosely over rickety bones” but still serving to protect Nanapush in a replication of pregnancy – reflects both the round house, reminiscent of a rib cage, and Geraldine’s injured body. Thus Erdrich invokes voices of survivance in female bodies or structures throughout the novel’s layered narratives. Storytelling thus enables Ojibwe survivance, and actively contributes to Ojibwe self-determination.

By blending traditional oral storytelling forms, including revision and reproduction, with literary fiction, placing urgent social issues and historical injustices at the core of her writing and creating a narrative network between her texts, Erdrich defies literary boundaries as well as settler colonial grand narratives and hegemony. The highly layered narrative of *The Round House* reveals the multivocal histories, transmotion and survivance of the Ojibwe community at the heart of Erdrich’s writing.

Conclusion

This study has sought to demonstrate that Erdrich's employment of borders in her fiction is vital to her presentation of Ojibwe and mixedblood identities, senses of place and experiences of US history and society. My critical and theoretical intervention has been to analyse Erdrich's use of the border as a theme and symbol by which she explores and advocates decolonial resistance, interweaving the concerns and concepts of Native studies, border studies and settler colonial theory. I have argued that Erdrich engages with the border both as a political, geographical construct and as an idea, manifesting colonial hegemony as well as the survivance of Ojibwe culture and sovereignty. Drawing on Gerald Vizenor's concepts of transmotion and survivance, Louis Owens's re-visioned frontier, Gloria Anzaldúa's borderlands and *mestiza*, and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's re-emergence, I conclude that Erdrich's engagement with borders throughout her novels constitutes a profound challenging of US colonial hegemony through a deeply critical examination of the US government's establishment, (mis)management and neglect of reservation communities and environments and an insistence on the concurrent and constant endurance of Anishinaabe land-based identity and sovereignty, or what Coulthard terms grounded normativity.

The borders I have considered in this thesis vary from those of the most local in scale, including the limits of the body and personal or familial property, both claimed and imposed, to those indicative of cultural and social differentiation and historical shifts, like the borders of the reservation, and boundaries on the broadest scale, such as international borders. My discussions demonstrate that Erdrich utilises the border as a metonymic image of settler colonial presence and power. Her exposure

of western borders as illusory and arbitrary both defies and undermines the legitimacy of colonial hegemony. Moreover, Erdrich's focus on the reservation as both delimited space and a place of spiritual and cultural importance to the Ojibwe illustrates survivance as a defining characteristic of Indigenous peoples and challenges colonial narratives of land and history. My focus on borders illuminates Erdrich's novels as damning indictments of the US government's attempts to dispossess, exploit and erase Native American peoples, but also as novels of hope and strength.

I have also considered the border as an abstract epistemological construct, imposing linear and hierarchical western thought and order onto Indigenous cultures previously defined by holism and fluidity. Without paying attention to these borders, our understanding of Indigenous and non-Native conceptions and histories of land is necessarily limited. My reading of borders in Erdrich's novels allows us to comprehend the differences between epistemological traditions of land, the respective trajectories of the development of these traditions, and, most importantly, the ways in which these traditions interact with and impinge upon each other. Therefore, this thesis reveals a significant network of connections between Ojibwe identity, sense of place and sovereignty and resistance to colonial narratives, structures and authority underpinning Erdrich's work.

In Part 1: "Theft of the sacred": Borders, Land and Cultures' I analysed the novels *Tracks* and *Four Souls*, presenting the establishment of localised colonial borders in the form of reservation and allotment boundaries as a microcosm of the parallel process of the establishment of state and national borders, signalling the consolidation of hegemonic settler colonisation. Focusing on the themes of surveying and construction in these novels, in Chapter 1 I analysed Erdrich's presentation of Mauser's mansion as an additional microcosm of the development of the settler

colonial US, fulfilling key aims of settler legitimacy and Indigenous erasure. I argued that Erdrich's depiction of Ojibwe vernacular landscape and engagement with traditional oral storytelling through Nanapush, Fleur and other characters' profound senses of place and rejection of colonial mapping and landscape demonstrates historical resistance to colonial authority and enduring Ojibwe sovereignty.

In Chapter 2 I expanded my examination of borders in *Tracks* and *Four Souls* to consider social and political institutions as extensions of colonial borders and manifestations of Euro-American epistemological hegemony. I argued that Erdrich's presentation of the family home, the government school, the Catholic Church and the tribal council illustrates the growing power of colonial patriarchy and capitalism in the early twentieth century United States. I explored the influence these institutions exert within spatial and cultural boundaries and found that Erdrich presents serious and irrevocable changes in Ojibwe senses of identity and place as the primary goal of these institutions, and that they are therefore implicated in the driving settler colonial process of Indigenous assimilation. I also found, however, that Erdrich portrays instances of defiant resistance to each of these institutions, countering dominant American cultural narratives, and suggests that long-term Ojibwe survivance and sovereignty shape Ojibwe interactions with them, colouring institutional boundaries as equally as illusory, arbitrary and illegitimate as imposed geographical borders. I concluded, therefore, that Erdrich's presentation of borders in these novels is deeply reflective of the agency and resistance which characterise Owens's frontier and Anzaldúa's *mestiza*.

In Part 2: "Creation, emergence, migration": Cycles and Survival' I explored the lasting impacts of disruption to Ojibwe senses of place and identity caused by the imposition of geographical, social and epistemological borders on and around the

reservation through Erdrich's engagement with the themes of home and mobility, and motherhood and water in the novels *The Bingo Palace*, *Love Medicine* and *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*. In Chapter 3 I discussed transmotion and grounded normativity as the defining principles of home and mobility in Erdrich's presentation of Anishinaabe tradition, and found that Erdrich presents Ojibwe and Euro-American approaches to home and mobility as fundamentally irreconcilable, leading to sustained power struggles between two opposing epistemologies. I argued that Erdrich presents Lipsha as a powerful descendant of Fleur Pillager who, as a deeply liminal, individualistic yet traditionalist character, who reconciles himself not with colonial authority but with Anishinaabe ideas of home and mobility, is positioned to take up Fleur's role as an archetypal warrior figure and pursue Ojibwe sovereignty in defiance of capitalist colonial hegemony.

In Chapter 4 I discussed Erdrich's presentation of Anishinaabe ideas about motherhood and water in relation to transmotion and survivance, arguing that the importance and power of motherhood and matriarchy in Anishinaabe tradition run counter to colonial patriarchy and that the temporal and spatial holism and fluidity associated with water in these novels defy Euro-American epistemological principles of linearity, hierarchy and fixity. I found, therefore, that Erdrich's alignment of water with Ojibwe motherhood illustrates the indivisibility of Ojibwe identity from land and the power inherent in and derived from Anishinaabe tradition. In a divergence from scholarly views on *Love Medicine*, I concluded that June leaves Lipsha in the earth's maternal waters, in safety and confidence, to begin a process of transition and transmotion that will lead him to his place in the tribe and in the land. I suggested that Lipsha's survival mirrors that of the tribe, reclaiming the fluidity of water, *mestiza* and

the reappraised frontier, rejecting the fallacy of the border, and proclaiming Ojibwe re-emergence in defiance of colonial hegemonic narratives.

In Part 3: “‘A tangle of red tape’: Permeability and Voice’ I connected my preceding discussions of Erdrich’s use of borders in earlier novels to the late twentieth century setting of *The Round House*. I investigated Erdrich’s presentation of the crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women in direct relation to reservation borders, the implications of this crisis for Ojibwe sovereignty, the relationship between survivance and trauma and possibilities for resistance within this context. In Chapter 5, I explored the parallel Erdrich draws between personal autonomy, tribal authority and self-determination as integral to sovereignty. I argued that Erdrich’s damning examination of the themes of justice and jurisdiction in reservation contexts demonstrates the inevitable, often deliberate failings in the United States’ treatment of Native peoples as ‘domestic dependent nations.’ I found that the novel highlights the extreme urgency of the need to recognise and facilitate greater Indigenous sovereignty, beginning with Native peoples’ empowerment to make and enforce law, exercise justice and reserve authority over Native lands.

In Chapter 6 I discussed Erdrich’s use of traditional oral storytelling in *The Round House* in relation to the theme of testimony, arguing that Erdrich’s presentation of storytelling in this novel reflects its importance throughout her oeuvre. I suggested that Erdrich’s exploration of traditional oral storytelling in relation, and contrast, to the vital acts of witnessing and giving testimony positions Native storytelling as inherently political, and that her critical portrayal of the infrastructure around testimony in the settler colonial context of the US legal and justice systems deprives Indigenous women of autonomy and Native nations of sovereignty. I found that, on a metatextual level, Erdrich calls attention to the decolonial import of her own

storytelling and, thereby, advocates for Indigenous voices and histories largely overwritten or occluded in US society. I concluded that the relationship between storytelling and justice in this novel indicates that Native sovereignty is indispensable to the pursuit of justice in the United States; thus, decolonial resistance must become an integral force within the US legal, justice and political systems.

This thesis represents a significant development in Erdrich criticism. While a number of scholars have discussed Erdrich's particular engagement with space, place and liminality in relation to Ojibwe and mixedblood identity, this thesis demonstrates that Erdrich's portrayals of place and identity are deeply, actively political. This thesis makes it clear that Erdrich's vernacular landscapes and explorations of Ojibwe experience and storytelling reflect not only a fascination with senses of place and identity, but an urgent and profound concern with Ojibwe survival, sovereignty and re-historicising the colonial past in order to understand intergenerational trauma and facilitate healing. It is my contention that my reading of borders in Erdrich's novels compels us to attend to her work as literary decolonial activism.

The field of Native studies has been indispensable as a grounding for my research. Erdrich centres themes and tropes of Anishinaabe spiritual traditions, stories and experiences throughout these novels. She consistently uses borders to set Anishinaabe approaches to history, land, sovereignty and healing in opposition to destructive and exploitative Euro-American social practices and governmental policies. Thus Erdrich's engagement with borders indicates that resolutions to issues and crises facing Indigenous peoples lie not in settler-orientated processes of assimilation or reconciliation, but in what Simpson terms "resurgence," in which sovereignty is not sought to be granted by colonial authority as a colonial concept, but rather in relation to the "new emergence" of Indigenous identity, traditional

relationships and communal power (*Dancing* 68). Erdrich's explorations of Anishinaabe concepts of place, time and identity demonstrate that this "new emergence" does not recognise colonial borders; indeed, Indigenous sovereignty depends upon the reclamation of Native peoples' traditional relationships with land, people and non-human life. Thus Indigenous sovereignty cannot be achieved within colonial constructs; yet, Erdrich insists, colonial constructs are powerless to destroy it. Thus, my study of Erdrich's use of borders draws upon settler colonial theory from an Indigenous-centred perspective. Similarly, while border studies has been crucial to my study, my methodology has entailed re-orientating concepts of the border from the Eurocentric, macro-focused view of westward expansion to the tribally-specific, local, community-focused perspective of grounded normativity.

My reading of borders in Erdrich's work has presented several openings for further research. Erdrich's presentation of gender fluidity in the characterisation of Father Damien and in archetypal figures like Fleur and Nanapush has been the subject of considerable attention, but my analysis of Erdrich's complex engagement with land and colonial institutions as gendered and impinged upon by borders invites further attention with regard to recent developments in queer Native studies and ecocriticism. Additionally, Erdrich's most recent novel, *Future Home of the Living God*, published too late for detailed consideration in this thesis, has signalled a further expansion of her literary scope and political engagement. In this novel, Erdrich explores the theme of exploitation of Indigenous women in relation to environmental disaster and oppressive government policies on women's reproductive rights and bodily autonomy. Erdrich's shift towards the relatively new genre of dystopian climate fiction invites further scholarship examining the intersections of Indigenous sovereignty, ecofeminism and climate activism in her work.

In conclusion, this thesis demonstrates that analysis of borders in Native literature is deeply enriched when set into historical and political theoretical context with reference to border studies and settler colonial theory. Such analysis of Erdrich's work reveals the social and cultural impact of living in an intranational borderland region as well as the multiple, damaging colonialist legacies embodied in Native reservations and their governance. My analysis of Erdrich's novels illustrates that reservation borders can be experienced as subjugating forces under which Native sovereignty is rarely fully exercised. However, my analysis also reveals a profound commitment to sovereignty and survival made possible by a continued traditional relationship with land. Erdrich's novels thus chime with Louis Owens's re-envisioned concept of the frontier, suggesting that a reclamation of history and recognition of the rights of Indigenous peoples to interact with land in traditional ways are vital features of the journey towards respect and protection for Indigenous sovereignty.

This thesis also makes clear the urgent need for greater recognition, protection and foregrounding of traditional Indigenous epistemologies in settler polities. Failings in the Canadian political process of reconciliation and US approaches to governance and jurisdiction expose the systematic suppression of Indigenous sovereignty in North America, leading to ongoing oppression, deprivation and endangerment of Native peoples. Erdrich's use of borders helps make a compelling case for much greater Indigenous representation and power over decision-making for issues including land use, citizenship, law-making and community services. Above all, Erdrich's use of borders in her novels illuminates important and continuing narratives which should be read and promulgated not only as counter-histories or counter-epistemologies but as foundational and integral to the land and peoples which make up North America. Erdrich's writing reminds us that colonial borders in the United States (and Canada)

are relatively recent, arbitrary constructs and that settler hegemony is the outcome of centuries of systematic genocide and oppression. Indigenous sovereignty, Erdrich demonstrates, both predates and survives colonial hegemony.

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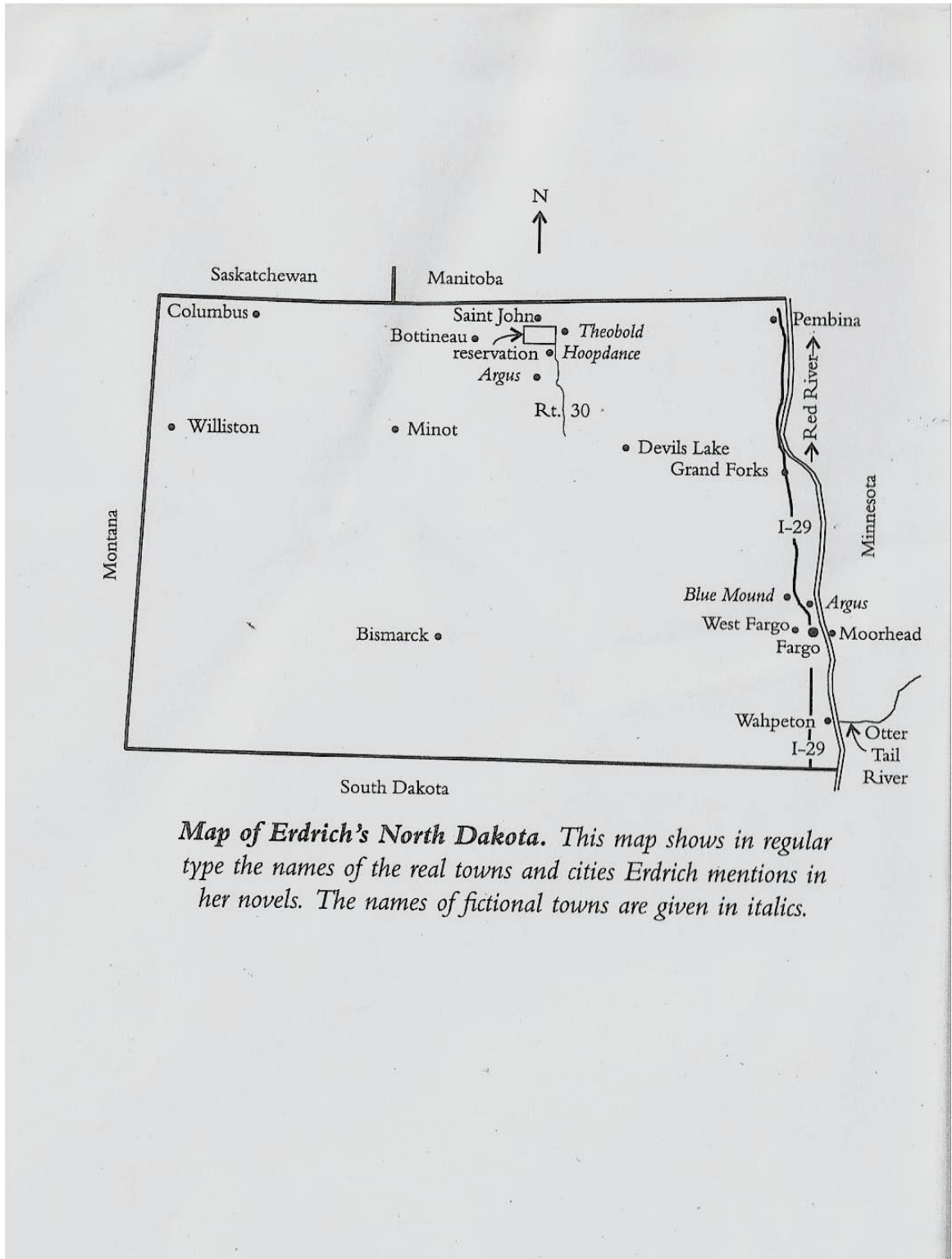
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Appendices

Appendix 1: Beidler and Barton's map



Map of Erdrich's North Dakota. This map shows in regular type the names of the real towns and cities Erdrich mentions in her novels. The names of fictional towns are given in italics.

Appendix 3: Thoreau's map of Walden

