

Ca' Foscari
University
of Venice

European Joint Master's Degree
in "English and American Studies"

Final Thesis

A Century of Somatic Sovereignty: The Female Body as Living Archive in Louise Erdrich's *Tracks* and *The Round House*

Supervisor
Prof. Elisa Bordin

Assistant supervisor
Dr. Nicole K. Konopka

Graduand
Elena Corti
Matriculation Number 889481

Academic Year
2025 / 2026

Table of Contents

Dichiarazione del ricorso a strumenti di Intelligenza Artificiale (IA) 5

Introduction 7

Chapter 1: Theoretical Framework – Toward Somatic Sovereignty 19

1.1 Literary Review: Native American Women's Bodies in Erdrich Scholarship 19

1.2 Somatic Sovereignty and Embodied Resistance: The Female Body as a Site of Colonial Violence and Indigenous Self-Assertion 22

1.3 The Jurisdictional Maze and the Legal Void: Analyzing the Systemic Failure of Justice on Reservation Lands 27

1.4 Affective and Spatial Resistance: Emotion, Homeplace, and the Body in Erdrich's Fiction 29

Chapter 2: *Tracks* – The Somatic Archive: Resistance, Silence and Self-Erasure. 33

2.1 Fleur Pillager as a Somatic Archive: The Body as a Site of Territorial Resistance 33

2.2. Beyond the Colonial Gaze: Non-Verbal Resistance and the Refusal of Representation 39

2.3 Somatic Self-Erasure and the White Gaze: Pauline Puyat as the Fragmented Archive 43

Chapter 3: *The Round House* – Bureaucratic Violence, Sacred Space, and the Quest for Justice 55

3.1 The Jurisdictional Maze and the Space of Exception: Federal Law and the "Legal Void" 56

3.2 The Inviolable Silence of Geraldine Coutts: The Body as an Archive of Persistent Sovereignty 61

3.3 Profaning the "Homeplace": The Round House as a Site of Desecrated Memory 66

3.4 The Limits of the Law and Vigilante Justice: Joe Coutts and the Burden of the Next Generation 70

Conclusion: A Century of Somatic Sovereignty – Fleur Pillager and Geraldine Coutts in Dialogue 79

4.1 Elemental Vengeance, Embodied Guilt: Two Somatic Responses to Violation 79

4.2 From Allotment to Jurisdiction: The Evolving Architecture of Dispossession 81

4.3 Unkillable Mothers: Motherhood as Somatic and Political Sovereignty 84

Works cited 89

Dichiarazione del ricorso a strumenti di Intelligenza Artificiale (IA)

La sottoscritta Elena Corti, matricola numero 889481, iscritta presso Ca' Foscari al corso di Laurea magistrale in "European Joint Master's Degree in English and American Studies," autrice della tesi di laurea "A Century of Somatic Sovereignty: The Female Body as Living Archive in Louise Erdrich's *Tracks* and *The Round House,*" relatrice Elisa Bordin, consapevole delle sanzioni previste dall'art. 76 del Testo unico, D.P.R. 28/12/2000 n.445, e della decadenza dei benefici prevista dall'art. 75 del medesimo Testo unico in caso di dichiarazioni false o mendaci, sotto la propria personale responsabilità ai sensi degli artt. 46 e 47 del D.P.R. 28/12/2000 n. 445,

DICHIARA

di aver fatto ricorso a tecnologie di intelligenza artificiale generativa per supportare alcuni aspetti della ricerca e della scrittura della tesi di laurea, in particolare:

- Strumenti di AI utilizzati*: Google Gemini (versione 3.1 Pro, rilasciata a febbraio 2026); Claude Sonnet 5, sviluppato da Anthropic, accessibile tramite l'interfaccia Claude.ai (versione rilasciata a giugno 2026).*

- Modalità di utilizzo: *come stimolo al ragionamento tramite domande socratiche e nella revisione e ottimizzazione di alcuni brani di testo per migliorare chiarezza e coerenza.*

- Sezioni/capitoli interessati: *tali strumenti sono stati utilizzati trasversalmente in tutte le sezioni della tesi di laurea.*

- Verifica dell'attendibilità: *le fonti bibliografiche e le citazioni utilizzate nella tesi sono state reperite, lette e verificate autonomamente attraverso la consultazione diretta dei testi primari e secondari originali, al fine di garantirne l'accuratezza e l'attendibilità.*

- *Ho utilizzato i due strumenti di intelligenza artificiale come ausilio al ragionamento critico, attraverso un dialogo che mi ha aiutato a chiarire e collegare in modo logico e coerente le idee sviluppate in ciascun capitolo. Gli strumenti sono stati inoltre impiegati all'occorrenza nella revisione stilistica dei testi, per migliorarne coerenza e scorrevolezza. La struttura argomentativa, l'analisi critica dei testi letterari, la ricerca bibliografica e la stesura finale restano interamente opera mia.*

DICHIARA INOLTRE

che tutto il materiale generato dall'IA è stato attentamente verificato, rivisto e rielaborato dall'autrice, che si assume la piena responsabilità per la qualità, l'accuratezza e l'integrità scientifica del lavoro.

Introduction

This research study is prompted by a simple observation: despite carrying immense cultural, political, and historical weight, Native American literature remains largely absent from most traditional literary studies and is often considered as a niche or secondary field rather than as a central part of U.S. literary and historical memory. Personally, I felt that this gap was worth addressing directly: not only for its deep influence on education and literature, but mostly because it points to something larger about how Native history itself has been recorded, transmitted, and, in many cases, withheld. I turn to Louise Erdrich's fiction, particularly her novels *Tracks* (1988)[1] and *The Round House* (2012)[2], to explore precisely this concern: how Native history is preserved, contested, and reclaimed through literature.

Undeniably, the marginal position that Native American literature occupies within the field of education cannot be separated from the way Native history has been documented more broadly. As scholar Joy Porter observes, "literature tells truths about the past that history cannot articulate" (2005, 39), implicitly making literature the vehicle that carries the emotional and psychological weight of colonization when official archives fail to do so. Additionally, Porter's statement is not to be interpreted as an abstraction, but as a claim grounded in the present material reality: Native communities today continue to face significantly higher rates of poverty, worse health outcomes, and other consequences that trace directly back to centuries of land dispossession and forced assimilation. Because official history has struggled to fully register this experience, literature has become not merely a supplement to that record, but, in many respects, a necessary corrective to it.

The increasing significance of Native American literature also shapes how it should be positioned and interpreted within broader literary studies. As scholar Deborah L. Madsen argues, the most fundamental aim of Native American literary scholarship should be to "promote the reading of Native American Literature as indigenous literature" in its own right, rather than, as she puts it, one of the "ethnic or multicultural 'branches' of the canonical U.S. literary tree" (Madsen 2016, 1). Elaborating on this same tree metaphor, Craig Womack

[1] *Tracks* was originally published in 1988; from now on, the date given here will be 2025, which refers to the large print edition (Thorndike Press) consulted for this study.
[2] *The Round House* was originally published in 2012; from now on, the date given here will be 2013, which refers to the Hachette Collections edition consulted here.

similarly argues that Native literatures should be treated as "the *tree*" itself (Womack 1999, as qtd. in Madsen 2016, 1) – rooted in their own history and not dependent on the mainstream canon for legitimacy. This distinction is highly significant, as it shapes how this research study approaches Erdrich's work, namely not as a minor variation within American fiction, but as writing that draws on the same language as the American literary canon while emerging from, and speaking back to, a distinct cultural and historical tradition.

Before turning to the historical record itself, it is first necessary to define the familiar image of the *Indian* that Native fiction systematically seeks to challenge. Within American popular culture, the image of "the Indian" was never truly associated with a person but with a concept. Specifically, scholar S. Elizabeth Bird traces this icon back to what historian Robert Berkhofer defined as the "White Man's Indian": a fictional figure shaped almost entirely by non-Native imagination and built to serve non-Native purposes rather than to reflect any actual Indigenous experience.

In turn, this fabricated image tended to split into two opposite but equally distorted versions: the "noble savage," admired for his "peaceful, mystical, spiritual" demeanor and his supposed closeness to nature and simplicity, and the "ignoble savage," often depicted and feared for being a violent, "hellish savage" (Bird 2018, 3). As divergent as these two images seem, they share the same basic function within what Bird terms the noble/ignoble savage dichotomy: they both position the Indian as the "quintessential Other, whose role is to be the object of the White colonialist gaze," rather than a subject in possession of their own voice or interiority (2018, 4). This objectifying gaze raises a deeper question about what makes any representation of Native Americans authentic in the first place – a complex and long-debated issue in postcolonial and Indigenous studies. Within this debate, Bird argues that authenticity has little to do with historical accuracy and is instead a matter of power: an image becomes authentic only once Native people themselves hold the power to define and use it, rather than having it defined for them by outsiders, however well-intentioned (Bird 2018).

This is precisely the reason why even a well-meaning depiction of Native Americans does not provide a solution to the issue of representation. As Bird argues, this "benign image is deeply impersonal and distanced, once again ignoring Indian people as individuals and allowing real Indian people no subjectivity" (Bird 2018, 11). This is exactly the space Native American literature should move towards: the aim should be to not simply challenge previous distorted depictions of Native history and identity, but to reclaim the interior, subjective

experience that popular stereotypes have often denied, thus replacing symbolic reduction with embodied presence.

This reclamation of presence, however, cannot be separated from the concrete historical conditions that produced these stereotypes in the first place, rooted, above all, in questions of land and law. To understand their significance within the novels discussed in this thesis, one must trace a framework that shaped the world Erdrich writes about. It must be noted that the legal relationship between Native nations and the U.S. federal government was deeply marked from the very beginning by what is often known as the *Marshall Trilogy*[3]*,* which, along with the Indian Removal Act of 1830, established the backdrop against which tribes would be forced to operate for the following two centuries. This framework did not simply limit Native sovereignty once; it allowed for a structure to be built, one that consistently restrained Indigenous self-determination.

From that moment onward, Native history was characterized by a series of increasingly aggressive policies. To start with, the Trail of Tears forcibly displaced entire nations from their homelands; then followed the Dawes Act of 1887, which broke up communally held tribal land into individual private plots. As Patrick Wolfe observes, in the half-century from 1881, Native-held land in the United States dropped from roughly 155 million acres to just over 52 million, marking the loss of nearly two thirds of the total land base within the span of a single lifetime (2006). The process of tribal land dispossession was framed, at the time, as a path toward civilization and private property; in practice, however, it soon revealed to be one of the fastest and most effective mechanisms of land transfer the federal government had ever devised (Wolfe 2006). Land seizure was soon accompanied by assimilation policies which, as Joy Porter explains, were aimed at "attacking Indian tribalism and Indian values at their core;" this process of deep cultural erasure was executed primarily through a "brutal educational program" and the introduction of a boarding school system specifically designed to annihilate Indigenous language, religion, and identity from an entire generation (2005, 52). Porter places further emphasis on the brutality of reservation

[3] The Marshall Trilogy consists of three foundational U.S. Supreme Court decisions authored by Chief Justice John Marshall: *Johnson v. M'Intosh* (1823), which ruled that private citizens could not purchase land from Native Americans; *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia* (1831), which defined tribes as "domestic dependent nations"; and *Worcester v. Georgia* (1832), which established that distinct tribal nations possess inherent sovereign authority within their boundaries, free from state jurisdiction. Together, these cases formed the basis of the federal-tribal trust relationship.

education, noting that it was fundamentally built upon Richard H. Pratt's infamous principle to "Kill the Indian and save the man" (Porter 2005, 52).

This period of violent confrontation between Native nations and the U.S. government reached one of its most devastating climaxes at the massacre of Wounded Knee in 1890, an atrocity that claimed the lives of nearly 300 Native Americans, and as such, "retains great significance within Indian life and literature" (Porter 2005, 54). This physical brutality is often said to terminate symbolically in 1890, when the U.S. Census Bureau declared the American frontier closed. It could be argued, however, that for Native nations, this so-called closure did not facilitate any kind of relief; instead, it marked a turning point after which containment replaced expansion as the primary tool of dispossession, thus confining Indigenous communities within ever-shrinking reservation boundaries.

Some might interpret this sequence of historical events as isolated occurrences, yet, as Wolfe observes, this is far from being the case: settler colonialism is best understood as ongoing rather than concluded, since "invasion is a structure not an event" (2006, 388). In other words, dispossession should be read as a perpetual process that simply shifts into new forms. The Dawes Act and the allotment system previously discussed – together with practices like blood quantum classification and continued boarding school enrollment – are not isolated policies, but rather different expressions of the same underlying logic: a "logic of elimination" that adapts itself to each new historical moment (Wolfe 2006, 387).

Far from ending with the frontier's closure, this same logic persisted, resurfacing in the mid-twentieth century through Termination and Relocation policies, which forced Native people off reservation land and attempted, once again, to erode tribal identity into the broader American population. However, this historical period was also characterized by the rise of organized Native resistance; movements such as Red Power and the American Indian Movement (AIM) directly challenged the implementation of these policies, ultimately advocating for Indigenous self-determination rather than assimilation (Porter 2005).

It is across the span of these centuries that the primary concept of this research study begins to take shape: survivance. The term itself is not new – the *Oxford English Dictionary* traces it back to the seventeenth century, although by the twentieth century it had become rare enough to be considered almost obsolete (Donahue 2019). It was scholar Gerald Vizenor who resuscitated the term in his 1999 collection *Manifest Manners* for the purpose of choosing a word whose meaning had not yet been absorbed by familiar language. According to the scholar, survivance can be understood as:

[…] an active sense of presence, the continuance of native stories, not a mere reaction, or a survivable name. Native survivance stories are renunciations of dominance, tragedy, and victimry. Survivance means the right to succession or reversion of an estate, and in that sense, the estate of native survivancy. (Vizenor 1999, as qtd. in Donahue 2019, 7)

Most importantly, as Donahue observes, Vizenor defines survivance both by what it is and by what it explicitly refuses to be. It is neither simply survival, nor mere endurance, and cannot, crucially, be reduced to victimhood (2019). The concept of survivance directly challenges two of the most persistent narrative traps Native peoples have historically been placed into: the tragic, defeated victim on the one hand, and the noble savage frozen in an idealized past on the other. Survivance, instead, insists on actively asserting presence and continuity in the face of a history that has repeatedly tried to erase both (2019).

The same reclaiming of Indigenous presence ultimately reaches into the very language through which Native stories are told. As scholar Joseph Coulombe observes, language itself became a further battleground for survivance throughout Native history (2011). English initially served primarily as an instrument of dispossession: it was the language of treaties, deeds, and legal documents that facilitated the seizure of Native land. Non-native writers furthered this harm, employing the same language to "consistently distort[ ] indigenous peoples in poetry, periodicals, and fiction" (Coulombe 2011, 19). Over time, however, Native writers reversed this dynamic, appropriating English as thoroughly as it had once been used against them – turning the very language of conquest into a tool of self-representation and survivance.

It is within this same spirit of resistance and continuity that Native American literature entered what is often defined as the Native American Renaissance: the term generally describes the era beginning in 1969, when N. Scott Momaday became the first Native writer to win the Pulitzer Prize for fiction (Donahue 2019). Crucially, this moment marked a turning point: Native authors were no longer simply responding to inaccurate representations imposed from the outside but actively shaping their own literary tradition on their own terms.

This is precisely the same tradition Louise Erdrich would enter and contribute to transforming in the decades that followed. Similarly to other writers who are said to be constructing survivance narratives, Erdrich's work is not limited to the narration of stories

featuring Native characters: she deliberately replaces the stereotypical image of Native identity that has long dominated popular imagination with figures whose presence is active, embodied, and irreducible to victimhood. Central to this refusal is the concept of *somatic sovereignty*, developed across the following chapters – a form of Indigenous self-determination exercised through the body itself when colonial legal institutions fail to recognize or protect Native lives. Developed more fully in Chapter One, this framework allows this study to read the female body in Erdrich's fiction as the ultimate site of resistance against jurisdictional and historical erasure.

Situating Louise Erdrich within this tradition of survivance also means reconsidering where, exactly, her work belongs within American literature – a matter that requires moving beyond any single identity category used to frame her writing. In this sense, scholar Thomas Austenfeld makes a compelling observation, arguing that Erdrich should be approached not only as a Native American writer, but equally as an American one; her work should be read considering the author's background and identity, but above all, it should be positioned in dialogue with the broader tradition of American literature itself. As he puts it, "Louise Erdrich is as clearly an American author as she is a Native American author" (Austenfeld 2012, 68).

Crucially, this claim is not meant as an invitation to dilute or override Erdrich's Indigenous identity. Rather, Austenfeld emphasizes that identity labels often associated with Erdrich's literary persona – "Native American", "woman writer", "German American", "Catholic novelist" (2012, 73) – while accurate, remain "necessary but insufficient characteristics" on their own because, if considered individually, they can only partially capture the uniqueness of her writing (2012, 75). No single label does justice to the complexity of her literary persona, and only when considered together do they "feed her identity as an American writer" (2012, 75).

In light of this, Austenfeld specifically places Louise Erdrich in conversation with two other major American writers who achieved a similar literary reputation: Toni Morrison and Flannery O'Connor. Both authors wrote from ethnically marginal positions – Morrison from within African American experience, O'Connor from within a specifically Catholic, Southern worldview – yet, over time, both were widely recognized as central figures of American literature, not despite these positions, but through them (2012). As Austenfeld notes, Morrison in particular "has shed the limitations of the label 'African American writer' precisely by enlarging what that term can encompass" (2012, 72). Austenfeld's broader

argument suggests that Erdrich follows a similar trajectory: her work should not be merely regarded as a regional or ethnic subcategory of American fiction, but as one of its defining voices.

While Austenfeld situates Erdrich within the broader field of American literature, I contend that it is equally important to place her within the more specific lineage of previous Native American writers, whose nostalgic, rooted mode of storytelling differs from Erdrich's own hybrid and unresolved literary voice.

Erdrich's writing reveals this same underlying quality: she is neither fully confined to a single identity category, as Austenfeld argues, nor does she align exactly with the nostalgic, rooted storytelling mode of the preceding generation of Native writers. Her literary voice emerges, instead, as defined precisely by this unresolved, in-between position – one that treats hybridity not as a weakness or a compromise, but as its own distinct source of narrative strength.

Among Erdrich's literary production, her two novels at the center of this study are *Tracks* (2025) and *The Round House* (2013). I deliberately chose to explore these specific literary works not only for their individual literary merit, but mostly for the way they function together: both are set within Erdrich's recurring, broader fictional Ojibwe reservation universe in North Dakota, yet the stories unfold nearly a century apart. This shared setting allows for the same community and legal landscape to be traced across two radically different moments of colonial history. Read in a comparative light, the novels trace a single, evolving story of dispossession: from the early twentieth-century seizure of tribal land under the Allotment Act to the jurisdictional voids that continue to leave Native women unprotected today. It is precisely this combination – a shared fictional world spanning a century of dispossession – that makes the two novels particularly suited to the combined analysis this thesis undertakes.

Tracks, the earlier of the two novels, is narrated through two alternating voices: Nanapush, an elder member of the Anishinaabe community, who addresses his account of events directly to his granddaughter Lulu, and Pauline Puyat, a young mixed-blood woman whose perspective grows increasingly unreliable with the progression of the story. The narrative is set in the early twentieth century: specifically, it portrays the historical period when the U.S. government consistently enacted a long and invasive process of land dispossession, actively pressuring Native communities to surrender their territory.

The novel opens with a tragic preamble: an epidemic of consumption has wiped out most of the tribe, including the Pillager family, leaving only young Fleur Pillager barely alive in the family's remote cabin by Lake Matchimanito. Nanapush rescues her, and the two mourn the death of their loved ones together. Fleur eventually returns alone to her cabin, refusing to abandon her land despite growing pressure from the government and suspicion from her own community, who increasingly considers her dangerous because of her connection to the supernatural lake spirit Misshepeshu.

In order to earn money for her land's tax debt, Fleur travels to the nearby town of Argus, where she finds work at a butcher shop and wins repeatedly in a poker game against a group of local white men. Suspicious and humiliated by her uncanny success, the men eventually attack and rape her. Pauline, who works alongside Fleur, witnesses the assault yet does nothing to intervene. Soon afterward, a violent storm strikes the town, and the only victims of this natural catastrophe are Fleur's attackers, who are then found frozen inside the shop's meat locker. While the community believes Fleur summoned the storm through supernatural means, the novel also suggests a more concrete explanation, later hinting that it was Pauline who locked the freezer door – leaving the true cause of the men's deaths deliberately ambiguous.

Soon after her arrival back at the reservation, Fleur forms a relationship with a young man named Eli Kashpaw and gives birth to a daughter, Lulu, in a moment of chaos and danger when a drunken bear wanders into her cabin. Meanwhile, Pauline's own storyline grows darker: she becomes increasingly obsessed with Catholicism and subjects herself to extreme forms of self-punishment. She also orchestrates a manipulation that leads Eli to sleep with another young woman, Sophie, using a love charm obtained through Native medicine. Eventually, Pauline becomes pregnant, attempts to end the pregnancy and, after giving birth, abandons the child, Marie.

As the story progresses, the whole Chippewa community faces growing desperation over unpaid land taxes. During this particularly harsh time, Fleur suffers further loss when she enters into premature labor with her second child; during this crucial moment, she steps into the spiritual world by traveling to the land of the dead to gamble for the lives of both her newborn and Lulu, who has become lost in a storm. Fleur is able to save Lulu yet sacrifices her newborn. Simultaneously, Pauline's psychological unraveling reaches its climax: having persuaded herself that she is driving evil away, embodied in the supernatural lake monster, she ultimately kills a man, Napoleon Morrissey. In the aftermath of the killing, Pauline

formally joins a convent, adopting the name Sister Leopolda and fully severing herself from her Native identity and past.

In the novel's final scenes, Nanapush and Fleur's family discover that the tax money meant to save both the Kashpaw and Pillager allotments was barely sufficient to save one allotment – and it was spent, without Fleur's knowledge, on the land that is not hers. With the loss of her land, Fleur is left with no legal claim to her home, which is sold to a lumber company. When the loggers arrive to force her off the land entirely, Fleur responds with one final act of defiance, bringing down the trees surrounding her cabin before finally leaving the reservation on her own terms. In the meantime, Lulu is sent away to a government boarding school, thus setting the stage for Nanapush's efforts, in the novel's closing pages, to bring her home.

The Round House opens nearly a century later within the same fictional reservation but with a very different form of crisis, namely the failure of law itself to protect Native American people. The story is narrated by a retrospective narrator, Joe Coutts, who recalls the events of a single summer which forced him to step prematurely into the adult world when he was just thirteen years old. The novel begins with Joe and his father Bazil, a tribal judge, growing anxious when Joe's mother, Geraldine, fails to return home. They eventually find her in her car, covered in blood and vomit and smelling of gasoline. Geraldine has, indeed, been subjected to a violent rape and an attempted murder. In the weeks that follow, however, Geraldine refuses to provide details about the assault, despite knowing the identity of her attacker.

As Geraldine exiles herself to the silence of her bedroom, Joe becomes increasingly frustrated by the lack of progress in the pursuit of justice for his mother. Together with his friends Cappy, Zack, and Angus, he sets out on his own amateur investigation, searching the reservation's Round House, the site of the attack, for clues. The boys' investigation briefly leads them to suspect the local Catholic priest, Father Travis, before Bazil's own inquiry turns toward a different suspect: Linden Lark, a non-Indian man with a documented history of hostility toward Geraldine's family. During his search for clues, Joe stumbles upon a large sum of money hidden inside a doll which he pulled from the reservation lake; as it later emerges, the money belongs to a missing young woman named Mayla Wolfskin.

Eventually, Geraldine decides to break her silence and, not without fright, recounts the events of that terrible day: she had gone to retrieve a case file from her office, where she worked as a tribal official. There, she was abducted, taken to the Round House, and violently

raped; at the same site, her attacker was also holding Mayla Wolfskin and her infant daughter hostage. Despite being in terrifying conditions, Geraldine managed to create a distraction and narrowly escape before her perpetrator could set her on fire. As the investigation continues, Joe learns that Mayla's baby was discovered abandoned, and that South Dakota's governor, Curtis Yeltow – who had fathered the child during an affair with Mayla while she was still underage – has attempted to adopt her through legal means. Geraldine, who had initially withheld crucial information out of fear for her own safety, only agrees to provide her testimony once she is certain the child is protected from Yeltow's claim.

Regardless of the mounting evidence against Linden Lark, the case against him collapses: because the Round House is characterized by a tripartite jurisdiction – tribal, state, or federal – and no one can truly determine where precisely the crime took place, no authority is able to prosecute Lark, who is eventually released. Joe is enraged by the government's failure to pursue justice for his mother, as Bazil explains that this same jurisdictional maze has historically stripped tribal courts of any real power to prosecute non-Native offenders. Shortly afterward, Bazil and Joe encounter Linden in public and attack him; in the aftermath of this incident, Bazil suffers a heart attack and is hospitalized.

Geraldine confesses to Joe her resolute intention to kill Lark herself, in response to all the injustice he has inflicted on their family. Fearing that Lark will kill his mother first if she attempts this herself, Joe resolves to act before she can. Having learned of wiindigoo justice from his grandfather Mooshum – a traditional Anishinaabe concept concerning the killing of a person possessed by an evil, cannibalistic spirit – Joe comes to frame his intended act of vengeance through this same lens. With the help of his friend Cappy, Joe learns to use a rifle, and the two teenagers begin tracking Linden's daily routine, eventually ambushing him near a golf course. Joe shoots Linden but fails to kill him; it is Cappy himself, who has secretly followed Joe out of concern for his safety, who gives Lark the ultimate *coup de grâce*. The two boys then flee the crime scene, dispose of the weapon and construct an alibi, while Linden's death remains unsolved.

The novel's final pages depict Joe as someone who is left privately tormented by guilt and recurring nightmares in the aftermath of the killing. Shortly afterward, having been drinking heavily, the boys are involved in a serious car accident while driving to Montana with Cappy and their friends to visit Cappy's girlfriend. Zack and Angus are badly injured, while Cappy is found lifeless. The novel ends on a sorrowful note, with Joe, Geraldine, and

Bazil driving home from the police station in silence, marked permanently by the accumulated losses of that single summer.

Having established both novels' plots, the remainder of this introduction outlines the theoretical approach and structure that guide the analysis to follow. As previously stated, this research study approaches the Native American female body as a living archive – a site that does not merely record historical trauma passively but actively defies and reshapes it. To this end, the thesis draws on a combination of theoretical frameworks. It engages with the biopolitics of Michel Foucault and Giorgio Agamben, Patrick Wolfe's theorization of settler colonialism, and Gayatri Spivak's concept of epistemic violence, alongside Sara Ahmed's work on the cultural politics of emotion, bell hooks's concept of homeplace, and Indigenous theories of sovereignty and survivance. These frameworks, which are developed more fully in Chapter One, together ground this thesis's central argument.

Specifically, the analysis is organized into four chapters: the first one provides insight into the theoretical foundation of the study, examining how the Indigenous female body becomes a site where power is both exercised and resisted. The second chapter focuses on a close reading of *Tracks* (2025), focusing on Fleur Pillager's body as a public, ecological form of resistance against land dispossession. The third chapter examines *The Round House* (2013), tracing how Geraldine Coutts's body serves instead as a private, restorative archive within a modern legal system defined by jurisdictional failure. The fourth and conclusive chapter brings the two novels into direct comparison, demonstrating that, across the century separating them, the Indigenous female body remains the site where the truth of colonial trauma is preserved – resisting the fragmentation and distortion it undergoes within official historical narratives.

Chapter 1: Theoretical Framework – Toward Somatic Sovereignty

1.1 Literary Review: Native American Women's Bodies in Erdrich Scholarship

Born in 1954, Louise Erdrich entered a Native American literary landscape that had been fundamentally redefined by the cultural renaissance of the late 1960s and 1970s. While authors of that preceding generation responded to cultural erasure primarily through the nostalgic recovery and preservation of lost oral traditions, Erdrich marked a significant departure from this trajectory by pushing beyond this retrospective approach. Her writing resists both nostalgic immersion in native roots and uncritical alignment with mainstream literary conventions, engaging instead with the hybrid, often fractured realities of historical and contemporary Native life. This dynamic tension is the driving force behind the two novels central to this thesis, which together trace a century-long arc of colonial violence and resistance. *Tracks* (1988), set on a North Dakota Anishinaabe reservation in the early 1910s, centers on the systemic dispossession of Native lands through the resilient figure of Fleur Pillager, whose bodily defiance challenges land allotment. *The Round House* (2012) shifts the focus to the contemporary era, exploring the aftermath of a brutal sexual assault on Geraldine Coutts and the jurisdictional voids that leave Native American women legally unprotected. Erdrich's ability to navigate the complex intersections of Native and settler-colonial systems stems directly from her own background. The author writes, in fact, from the productive tension between her Chippewa and German heritage. While the Introduction situated Erdrich's bicultural identity within the broader question of her position in the American literary canon, this section turns to how that same tension directly shapes the formal and narrative strategies of her fiction. As Daniela Daniele observes, both Erdrich's personal life and her work are deeply shaped by these dual cultural spheres which, rather than merely coexisting, "constantly interact" to provide the foundational frame for her narratives (1992, 43). While recent scholarship has rightly moved beyond the reductive image of Erdrich as a "survivor of an extinguished race", her work equally resists being read as a simple combination of German and Native American cultures (43). Instead, she skillfully positions herself at the intersection of these backgrounds to achieve what Daniele describes

as a "*métis* writing form" (49), one that, as the scholar argues, reflects a "dynamic but quite profound sense of her cultural background" (45), distinguishing her work from the previous generation of Native American writers as well as the more postmodern ironies of authors like Gerald Vizenor. Furthermore, this *métis* position allows Erdrich to portray the complex "dilemma of her bicultural identity" (49) through the creation of "cross-cultural figures" (43). More specifically, these characters inhabit a dynamic space where Western traditions and tribal lore constantly negotiate, reflecting the "bi-cultural, transitional identity" of contemporary Native communities (44).

This bi-cultural negotiation is widely seen across Erdrich's literary production, particularly through her recurrent adoption of a polyphonic narrative structure. Through the intertwining of diverse personal narratives, Erdrich demonstrates that tribal identity is a communal construct rather than an individual phenomenon, generating what Daniele characterizes as a "decentered space of memoirs," which mirrors tribal epistemology (1992, 46). Because narrative authority is distributed among multiple voices, the form of her novels aligns with the oral tradition, where truth emerges from a collective web of stories.

However, in the two novels central to this study, Erdrich deliberately narrows this polyphonic focus. While her early works from the so-called *Love Medicine* tetralogy – such as *Love Medicine* and *The Beet Queen* – feature an extensive chorus of voices, in *Tracks* the perspective is reduced and split between two characters, namely Nanapush and Pauline. In this case, the oral tradition is directly embedded in the narrative structure: as Mrak observes (2022), Nanapush addresses his story directly to his granddaughter Lulu, thus performing an act of lineage-keeping. Through this second-person narration, Nanapush seeks to reclaim tribal history from colonial distortion, presenting the story as a living inheritance for the next generation. Similarly, in *The Round House*, the author relies on the single, retrospective voice of Joe Coutts. By shifting from a broad communal tapestry of voices to a more limited number of witnesses, the author ultimately deepens the exploration of a singular, central trauma. In *The Round House*, this transition to a single person retrospective allows the author to explore what Mariani (2024) identifies as a complex moral and temporal distance: the adult Joe reflects on his younger self, emphasizing the gravity of the legal failures and the lasting impact of the crime on the family dynamics.

This narrative shift toward a more concentrated focus fundamentally serves a specific analytical purpose: to center the female body as the silent, yet foundational, archive around which the stories of Fleur Pillager and Geraldine Coutts revolve. In both novels, the body is

presented as a site of profound paradox and resistance, far exceeding its status as a physical entity. In *Tracks*, Fleur Pillager's physical presence embodies a form of resistance that other characters struggle to define. Drawing on Mrak's analysis, Fleur occupies a space of "liminal femininity" (2022, 220) which positions her on the threshold between the human and the spirit world, the tribal and the colonial. Mrak further identifies the portrayal of Fleur's body through "monstrous" or "animalistic" imagery as an act of deliberate subversion of the "social order" that seeks to subjugate Native American women (2022, 214; 220). Fleur's physical self, situated within this liminal state, becomes a sovereign record of resistance against the "social changes enforced by capitalist patriarchy" (Mrak 2022, 214). Her body does not simply endure history; it stores a form of power and memory that colonial language cannot categorize or erase.

Similarly, in *The Round House*, Geraldine Coutts's body becomes emblematic of the historical trauma perpetrated on Indigenous people within a fragmented legal landscape. Following her assault, Geraldine retreats to the silence of her bedroom and to "the oblivion of sleep" (Carden 2018, 100); yet her withdrawal into silence should not be misinterpreted as mere passivity or defeat. Instead, as Carden argues, through her decision to take refuge within the "dark silence of her bedroom" (2018, 99), Geraldine establishes a temporary sanctuary. While others around her perceive this silence as a severing of spirit from body, it actually functions as a prelude to *Native survivance* – "a concept Ojibwe writer and scholar Gerald Vizenor uses to indicate modes and means of survival that result in something more than simply or only basic bodily subsistence" (Carden 2018, 98). Her refusal to speak serves as an "active presence" (Carden 2018, 98), through which she resists being reduced to a mere victim in a flawed legal system. Geraldine's body thus becomes a *living archive* of a crime that the American law fails to punish; her physical state stores the truth of the jurisdictional void (Mariani 2024). In both cases, the body functions as a primary record of Native American resilience and sovereignty, bridging the gap between the individual experience of violence and the broader history of colonial dispossession.

The intersection of bodily memory and institutional failure is where I identify a critical gap in current scholarship. While several critics have focused on Erdrich's account of Native American history and law (Mariani 2024; Carden 2018), and others have explored the role of the body and gender in her earlier works (Mrak 2022, Ziarkowska 2020), no study has yet brought these two strands into direct comparative dialogue across both novels. To address this gap, my dissertation specifically explores how the female body acts as a connective thread

between the land-based dispossession of the early twentieth century and the jurisdictional "voids" of the present day. I advance the framework of "somatic sovereignty"[4], which I define as a form of Indigenous self-determination and authority actively inscribed and exercised through the physical body when colonial legal institutions fail to recognize or protect Native lives. By applying this lens to the physical archives of *Tracks* and *The Round House*, I demonstrate how the female body serves as the ultimate site of autonomy against jurisdictional overreach.

1.2 Somatic Sovereignty and Embodied Resistance: The Female Body as a Site of Colonial Violence and Indigenous Self-Assertion

To understand how Erdrich positions the physical self as a site of historical record, it is necessary to establish the specific epistemological and biopolitical framework used to marginalize and regulate physical existence. Among the relevant theoretical approaches, Fiorenzo Iuliano's analysis in "Sovversioni materiche. Corpi e politiche del corpo nella teoria culturale contemporanea" (2006) is particularly relevant for this research study. Iuliano explores the historical exclusion of the body within Western epistemological traditions, dating back to René Descartes' *Discours de la méthode* (1637). Drawing on these traditional readings, Iuliano identifies the modern subject as a "disembodied" entity, which is defined by a universal rationality that is fundamentally abstracted from the "contingency" of physical existence (2006, 7, my translation). However, as the scholar observes, this philosophical consideration is not merely a matter of theory: it carries significant political and social weight. When physical existence is rendered epistemically irrelevant and abstracted, the body is consequently marked as something other (Iuliano 2006). This epistemic void facilitates the assumption that the body is something which can be controlled, appropriated, and silenced without epistemic consequence; this phenomenon particularly targets marginalized or vulnerable bodies – those marked by gender, race, or colonization – which are stripped of their epistemic authority. This enforced separation of mind from body thus

[4] To my knowledge, the term "somatic sovereignty" has not yet been previously developed as a critical framework within literary, postcolonial, or Native American studies. The concept I propose here draws on existing theoretical frameworks – namely Foucault's biopolitics, Agamben's bare life, Spivak's epistemic violence, and Mbembe's necropolitics – to articulate a historically grounded form of Indigenous political resistance exercised through the individual body.

enables the exploitation of the physical self.

In this analysis of Western epistemological traditions, Iuliano draws particular attention to Michel Foucault's exploration of the "history of the body," which is, in the scholar's terms, crucial for the understanding of modernity and its dynamics (2006, 11, my translation).[5] More specifically, as Foucault illustrates in *Discipline and Punish* (1975), the history of bodies and the history of power are closely intertwined: historically, each ruler represented the physical embodiment of the state itself, thereby enhancing the physical existence with a deep metaphorical and symbolical significance (Foucault 1975; as discussed in Iuliano 2006, 12). Consequently, any crime that threatened the integrity of the state was perceived as a perpetration of violence against the ruler himself, demanding a public manifestation of punishment (Foucault 1975). As Foucault argues, by inflicting torture, execution or other forms of castigation on the condemned subject's body, the sovereign re-established his power and authority over citizens. Thus, the body was inscribed within a system of control through bodily punishment. This logic of bodily inscription evolves, as Foucault argues, into the modern institutional network of control, marking the emergence of a new historical dynamic: biopolitical power (1975, as discussed in Iuliano 2006, 13). Specifically, this form of authority shifts away from spectacular bodily torture and is established through the implementation of more meticulous regulations and direct supervision of the subject. According to Foucault, modern biopolitics ultimately finds its exemplary expression in the concept of prison, which operates through a gradual seeping into the individual's physical existence, effectively taming and normalizing bodies through the subtle mechanisms of discipline, surveillance and scientific prescription (Foucault 1975; see also Iuliano 2006, 13). The body is, therefore, subject to a higher authority which normalizes and inscribes it within systems of power. While Foucault's framework originates in the European institutional and historical context, it becomes a crucial lens for analyzing the violence perpetrated on Indigenous communities when situated within settler-colonial studies. Rather than a concluded era of physical conquest, colonial power operates precisely as an ongoing biopolitical governance which relies on surveillance, classification and legal regulation. This continuity echoes Patrick Wolfe's argument that settler invasion persists as an ongoing structural condition rather than a single historical event, sustained by a logic of

[5] While a broader discussion of Foucault's theory falls outside the immediate purpose of this work, this study strategically relies on Iuliano's (2006) critical synthesis as an effective tool to analyze how biopolitical regulations target and reshape marginalized bodies.

elimination that requires continuous systemic management of the population (Wolfe 2006). Scott Lauria Morgensen extends this framework by adapting Foucault's biopolitics and Agamben's account of the state of exception to the settler state: he demonstrates that modern colonial authority depends on the ongoing regulation, and containment of Indigenous bodies, territories, and even genealogical kinship (Morgensen 2011).

Echoing the path charted by Foucault, Giorgio Agamben, in *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (1995), builds upon the biopolitical framework to introduce two interconnected concepts: *bare life* and the *homo sacer*. Agamben defines *bare life* as human existence reduced strictly to its biological dimension, namely human life stripped of all political and legal constraints rendered unprotectable by the state (Agamben 1995, as discussed in Iuliano 2006, 13). The *homo sacer* is the figure who embodies this condition: drawn from archaic Roman law, it designates the person who can be killed without the act constituting murder, thus being expelled from both human and divine law. These are not separate ideas but two faces of the same mechanism: the sovereign decides who counts as a full political subject and who is reduced to *bare life*, and it is precisely this decision that lays the foundation for political power itself. Achille Mbembe crucially extends this paradigm into the colonial sphere in "Necropolitics" (2003). If Agamben illustrates how sovereign power produces bare life, Mbembe demonstrates that within colonial frameworks, the ultimate expression of sovereignty lies in the power over life and death itself. Within the colony – which operates as the ultimate site of exception outside the law in Mbembe's reading – colonial sovereignty determines who is regulated in life while actively exposing colonized populations to systemic vulnerability and to what Agamben terms bare life. This combined framework becomes devastatingly literal when applied to the legal condition of Native American women as portrayed in Erdrich's work. As Mariani (2024) demonstrates, Geraldine Coutts cannot be protected by tribal courts following *Oliphant v. Suquamish* – the Supreme Court ruling that stripped tribal nations of criminal jurisdiction over non-Native perpetrators – and she is effectively abandoned by federal jurisdiction. Building upon this legal framework, I argue that the *homo sacer* is not merely a medieval abstraction, but the concrete legal status of Geraldine Coutts' body within a settler-colonial system that structurally produces its own jurisdictional gaps. Expelled from human law and reduced to bare life, her physical body is forced to absorb the crime precisely because the violence committed against her is rendered legally unpunishable.

If biopolitical power regulates which bodies are protected by the law, epistemic

violence determines which bodies are believed; I contend that it is at this specific intersection that the condition of Native American women becomes most acutely visible. While Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988), conceptualizes *epistemic violence* as the process through which colonialism denies subaltern bodies the right to produce valid knowledge or testimony, I expand this framework to argue that this silencing is fundamentally anchored in the physical self. The subaltern female body is where this phenomenon is most extreme: she is silenced twice, by both colonialism and patriarchy. This theoretical framework maps directly onto Erdrich's female protagonists: both Fleur and Geraldine are bodies whose testimony the dominant system refuses to process. Fleur's resistance has no language in the colonial legal framework. Geraldine's account of her assault exists, since she knows who attacked her, yet cannot be translated into prosecutable evidence because the jurisdictional void renders her testimony legally irrelevant. Consequently, by bringing Spivak into conversation within the text, I demonstrate that epistemic violence extends beyond cognitive or linguistic erasure to become a physical violation that directly assaults the somatic archive of Indigenous women.

This framework finds a specific application in Joanna Ziarkowska's (2020) book entitled *Indigenous Bodies, Cells, and Genes: Biomedicalization and Embodied Resistance in Native American Literature*, which explores the process of colonial biomedicalization on Native American bodies throughout history. In her analysis, the scholar demonstrates how Indigenous bodies carry "more than merely biochemical information," and are, rather, "inscribed with historical and cultural content" (Ziarkowska 2020, 14). Through the construction of the body as a *text* connected to "kin, community, traditional knowledge systems, and the land," Native American communities are able to produce narratives about the violence and subjugation perpetrated by colonial power (14). In the scholar's view, this phenomenon can be defined as "embodied resistance" (14): when the dominant system refuses to process Indigenous speech or testimony, the body itself becomes the primary archive of what cannot otherwise be recorded or heard. This study proposes to explore this double valence precisely: the body as both a target of colonial violence and an archive of survival.

Building upon Ziarkowska's (2020) model of embodied resistance alongside Foucault's (1975) and Agamben's (1995) biopolitical lens, the framework of somatic sovereignty allows me to move beyond viewing the female body in Erdrich's fiction as merely a passive site of historical trauma. Instead, I analyze the physical self as an active subversive archive that resists state-sanctioned violence and reclaims spatial autonomy. Specifically, somatic

sovereignty operates across three interconnected dimensions within the texts. First, the body serves as a *living archive*, in the sense that it testifies to historical violence and injustice when official records systematically erase or distort them. Furthermore, the body serves as a *site of resistance*, its physical presence alone challenging colonial control and preserving memory and trauma in ways that resist Western categorization. Finally, the Indigenous body represents an *act of sovereignty*: it asserts Indigenous identity and existence when the law attempts to render the subject as bare life or legally invisible. While the concept of somatic sovereignty applies broadly to Indigenous bodies, this thesis argues that the female body represents its most acute and contested site. As Iuliano (2006) notes through Spivak, the subaltern female body is silenced twice, both by colonialism and patriarchy, thus making it simultaneously the primary target of colonial violence and the most powerful site of resistance. Jill Doerfler reads survivance as "a reimagination of sovereignty that brings control to tribal nations and encompasses political status, resistance, cultural values, and traditions" (as cited by Carden 2018, 114). Drawing on this interpretation, this thesis extends the notion into the somatic register and recognizes the body as the primary record of Indigenous resilience and self-preservation, ultimately providing a counter-narrative to jurisdictional voids that characterize the colonial state.

It is through this tripartite framework that this study approaches the bodies of Fleur Pillager and Geraldine Coutts. In *Tracks*, somatic sovereignty manifests as bodily resistance to land dispossession: Fleur's physical presence is intrinsically linked to the Pillager territory and, as such, represents the last form of resistance that the law cannot expropriate. As Mrak argues, her sovereignty operates precisely through her position in a "liminal social place" (2022, 220) and her refusal to be fully categorized by the state. Conversely, in *The Round House*, somatic sovereignty finds expression through Geraldine's retreat into silence. Rather than a sign of passivity, this withdrawal exemplifies what Carden, drawing on Vizenor, identifies as *survivance*: an active "presence" (Vizenor 2008, as qtd. in Carden 2018, 98) that grants Geraldine "power, purpose, and agency," protecting her integrity from a failing jurisdictional system (Carden 2018, 98). Together, these two bodies trace a continuous arc of colonial violence and Indigenous resistance across a century of American history, providing the somatic evidence that the following chapters will examine in detail. To understand the systemic forces that necessitate this bodily resistance, however, one must first map the specific legal and historical architecture, namely the jurisdictional maze that renders these bodies unprotectable in the first place.

1.3 The Jurisdictional Maze and the Legal Void: Analyzing the Systemic Failure of Justice on Reservation Lands

Having established the female body as a primary site of sovereign resistance, this study now turns to the failures of the American legal system and the ways in which these conditions render Indigenous women systematically unprotected – conditions that Erdrich reproduces with devastating clarity in *The Round House*. As Mariani emphasizes, the novel belongs to the so-called "justice trilogy," a body of work that questions how justice can function when tribal self-government remains severely constrained (2024) – a claim this thesis will develop in greater depth in Chapter Three. More specifically, at the heart of his analysis lies a compelling claim: that the jurisdictional complexity surrounding Native American reservations does not represent a flaw in the American legal system, but one of its most enduring colonial features. In other words, the scholar suggests that this jurisdictional void represents a structural feature of settler-colonial sovereignty, designed to maintain Indigenous dispossession, all the while appearing neutral and procedural. As a result, the law is both omnipresent and absent within the space of the Native American reservation: it classifies and regulates Indigenous life, while simultaneously withholding the protections it claims to offer. According to Mariani (2024), this specific problematic is best exemplified in the dramatic personal story of Geraldine Coutts. While her assault represents the narrative core of the novel, the specific jurisdictional void stems from two crucial factors: Geraldine is a tribal enrollment official, and her attacker, Linden Lark, is a non-Native white man. The crime, moreover, is perpetrated in the proximity of the so-called Round House, "a ceremonial ground where tribal, state, and federal lands meet" (Mariani 2024, 10). Given that it is impossible to determine which legal authority has jurisdiction on this territory, the rapist cannot be formally prosecuted. It is precisely because of this deliberate jurisdictional maze that crimes against Native American women systematically occur and consistently fail to be brought to justice.

This jurisdictional void is the product of a specific historical and legal architecture – rooted in the *Marshall Trilogy*, and later reinforced by rulings such as *Oliphant v. Suquamish* (1978), which Chapter Three examines in detail. The consequences of these brutal court rulings are, however, still visible today: federal prosecutors decline to act in 67 percent of

sexual abuse cases reported on reservations, leaving no legal authority to pursue justice for Indigenous women. This systematic failure was forcefully highlighted by Erdrich herself in her 2013 *New York Times* op-ed, "Rape on the Reservation". The compelling story of Geraldine Coutts represents only one among the many examples of what Mariani identifies as the "toothless sovereignty" characterizing Native American communities under an absent and distorted law system (Mariani 2024, 10).

Furthermore, the jurisdictional void identified by Mariani (2024) functions as the concrete mechanism through which biopolitical power, as theorized previously, operates, rather than a mere legal technicality. In this reading, the reservation can be understood as a space of exception in Agamben's terms: a territory where the law exerts its power and jurisdiction, yet its protective function is deliberately suspended with matters of rape. As a result, the government reduces women like Geraldine Coutts to bare life – a condition the legal system tacitly sanctions by refusing to intervene. As Mariani (2024) observes, this jurisdictional gap is conveniently exploited by perpetrators like Linden Lark: he deliberately commits the crime at the Round House, knowing the law's absence represents his greatest shield. In this sense, the jurisdictional void is precisely how biopolitical power operates: it designates whose life is to be protected and whose body remains a site of legal abandonment.

When the official archive, such as police reports, court filings and witness statements, fails to produce justice or actively distorts the truth, the record of the crime does, however, not disappear; it migrates to the body itself. This is not a metaphorical claim but a structural one: when the state refuses to process Indigenous testimony, the body of the victim becomes the only site where the truth of the crime remains intact and unmediated by institutional failure. In this light, Geraldine's strategic silence is not a passive symptom of trauma but a rational political response: by devising "techniques of corporal empowerment", her body is transformed into what Ziarkowska calls "narratives of survivance" (2020, 15). By withholding her testimony and voice from a system she knows will fail or misinterpret her, she preserves the archive of the crime within herself, ensuring its integrity remains beyond the reach of the law. This is precisely what lies at the core of somatic sovereignty: the body becomes the ultimate site where truth is preserved when institutional archives abandon it.

While the jurisdictional void renders Indigenous women's bodies legally invisible, this invisibility paradoxically concentrates sovereign meaning within the physical self. When the law produces a vacuum of absence, the body responds and resists by preserving and constructing an undeniable presence or "creative stance" (Carden 2018, 98). It is through the

political and emotional dimensions of this presence that the following section will proceed, drawing on Sara Ahmed's theorization of emotions as social and political practices that define the boundaries of both the body and the land.

1.4 Affective and Spatial Resistance: Emotion, Homeplace, and the Body in Erdrich's Fiction

Having analyzed the role of the body in filling the vacuum produced by jurisdictional voids, this study will now explore the mechanisms through which the body actively resists biopolitical power. While representation of the body has been widely investigated in contemporary Indigenous fiction, Sara Ahmed's *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2014) offers an unexamined yet crucial theoretical lens for decoding Erdrich's texts. Challenging both individualist and collectivist models of emotion, which locate feelings either inside the subject or inside the crowd, Ahmed argues that emotions should not "be regarded as psychological states but as social and cultural practices" (2014, 9). In her view, emotions do not originate in the individual and then move outward, nor do they belong to groups as a form of collective identity; rather, "it is through emotions, or how we respond to objects and others, that surfaces or boundaries are made" (Ahmed 2014, 10). Emotions, in other words, are neither inside nor outside – they are what produces the boundary between inside and outside in the first place.

Ahmed's framework becomes particularly illuminating when applied to Geraldine's behavior following the sexual assault, as it reframes her pain, anger, and grief not as passive, private trauma, but as highly political acts. By retreating into the silence of her bedroom, Geraldine is not only attempting to survive the anguish that threatens to envelop her but is also actively drawing a boundary between her somatic integrity and a colonial legal system that has failed her. Furthermore, this affective boundary-making operates through what Ahmed describes as *stickiness,* namely the mechanism through which emotions *stick* to objects, which then become "saturated with affect, as sites of personal and social tension" (Ahmed 2014, 11). This directly applies to Fleur Pillager: by framing her body as dangerous, monstrous and within the realm of animality (Carden 2018), the colonial gaze thus projects emotions of disgust and fear onto it. Her personal story is one instance of a broader colonial pattern in which Native American bodies are rendered sticky sites of projected fear and

disgust, their perceived monstrosity a product of the colonial gaze rather than anything inherent to them.

Applying Sara Ahmed's approach to emotions as boundary-making practices provides a crucial tool for decoding how both of Erdrich's protagonists do not simply succumb to colonial control but rather weaponize their physical suffering into sovereign acts of resistance. In *Tracks,* Fleur's anger and bodily defiance against the dispossession of her ancestors' land are not to be understood merely as an isolated psychological reaction; on the contrary, her rage serves as an openly political gesture that *marks* the Pillager territory and challenges the legal boundaries of capitalist appropriation. Conversely, in *The Round House*, Geraldine's pain ceases to be a passive instance of trauma and functions as a structurally protective shield. Re-read through Ahmed's theoretical logic, this physical and emotional suffering establishes an affective boundary that protects her somatic integrity, thus effectively weaponizing her silence into a sovereign political practice (Carden 2018). Crucially, as Carden (2018) observes, Geraldine's withdrawal into the silence of her room is to be interpreted neither as a flight into victimhood nor as an abdication of her tribal duties and agency, but rather as a necessary sanctuary. By withholding her presence from a broken system, Geraldine's body silently becomes a site of somatic power until she can safely reclaim her spirit and her vital role as the guardian of her community's lineage.

This sanctuary, however, is not merely a psychological retreat: bell hooks' concept of the homeplace offers a theoretical framework for understanding it as a political space in its own right. In her essay "Homeplace: A Site of Resistance" (1990), hooks argues that domestic and private spaces are never politically neutral: they are sites where oppressed communities rebuild dignity, process collective wounds, and prepare resistance. The essay specifically addresses the meaning of homeplace from the perspective of enslaved African Americans and explores the crucial role of Black women in forging safe spaces where "all black people could strive to be subjects" and reclaim the dignity which was denied to them (hooks 1990, 42). As a result, homeplace has served historically as a site of resistance and liberation struggle amidst oppressive and dominant systems, standing in direct opposition to institutional abandonment (hooks 1990). hooks notes that these spaces need not be permanent or secure – even the most "fragile or tenuous" space can function as a homeplace if it enables free expression and resistance (1990, 42). The creation of a homeplace, however, is not to be understood as a historically isolated phenomenon – solely related to slavery in the United States – but is applicable to various contexts of oppression, as is the case for Geraldine Coutts

in *The Round House*. Her bedroom – the space of withdrawal where she seeks refuge – does not represent a place of surrender and pain, but a homeplace in hooks' sense. Echoing the experience of many Black women before her – while transposing this domestic strategy cross-racially to the Indigenous reservation landscape – Geraldine attempts to create a space where she can freely express her emotions, recover her true self and preserve the somatic archive of the crime, thus effectively resisting a brutal legal system that does not validate her. In a similar way, Lake Matchimanito and the surrounding untamed environment function as an extended homeplace for Fleur in *Tracks,* since it is the physical space through which Fleur rebuilds her sovereignty. hooks (1990) also argues that homeplaces are systematically targeted for violation and destruction precisely because they nurture communities of resistance. In *Tracks*, this structural violation manifests through the dual pressures of settler-colonial capitalism: the bureaucratic violence of state land taxes, on the one hand, and the ecological exploitation of commercial logging companies, on the other hand. By threatening to turn the untamed environment of Matchimanito into private, extractable property, the colonial system attempts to commodify and dismantle the physical sanctuary that sustains Fleur's somatic and tribal autonomy.

In conclusion, the intersections of biopolitics, legal architecture, and affective economies analyzed throughout this chapter reveal that the Indigenous female body is never a passive entity subject to colonial inscription but represents a dynamic site of sovereignty. The settler-colonial state turns the jurisdictional maze against Indigenous women on two fronts: a legal vacuum renders the body legally unprotectable, while a simultaneous act of epistemic violence (Spivak) strips the subaltern woman's testimony of its claim to valid knowledge. Yet, as the trajectories of Fleur Pillager in *Tracks* and Geraldine Coutts in *The Round House* demonstrate, this jurisdictional void does not produce total subjugation. Their bodies instead sustain a defensive presence, becoming living, resistant archives (Ziarkowska) that the law cannot fully erase. Both protagonists successfully manage to preserve the historical and cultural identities of their communities by weaponizing emotions into boundary-making practices and by incubating their power within domestic sites of resistance. Having established this comprehensive theoretical foundation – which unites Agamben's biopolitical framework, Ahmed's cultural politics of emotion, and hooks' spatial resistance – the following chapters turn to the novels themselves, examining how Fleur Pillager and Geraldine Coutts embody these principles of somatic sovereignty across a century of colonial violence.

Chapter 2: *Tracks* – The Somatic Archive: Resistance, Silence and Self-Erasure

2.1 Fleur Pillager as a Somatic Archive: The Body as a Site of Territorial Resistance

While the research study aims at exploring the somatic archive across a century of colonial violence through a comparative analysis of Erdrich's *Tracks* and *The Round House*, the following chapter offers a close reading of the former novel to map Fleur Pillager's resistance against land division and tribal displacement by the hands of an absent and corrupted government. Unfolding against the devastating backdrop of the Allotment Era of the early twentieth century, the novel captures a specific political shift wherein the US government carved communal tribal lands into individual private plots to dismantle tribal unity and sell off surplus land to different companies. Erdrich's *Tracks* demonstrates how this political and historical trauma of erasing Indigenous sovereignty through bureaucratic land division migrates to the physical essence of the body itself. Rather than existing as a passive casualty of this bureaucratic vacuum, Fleur Pillager's body operates as an overt *force of nature*, making her resistance against the physical erosion of the land insurmountable. Specifically, her relentless resilience is deeply rooted in Anishinaabe customs and thus functions as an unyielding extension of the native and the living world: Fleur therefore embodies a somatic archive that is public, collective, and ecological. By contrast, Geraldine Coutts exemplifies the private, domestic and, above all, rational somatic archive in the modern era. Her initial somatic sovereignty is expressed through the negotiation of a protective sanctuary within her homeplace. Her power is delicate, communal, and divergent from Fleur's example of sovereignty since it appears restorative rather than destructive.

To fully trace this twentieth-century somatic migration, this chapter will first analyze Fleur's ecological and radical defiance at Lake Matchimanito before concluding with an examination of Pauline Puyat's contrasting path of self-flagellating physical assimilation into the colonial apparatus. The powerful and clashing dichotomy between these two characters ultimately contributes to demonstrate the violent spectrum of bodily assimilation versus somatic sovereignty regarding Native American responses to colonial violence, revealing that both radical defiance and painful assimilation are deeply inscribed on the Indigenous body.

Fleur Pillager's status as a defiant somatic archive is established at the very beginning of the novel through her physical survival amidst the wreckage of her family. When Nanapush ventures out to Lake Matchimanito, he finds Fleur barely alive within the Pillagers' freezing cabin, a stark contrast to the rest of her family who were wiped out by consumption. Despite her near-fatal state, Fleur's body is immediately coded through striking predatory and ecological imagery: "She was wild as a filthy wolf, a big bony girl whose sudden bursts of strength and snarling cries terrified the listening Pukwan." (Erdrich 2025, 3). By offering such a raw and animalistic initial portrayal, the narrative deliberately codifies her body as strong and untamable; her physical appearance is stripped of any notions of Western, civilized, or domestic femininity. The text demonstrates that Fleur is not merely *living* on the land, but that her physical behavior mimics the apex predators. Fleur's savagery is further enhanced through the description of her body being "bony" and her strength "sudden" (Erdrich 2025, 3), suggesting that her physical presence cannot be regulated or contained by the colonial state. As a result, her body becomes the very site of territorial resistance, transforming the physical self into a resilient repository of sovereign survival where bureaucratic containment fails.

This somatic resistance shifts from mere survival to a more cosmic, ecological scale through Fleur's connection to Lake Matchimanito and the supernatural water spirit, Misshepeshu. Having recovered from her illness, Fleur returns to her family cabin on the remote shore of Lake Matchimanito, enacting a lifestyle of radical autonomy that is severely frowned upon by a community destabilized by colonial injustice; her independence is perceived as a threat since it "disturbs and disrupts the social order" (Mrak 2022, 215). Indeed, the narrative channels the tribe's anxiety through an excessive depiction of Fleur, noting how she "went haywire, out of control. She messed with evil, laughed at the old women's advice and dressed like a man. She got herself into some half-forgotten medicine, studied ways we shouldn't talk about." (Erdrich 2025, 12). Fleur's appearance is thus described through rumors of her contamination with the supernatural and the "evil". Her animalistic traits are further enhanced through neofantastic terminology when Fleur shapeshifts while hunting and is directly compared with the untamed wilderness (Mrak 2022):

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. (Erdrich 2025, 12)

Despite being narrated through Pauline Puyat's highly anxious and unreliable colonial-Christian lens, this description undoubtedly epitomizes the whole tribe's concern for Fleur since she disrupts the safe, unsoiled image the community might be forced to project in order to abide by colonial pressure under the Allotment Act. What is more, Fleur's wildness might also represent a painful reminder of that raw Native power and connection with the land that the community is struggling to hold on to. By enacting this wild, non-human autonomy and leaving untraceable tracks behind, Fleur ensures that the ancestral land she walks upon remains unassimilable and preserved from being divided by the state.

The perception of Fleur as an animalistic and liminal entity (Mrak 2022) is further informed by her connection with the Misshepeshu; specifically, Fleur's mythic connection with the lake creature is physically inscribed upon her body, which is portrayed as possessing "fishlike, slippery, narrow" hips and skin resembling "lakeweed" (Erdrich 2025, 18, 22). Fleur's anatomy is linked so closely to the lake's ecology that she appears structurally made of the territory itself, rather than a mere occupant of it. Fleur becomes the emblem of bodily somatic resistance precisely through these metaphors that emphasize her relationship both with the land and water. Her most distinctive trait lies in her transformative hybridity: by shifting repeatedly between land and water, terrestrial predator and aquatic anomaly, Fleur does not simply occupy a single defensive position but adopts a condition of constant evasion. In doing so, her fluid, ungraspable form physically defies state colonial categorization, preventing her from being mapped or controlled by a bureaucratic system that relies on static boundaries.

Crucially, Fleur's somatic connection bestows her with a unique active power to manage nature yet also condemns her to a condition of isolation and exclusion from her own community. While Nanapush notes that Fleur is uniquely capable of mastering the land and its elemental force, the community views this intimacy as a dangerous threat: "Men stayed clear of Fleur Pillager after the second drowning. Even though she was good-looking, nobody dared to court her because it was clear that Misshepeshu, the water man, the monster, wanted her for himself." (Erdrich 2025, 11). This belief fundamentally leads the community to isolate her. Her exclusion discloses a painful dimension of colonial trauma: in the eyes of the tribe, Fleur represents a menace because she refuses to suppress the ancestral,

supernatural forces of Matchimanito to accommodate white demands for "civilized" assimilation during an intense and difficult time such as the Allotment Era. As a result, her untamed body is policed and demonized by her own tribe and becomes the emblem of dual violence, representing both a sovereign weapon against the colonial state and the subject of fear and hatred within her own community. By projecting their fears onto Fleur's body, the tribe effectively employs an internalized survival strategy forged under the crushing pressure of the Allotment Act. As Fadwa Mahmoud Hassan Gad explains in *The Abode of Evil: The Female Body as a Symbol in Louise Erdrich's Tracks*, it is precisely because of her refusal to convert to Christianity or abandon traditional ways that Fleur is turned into a "devouring fame fatal [sic], a mixture of witch and predator" (2013, 125); this active classification of Fleur as a threatening demon allows the community to rationalize their own compromises in the grip of forced assimilation. This mechanism of demonization can be perfectly inscribed within Sara Ahmed's conceptualization of *stickiness*, whereby Fleur's body is burdened by affective labels – such as being associated with predatory features, describing her braids "like the tails of animals […] held in and half-tamed" or noting her strong, and sharp teeth – that the community itself sticks onto her image (Erdrich 2025, 18). Through the projection of emotions of fear and excess onto Fleur, the tribe members can draw a clear moral boundary between themselves and her and construct a clean, "civilized," and non-threatening image onto the white settler state. Specifically, this hostility towards Fleur peaks among "the mixed blood and the colonized who worked as guides to the White mappers", such as Pauline Puyat (Gad 2013, 125).

While the Anishinaabe assimilated community attempts to isolate Fleur's somatic power through demonization, the colonial government aims to conquer it through bureaucratic rationality. From the very beginning of the novel, the government embodies a looming threat for natives, since it systematically attempts to impose its authority and take over the Pillager land through bureaucratic means such as allotment fees and surveyors. While certain characters such as Nanapush seem to have already accepted the idea of the land's expropriation by the hands of the colonial state – "The land will go. [...] The land will be sold and measured" (Erdrich 2025, 8) – Fleur, on the contrary, categorically refuses to accommodate this bleak fate. Her unwavering resistance to this encroachment, however, does not rely on legal countermeasures, but rather on the actual physical and supernatural elements of her surrounding environment. This manifests clearly when the Agent – as the government liaison to the Anishinaabe people is called – arrives on the shore of Lake

Matchimanito to collect fee money on Fleur's allotments and gets lost in the woods. As Nanapush recounts, he made his way back, yet soon after "asked Fleur again for money, and the next thing we heard he was living in the woods and eating roots, gambling with ghosts." (Erdrich 2025, 9). The Agent's descent into disorientation and madness illustrates the ultimate futility of the state's legal mapping when confronted with the raw power of the environment, thus establishing the complete collapse of Western rationality when confronted with Indigenous somatic power. The result is an ironic reversal: while attempting to take control over the land, the agent is stripped of his bureaucratic power and forced into having to live off the wild land himself – a twisted survivalist mimicry of the very Indigenous lifestyle the government actively seeks to eradicate.

The arrival of the lumbermen at Matchimanito at the end of the novel represents the climax of the government's effort to extract capitalist value from Indigenous territory. In spite of Fleur's unyielding attempts to protect her ancestral home, the land surrounding Lake Matchimanito is, in fact, claimed by the government and sold to a lumber company. On account of a bureaucratic loophole – which mandated that the government accept bidding offers on lands if taxes were left unpaid – the Agent is able to formally claim the contested Pillager territory, thus effectively escalating the coercion against Fleur from legal paperwork to direct industrial extraction. Fleur's reaction to the government's threat is, however, once more unforeseen. Instead of engaging in a conventional physical confrontation or simply deciding to flee, Fleur enacts a premeditated tactical sabotage: by half-sawing the bases of the trees, she is actively taking back control of her environment one last time, ensuring that the lumber company is denied the opportunity to commodify her home. Through this gesture, Fleur reclaims her agency over the land just as the state attempts to finalize its theft. Her strategic sabotage also represents the definitive refusal to let the colonial apparatus commodify the ancestral land, prioritizing the destruction of the resource over its assimilation into a capitalist market.

This calculated physical sabotage is realized through the intervention of the natural world itself, escalating into a violent storm that threatens the lumbermen. The tempest functions as a direct physical extension of Fleur's own emotional state, generating a form of somatic resistance that erases the boundaries between human and nature. As the land reacts, Fleur transforms in unison. Nanapush recounts the eerie dread elicited by Fleur's raw, and frightening physical appearance as she stands before her cabin as the lumber company expropriates and destroys her land:

Her hair was thick, full of lights, falling in a wide arc. She wore no jewelry or feathers. Her legs were bare, her best moccasins, quilled in yellow swirls and flowers, were on her feet. Her face was warm with excitement and her look was chilling in its clear amusement. She said nothing, just glanced in the sky and let her eyes drop shut. (Erdrich 2025, 222).

This stark, chilling demeanor – devoid of modern or colonial adornment – that emphasizes her intrinsic bond with the natural world. Her expression is the ultimate proof of this profound somatic link: in letting her eyes drop shut, she appears to signal the storm's onset. The tempest progresses rapidly from a subtle warning – the wind "building on the earth" and waves beginning to "slap with light insistence against the shore" (Erdrich 2025, 222) – to the violent collapse of the forest, crashing down to block the lumbermen's escape. Although the lumbermen initially hold their ground despite being terrified of Fleur's "wide smile that frightened even those who did not understand the smiles of Pillagers" (Erdrich 2025, 223), they are ultimately trapped by the falling timber. This meteorological shift clearly mirrors Fleur's controlled yet absolute somatic rage, effectively erasing the boundary between her physical body and the surrounding environment.

Having weaponized and eventually sacrificed the physical landscape to refuse the commodification of her home, Fleur abandons the site, proving that her somatic archive survives independently of geographical space. Rather than salvaging personal possessions, she departs the contested land with specific natural and ancestral artifacts, a decision that signals the complete internalization of the somatic archive. Upon leaving, she retains only "weed-wrapped stones from the lake-bottom, bundles of roots, a coil of rags, and the umbrella that had shaded her baby," alongside the grave markers carved by Nanapush (Erdrich 2025, 224). This compelling act not only reveals a complete detachment from Western materialism and structural ownership but also foregrounds the concept that territory is carried within the Indigenous body rather than tethered to a static plot of land. Erdrich underscores that this profound tribal connection renders the colonial state's acquisition of the physical territory meaningless; Fleur's true heritage, power and somatic archive remain entirely sovereign and mobile, sheltered against government erasure.

2.2. Beyond the Colonial Gaze: Non-Verbal Resistance and the Refusal of Representation

Just as Fleur Pillager weaponizes the physical landscape against colonial extraction, she applies an identical strategy of sovereign refusal to her communication. While Western colonial frameworks traditionally misconstrue silence – particularly Indigenous women's silence – as a sign of passive submission, effectively reducing them to blank spaces on the colonial map, Fleur actively subverts this erasure. By resisting this colonial expectation and refusing to engage in verbal exchanges, she prevents the settler-state from commodifying her identity, predicting her strategies, or categorizing her past. As a result, her silence transcends mere absence, becoming a potent tool of somatic resistance and survivance. This wordless defiance, expressed through profound non-verbal actions and an unwavering, sovereign "cultural attitude" (DePriest 2008, 250)[6], renders her an active and unpredictable threat and sets the stage for her assertion of non-verbal dominance throughout the novel.

The most immediate manifestation of this sovereign silence occurs when Fleur relocates to the border town of Argus – a necessary move given that she requires money to pay for the allotment fees of her family land. While her physical labor in the local butcher shop is valued, it is at the poker table where Fleur explicitly wields her unreadability, transforming it into an active strategy of survivance that dismantles this white, male-dominated space. Fleur's initial request to be dealt in disrupts the gendered boundaries of the game, yet it is her impenetrable method of play that unsettles the other players. Her gameplay shatters the racist, colonial expectations upon which her rivals rely, namely the assumption that a Native woman is inherently predictable, submissive and incapable of strategic deceit, believing "the squaw can't bluff" (Erdrich 2025, 20). Furthermore, the poker game functions as a microcosm of colonial order, defined as a typical space of mundane, predictable chatter. Fleur does not simply introduce a new topic of discussion; she bluntly refuses to engage in their conversational economy. In choosing absolute silence, she strategically masks her identity, her thoughts, her history and any indication of her potential supernatural assistance.

[6] DePriest employs the term "cultural attitude" to describe Fleur's silence as an alternative mode of expression, "a tone that speaks in multiple registers for her past, for her land and for an open-ended future (DePriest 2008, 250). For the scholar, this attitude reflects Fleur's sovereign freedom to tell her own story on her own terms.

This non-verbal defiance is amplified by her methodical success: she consistently wins the exact same amount night after night, an outcome too precise for mere luck. As the novel notes, "The irritating thing was she beat with pairs and never bluffed, because she couldn't, and still ended each night with exactly one dollar" (Erdrich 2025, 21). Fleur's consistency sparks intense suspicion, yet her silence makes her impossible to read. Consequently, her non-verbality operates as a tool of survivance, enabling her to assert her dominance by denying them access to her inner world. This deliberate act infuriates the other male players because it strips them of the epistemological control and racialized dominance they feel entitled to hold over her as white men. In the end, their frustration inevitably escalates into physical violence. After Fleur flashes a "wolf grin" and wins the final round, the men – having "planned with their eyes things they couldn't say out loud" (Erdrich 2025, 24) – assault her in a desperate attempt to forcibly restore their fractured dominance. The white men's violation of her body functions as more than an individual crime: it operates as a systemic tool of subjugation. Applying bell hooks's framework, Maria DePriest (2008) contextualizes the assault in Argus as a gendered metaphor for colonization, whereby the rape serves as a violent re-enactment of imperial conquest. This act aims to punish Fleur for her epistemological defiance at the poker table and forcibly reposition her sovereign body as conquered territory. Yet, even during this violation, Fleur denies them the ultimate satisfaction of pleading, shifting her revenge away from the colonizer's vocabulary and entirely into the somatic "old language" of her ancestors (Erdrich 2025, 26).

Following the assault, Fleur's weaponized survivance manifests not as a verbal outcry, but as a devastating environmental retaliation: the tornado that subsequently kills her three attackers, while sparing the rest of the population of Argus. The narrative maintains a strategic level of ambiguity around this revenge: Fleur is rumored to have caused the storm, yet Pauline's own unreliable account hints at her potential responsibility in locking the freezer doors. Regardless of her potential interference, the catastrophic event perfectly aligns with Fleur's established pattern of leveraging her connection to the natural world and invoking her supernatural powers. As DePriest observes, the tornado descends on Argus at a highly "propitious moment" immediately following the rape, solidifying a visceral, direct link between the environmental chaos and Fleur's physical trauma (2008, 261). Because she completely refuses to appropriate the colonizer's language to demand justice or articulate her trauma, the landscape itself becomes an extension of her physical body. Fleur's voice thus operates entirely outside the Western verbal constraints, manifesting instead through the

destructive force of natural elements. As DePriest argues, this unrestrained force ensures that Fleur's silence continues to register as the same cultural attitude discussed above (2008, 250). Ultimately, the storm serves as her somatic voice, enacting vengeance on her behalf.

Fleur's nonverbal resistance extends beyond the localized spaces of Argus and the reservation, manifesting as a direct, absolute rejection of the colonial government's deceptive bureaucratic system. From the opening lines of the novel, Nanapush identifies the government as a looming, hostile presence that systematically threatens to conquer Anishinaabe land and community through administrative paperwork, preceding physical force: "I spoke aloud the words of the government treaty, and refused to sign the settlement papers that would take away our woods and lake" (Erdrich 2025, 2). As the narrative unfolds, it becomes evident that the imposition of a governmental system based on taxes, money, and written documents is inherently exploitative, purposefully targeting a vulnerable community. Facing starvation, many Anishinaabe are coerced into selling their land for minimal rations, often accepting these terms because they cannot decipher official documents: "We stumbled toward the government bait, never looking down, never noticing how the land was snatched from us at every step" (Erdrich 2025, 4). The narrative therefore demonstrates that conforming to the settler-state's bureaucratic mechanisms is a guaranteed trap for Indigenous populations. Even educated characters like Nanapush, who attempt to navigate the government's rules, are, in the end, cheated by hidden bureaucratic loopholes – such as the undisclosed late fees which legally authorize the auctioning of the Pillager allotment to lumber companies.

In strong contrast to other characters, Fleur recognizes that the colonizer's language is explicitly designed to ensure Indigenous dispossession. She combats this threat by categorically refusing to speak English to authorities, engage with the written word, or sign any official documents – a choice driven by calculated strategy rather than mere illiteracy. In doing so, she denies the state the legal illusion of a fair transaction, exposing the government's predatory intentions behind these arrangements. As Jennifer Sergi notes, initially, Nanapush also recognizes the insidious threat of the "printed words that the white man brings to his land" (1992, 282), warning Lulu of the bureaucratic diminishment of identity: "Nanapush is a name that loses power every time that it is written and stored in a government file" (Erdrich 2025, 32). He similarly asserts that the land is "the only thing that lasts life to life" (Erdrich 2025, 33), cautioning his granddaughter that government promises are weaker than the wind. Yet, as the story progresses, Nanapush is caught in an impossible predicament: he must

choose between physically defending his land and loved ones from state encroachment – risking losing them entirely, as Fleur does – or enduring the seizure of the land by lumber companies and the diminishment of his community to "a tribe of file cabinets and triplicates, a tribe of single-space documents, directives and policy" (Erdrich 2025, 225), accepting the very bureaucracy he distrusts in order to eventually bring his granddaughter Lulu home.

Conversely, Fleur remains the only character who absolutely refuses to accommodate the bureaucratic stripping of her land. Because the written word is treacherous, Fleur employs her physical body as her primary mode of communication and as a living counter-archive. She proves that her power and traditions are carried within her as a mobile somatic archive, ensuring her sovereign identity cannot be captured, or diminished by state records.

Another compelling manifestation of this non-verbal power occurs when the Lazarres brutally punish Margaret by forcibly shaving her traditional braids; Fleur's immediate reaction is to silently shave her own head in response. This quiet, drastic move serves as a powerful somatic signal that explicitly "puts her politics on display" (DePriest 2008, 263). Without uttering a single word, she conveys profound tribal empathy, absolute fearlessness and an unyielding refusal to conform, achieving far more impact than any spoken or written protest could:

[…] she cut her braids off, shaved her own head clean, and put the hair in a quilled skin pouch. She turned to us, still beautiful as before, but now in a frightful way. Then she went out, hunting, didn't even bother to wait for night to cover her tracks. (Erdrich 2025, 117).

Even as the physical battle for Matchimanito is lost, Fleur's potent act ensures that the historical trauma inflicted upon her tribe is permanently recorded upon her flesh, rendering her body an unassimilable, living archive.

To fully grasp the radical nature of Fleur's non-verbal resistance, it must be juxtaposed against the protective, restorative silence enacted by Geraldine Coutts nearly a century later, in *The Round House*. As previously established, Fleur operates through a mechanism of predatory survivance which speaks of loss, but, most importantly, of survival and resistance too (DePriest 2008). She employs silence as an offensive strategy in hostile, public environments to safeguard her identity while simultaneously frightening and disarming colonizers, channeling this silence into elemental destruction. In contrast, when Geraldine survives a horrific sexual assault, she withdraws entirely into the private,

domestic sphere of her bedroom, ceasing all verbal communication, even with her spouse and son. Because this retreat is accompanied by a drastic physical decline – characterized by severe weight loss and a depressive state – her silence can be easily misconstrued as a symptom of passive, psychological defeat. However, much like Fleur, Geraldine's silence is deeply purposeful: her physical body and her bedroom function as a somatic sanctuary. Within this controlled space, Geraldine processes her trauma to regain strength before rousing "from her exile" as an "unkillable mother" who "reclaims her familial and tribal roles" (Carden 2018, 100). She deliberately breaks this silence only when Mayla Wolfskin's infant daughter is threatened by the same perpetrator. Crucially, by refusing to speak her attacker's name prematurely, Geraldine protects the historical truth of her trauma from being diminished, altered, or manipulated by a flawed, modern Western legal system. As a result, this juxtaposition reveals two distinct manifestations of the Indigenous somatic archive: Fleur embodies an outward, ecologically destructive defiance against colonial erasure, whereas Geraldine embodies an inward, domestic preservation of truth, cultivating her strength until she can restore justice and protect her modern community.

2.3 Somatic Self-Erasure and the White Gaze: Pauline Puyat as the Fragmented Archive

To fully comprehend the spectrum of Indigenous bodily responses to the assimilation era, Fleur Pillager's sovereign resistance must be juxtaposed with the tragic trajectory of Pauline Puyat's absolute assimilation. If Fleur embodies a resilient somatic archive that actively resists colonial encroachment, Pauline represents a deeply colonized and self-erasing counterpart. Pauline's physical trajectory demonstrates how the violence of the Allotment Era can be entirely internalized; however, unlike Fleur, Pauline often operates as a willing participant in her own subjugation. From the novel's beginning, Pauline rejects her mixed-blood Native identity, exhibiting a marked preference for the white, Western world. Because she views her Indigenous heritage exclusively through a lens of shame, she actively repudiates any physical or cultural association with her Anishinaabe tribe. As a result, her body becomes a site of forced compliance to Western and Catholic ideals. In a desperate attempt to fully assimilate and strip her flesh of its Indigenous connections, Pauline's internalized hatred takes "symptomatic form in her hallucinations, paranoia, masochism,

and neurotic repressions and twisted expressions of sexuality" (Friedman 1994, 112). Driven by this racial obsession, she employs extreme strategies of self-inflicted somatic erasure, forcibly renouncing earthly comfort, food, and basic bodily autonomy. Through her acute, obsessive bodily awareness, her deliberate severing of ties to the ancestral land, and her perpetual struggle to conform to the white gaze, Pauline functions as the perfect somatic antithesis to Fleur Pillager.

Pauline Puyat's descent into somatic self-erasure begins with her deliberate rejection of her Anishinaabe heritage – a decision driven by her complete internalization of the white, colonial gaze. From a young age, Pauline strongly refuses to participate in traditional Native labor – hiding rather than beading, quilling, or rubbing "brains on the stiff skins of animals" (Erdrich 2025, 14). Instead, she begs her father to send her south to the settler town of Argus, hoping to master the "civilized" lace-making trade from the nuns. When her father warns that she will fade and cease to be Indian in the white world, Pauline spitefully replies with a hateful comment, expressing her preference to never return to the reservation at all. This refusal does not merely signal a preference for a different craft; rather, it constitutes a violent rejection of her own Indigenous heritage. Alienated by her liminal status as a mixed-blood woman, she idolizes her mother, "who showed her half-white" and her grandfather, who was "pure Canadian" (Erdrich 2025, 14). The specificity of this description suggests that Pauline's racial idealization extends beyond a generic notion of whiteness to a more precise, hierarchical distinction. This internalization of the colonizer's perspective is perfectly encapsulated in her admission: "I saw that to hang back was to perish. I saw through the eyes of the world outside of us" (Erdrich 2025, 14). Viewing her Native body as an insurmountable barrier to a brighter future leads her to feeling like an outcast in her own body; gradually, she convinces herself she "was made for better" (Erdrich 2025, 14) and actively begins dismantling any physical or emotional connection to her tribal roots.

However, upon arriving in Argus, her attempt at assimilation tragically fails. She does not learn lacemaking; instead, she is relegated to sweeping floors of a local butcher shop. More importantly, her desperate pursuit of whiteness literally erases her physical presence. Deeming herself "so poor-looking I was invisible," Pauline blends into the "stained brown walls" as a "skinny big-nosed girl" (Erdrich 2025, 15-16). Her body becomes thin, passive and unnoticeable as she internalizes and harbors deep colonial shame:

The men would not have seen me no matter what I did, how I moved. For my dress hung loose and my back was already stooped, an old woman's. Work had roughened me, reading made my eyes sore, forgetting my family had hardened my face, and scrubbing down bare boards had given me big, reddened knuckles. (Erdrich 2025, 19-20).

In this regard, Sara Ahmed's conceptualization of "stickiness"[7] perfectly frames Pauline's physical decline. Pauline's body becomes the sticky site of projected colonial revulsion; having internalized the settler-state's hatred for the Native body, she physically shrinks under the weight of the white gaze she so desperately struggles to please.

This somatic self-erasure represents a stark contrast to Fleur Pillager. Erdrich deliberately places these two opposing characters within the same, white-dominated space to violently juxtapose their somatic trajectories. If Pauline shrinks her physical presence, Fleur flourishes and dominates the space. From the moment she enters the butcher shop, Fleur does not hide her Native identity: she weaponizes it. Because she does not harbor shame for her identity like Pauline does, her physical presence takes up space, and exudes a powerful, intimidating attractiveness:

Her cheeks were wide and flat, her hands large, chapped, muscular. Fleur's shoulders were broad and curved as a yoke, her hips fishlike, slippery, narrow. An old green dress clung to her waist, worn thin where she sat. Her glossy braids were like tails of animals, and swung against her when she moved, deliberately, slowly in her work, held in and half-tamed. (Erdrich 2025, 18)

Crucially, Fleur's hyper-visibility is undoubtedly also subjected to a predatory white gaze that attempts to objectify and exoticize her Native body. As Pauline observes, the white men are "blinded" and "stupid," oblivious to Fleur's supernatural dangers – such as her missing toes and history of drowning – because they only see her "in the flesh" (Erdrich 2025, 18). This patriarchal objectification attempts to reduce Fleur to a mere physical resource to be consumed, proving how the "seemingly empowered Fleur is firmly planted in the framework of male domination and sexual gaze" (Mrak 2022, 219). Consequently, Fleur's success and dominance at the nightly poker games is perceived as a stark threat: by beating the white

[7] As discussed in Chapter One, Ahmed employs this term to describe the mechanism through which emotions attach to objects, which then become "saturated with affect, as sites of personal and social tension" (Ahmed 2014, 11).

men at their own game using her unreadable silence, she entirely disrupts their misogynistic, white-centric world. Notably, the spatial dynamic in Argus establishes the core physical dichotomy between the two women: Fleur's unapologetic Native pride renders her sovereign and hyper-visible, whereas Pauline's desperate assimilation and internalized shame initiate her tragic somatic self-erasure. While Pauline "is framed as an absence, a negation" within the defining male gaze – a marginalization she temporarily exploits to become the "gazing subject" and demand a privilege that usually "belongs solely to men" – this assimilation succeeds in turning her into a passive, disembodied shadow for the remainder of the narrative (Mrak 2022, 218).

Pauline's physical assimilation does not remain a passive fading; rather, it rapidly escalates into active self-destruction as she distorts Catholic concepts of penance to violently discipline her Indigenous body. Within the Catholic religion, Pauline discovers the ultimate framework to express the internalized hatred she harbors toward her Native roots. Her devotion to Catholicism is not a search for spiritual grace, but a calculated strategy to achieve absolute assimilation. Drawing on Franz Fanon's theoretical framework, Friedman observes that Pauline embodies the quintessential colonized subject, whose "internalized caste system of value results in racial neurosis and psychopathology" (1994, 112). This severe colonization of the mind "produces the desire [...] to be white as a response to the racist imperative to 'turn white and disappear'" (Friedman 1994, 112). Pauline's violent hatred for her Indigenous roots must therefore be understood as a traumatic psychological response to the threat of racial marginalization. Her rejection of her Anishinaabe identity, paired with her embrace of the colonizer's religious values, becomes an attempt to shield her image from colonial violence, thereby "performatively exposing the self-hatred of the colonized subject" (Friedman 1994, 112). This devotion quickly escalates into fanaticism as Pauline subjects her body to systematic, self-inflicted punishment meant to sever it from its Indigenous origins and eradicate any capacity for physical or emotional comfort: she crafts scratchy underwear from potato sacks, deliberately wears her shoes on the wrong feet, sews burrs into her clothing, restricts her urination to twice a day and adamantly refuses to wash. When her extreme motives are questioned or ridiculed, she simply replies, "I suffer for His sake, as He did for yours" or "I miswear my shoes for mortification" (Erdrich 2025, 146). While Pauline coaxes herself into believing that these actions are profound signs of Catholic devotion and martyrdom, they function fundamentally as severe mechanisms of colonial discipline:

"Accept this," I asked Him when night after night the cold gripped me in tight claws and I shook so hard I could not sleep. "And this," every time I sat to eat and halved my bread. When my stomach pinched, "This also, my Lord." (Erdrich 2025, 137)

At night, I did not allow myself to toss or turn for comfort, but only to sleep on my back, arms crossed on my breasts in the same position as the Virgin received the attentions of our Lord. [...] I let my toenails grow until it ached to walk again and each step reminded me of His tread on the path to Cavalry. (Erdrich 2025, 152)

By systematically torturing her body and denying it basic human necessities, Pauline turns her religious extremism into a direct, violent attack on her own somatic archive. This anti-body fanaticism is explicitly challenged when Fleur and Lulu forcibly bathe her. Pauline views her lack of hygiene as "devotion's air" (Erdrich 2025, 153), yet Nanapush mockingly observes that her smell is too repugnant to enter the cabin without washing. Despite her rigorous attempts to suppress any physical pleasure and maintain her penance while Fleur washes her, Pauline is overwhelmed by the sensation; she finds the feeling of being clean "so terrible, so pleasant, that [she] abandoned [her] Lord and all His rules and special requirements" (Erdrich 2025, 154). This intimate interaction strongly highlights the ideological divergence between the two women. Fleur exhibits a natural, nurturing, and sovereign relationship with the physical body, maintaining a connection to earthly realities like hygiene, shelter, and sexuality without shame. By contrast, Pauline has been conditioned to perceive her physical presence as deeply corrupted – a site of sin and abjection that must be systematically punished. The involuntary pleasure of bathing terrifies her deeply: by unwillingly allowing herself to experience this pleasure, she is temporarily reconnected to the physical, earthly realm that she so desperately attempts to transcend. Ultimately, Pauline's self-flagellation proves the insidious success of the colonial system. While the settler-state uses bureaucratic loopholes and industrial force to strip Fleur's land, it successfully infiltrates Pauline's psyche, causing her to transform her own body from a sovereign territory into a perpetual site of self-inflicted violence.

As the narrative progresses, Pauline's internalized self-hatred inevitably clashes with her biological survival instinct, forcibly preventing her from committing outright suicide. As a result, her extreme somatic loathing is projected outward, "resulting in complicated thanatopolitics inflicted upon other female bodies who serve as surrogates" (Gad 2013, 126).

This dynamic is best exemplified when Pauline orchestrates the rape of an innocent girl, Sophie: Pauline administers an ancient Anishinaabe love medicine to Eli who is consequently driven to sexually assault Sophie against her will. Although Pauline's motive is to take revenge against Eli for rejecting her advances, the true victim is Sophie. By participating in this violation, Pauline exploits Sophie's body in a manner that, as Gad asserts, "is even more brutal than that of Fleur's rapists" (2013, 127), weaponizing another Native woman's body to act out her own self-destructive urges.

Driven by this deeply internalized colonial hatred, Pauline's voluntary self-destruction transcends her individual flesh, reaching its ultimate biological extreme in the rejection of motherhood – a devastating act of somatic self-erasure that stands in stark contrast to Fleur Pillager's sovereign fight to preserve her bloodline. Because Pauline despises her Native heritage, she views her mixed-blood child as an evil entity that threatens her constructed, assimilated image and embodies everything she has so forcefully attempted to suppress. From the moment of conception, Pauline attempts to eradicate the pregnancy by self-inducing a miscarriage, a violent endeavor which fails only when Bernadette, the woman she lives and works with, forcibly intervenes. Although Pauline eventually agrees to carry the child to term and surrender it to Bernadette, she admits it is agonizing to ignore the physical reality of the fetus as it "punched with her powerful head and rolled and twisted like an otter" (Erdrich 2025, 133). Overwhelmed by "fits of hate" and anger, Pauline violently resists when labor finally starts, shattered by the visceral reality of childbirth: "I was slapped by a great beast, thrown over its shoulder, shaken like a child in the grip of its own mother. I marveled at the breath torn out of me. I heard my own cries" (Erdrich 2025, 134). Through Pauline's recounting, Erdrich captures the formidable, subjugating power of giving birth: the crushing pain that renders words "useless. Thoughts foolish," and the sudden, paralyzing fear that grips Pauline as she realizes that giving birth would leave her irrevocably lonelier – "outcast, a thing set aside for God's use, a human who could be touched by no other human" (Erdrich 2025, 134-135). Her subsequent attempt to halt the birth entirely, culminating in her howling admission that she "had decided to die, and let the child die too, no taint of original sin on her unless she breathed" functions as a disturbing act of attempted infanticide (Erdrich 2025, 135). This desire to eradicate her Indigenous child is driven not only by internalized sexual shame but also by the broader logic of white cultural invasion – a colonial paradigm which presents a *birth* of a new way of life strictly through the necessary *death* of the Native community. The child is delivered only because Bernadette – a figure who

uniquely bridges life and death in the narrative – ties Pauline down and forcefully wrenches the baby out into the world using cooking spoons. This internalized hatred becomes most evident in Pauline's remark upon setting her gaze on her baby: "She's marked by the devil's thumbs," interpreting the dark bruises left by the spoons as demonic symbols. Categorically refusing to look at or care for her infant, Pauline abandons the house as soon as she is physically able, entering a convent to officially sever her past, her Indigenous roots, and her biological legacy.

Conversely, Fleur's experiences of motherhood and birth are inextricably tied to the existential threats facing the Anishinaabe tribe, including government encroachment, diseases, starvation, and death. This dynamic is most evident during the birth of her first daughter, Lulu. While the labor itself proves agonizing, an acute, external danger manifests when a bear – drunk on reservation wine – suddenly breaches the Pillager cabin. Unexpectedly, upon seeing the animal, Fleur is "filled with such fear and power" that the menace paradoxically grants her the somatic strength required to push her daughter out into the world (Erdrich 2025, 60).

As one of the clan's primary markers, the bear represents the tribe itself, serving as a primal, ancestral reminder for Fleur to continue her family's bloodline amidst constant existential threats. Furthermore, the bear's intoxication hints at both the external dangers introduced by colonial forces – namely the government and its destructive commodities – and the tribe's tragic vulnerability to such corrosive influences. In this sense, the bear's appearance reinforces Fleur's profound, life-giving connection to the natural world.

When Fleur becomes pregnant a second time, she goes into premature labor and actively seeks to delay the birth. However, in stark contrast to Pauline's attempted infanticide, Fleur's resistance is driven solely by a desperate biological wish to safeguard both the fragile life growing inside her and her own survival, fully aware that life introduced too quickly into a hostile world resulted in death. Erdrich's depiction of this labor is extremely literal and overwhelmingly physical: once the baby slides out of her, Fleur "raised herself with vast effort and took the child from her own blood, then the knife from its sheath where it hung from the bedframe. She cut the cord and breathed into the child's mouth, rubbed its skin and changed its dead gray color" (Erdrich 2025, 157). Gathering her remaining strength, she drags herself to the stove to boil a restorative mixture. Despite the invincible resilience she exudes, both Fleur and her baby teeter on the brink of death. It is here that Erdrich's narrative shifts into the metaphysical, as Fleur travels to the spirit world to gamble for both

her children's lives – the newborn and Lulu, who had become lost in a winter storm seeking Nanapush's help. Ultimately, Fleur sacrifices her newborn to secure Lulu's survival. What remains most striking about these birthing scenes is Fleur's sovereign leverage of her physical body and spiritual heritage to actively battle colonial and natural threats, ensuring the survival of her lineage.

By contrast, Pauline manipulates her Catholic guilt and deeply internalized hatred to justify the abandonment of her child. Her agency here is undeniable – she consciously chooses each act of self-erasure – yet this same agency is itself the product of an internalized colonial violence, which has inflicted a psychological wound so deep that it corrupts even her most deliberate choices, turning active participation into complicity with the destruction of her own biological legacy.

Fleur's harrowing metaphysical descent into the land of the dead, mentioned above, carries real, high-stakes consequences for her somatic sovereignty and is no mere symbolic trial; as Pauline recalls, in "the heaven of the Chippewa there is gambling" for "drunkenness, or sorrow, or loss of mind. They play for ease, they play for penitence, and sometimes for living souls" (Erdrich 2025, 160). It is precisely at this spectral poker table that Fleur once again demands to be dealt in, facing the very three white men from the Argus butcher shop who perished in the aftermath of her revenge. Whereas in the physical town of Argus Fleur dominated the game through her unreadable silence and impenetrable tactics, in the spirit world she is stripped of that invulnerability and initially begins to lose. The game's existential stakes become explicit when Lily silently produces a strand of Lulu's hair and her shoe, revealing that the true wager is the life of Fleur's daughter, who is currently lost in a deadly winter storm. Confronted with this extreme threat to her lineage, Fleur summons a spiritual and somatic ferocity to win the hand and save her daughter: "Fleur came back to herself and played. She fanned through her cards, hunched and drawn as an old witch woman, lean as a half-dead wolf, and desperate" (Erdrich 2025, 162). She then immediately flees the spirit world before the dead can demand a rematch, directly mirroring how she walked away with her winnings in Argus. This metaphysical confrontation perfectly solidifies the ideological dichotomy between Fleur and Pauline regarding the preservation of Indigenous life. While Pauline exploits twisted Catholic logic to justify *pushing* her baby into death – seeking to cleanse it of its Native identity and original sin – Fleur willingly risks her own existence, deliberately travelling into the land of the dead to fight for her children, actively *pulling* Lulu back into the world of the living. Although Fleur successfully rescues

Lulu by accepting the devastating sacrifice of the newborn, this traumatic negotiation with death marks a turning point. It forces her to recognize the constant, pervasive threats surrounding her family, leaving her temporarily subdued and hyper-aware of danger until her final, catastrophic stand against the white lumbermen.

While Fleur's metaphysical battle secures the fragile continuation of her lineage, Pauline seeks out isolation not to save a life, but to orchestrate the absolute annihilation of her own Indigenous identity. Driven by religious delusions upon her arrival at the convent, Pauline hallucinates direct communication with God, who appoints her as the one who was "chosen to serve" (Erdrich 2025, 137). She persuades herself that she has been assigned an ecclesiastical mission to drive the Native "devil" – which she associates with the monster of Lake Matchimanito – from the land. Consequently, Pauline ventures onto the water: "I was pledged to a task, and when it was accomplished I would have no further use, or quarter, for this lost tribe of Israel" (Erdrich 2025, 196). She informs the Mother Superior that this expedition will be her final act before her officially becoming a novice, after which she will unequivocally repudiate her former life. She firmly believes that she is divinely called to perform this final act of service before annihilating her Indigenous identity.

Setting out onto Lake Matchimanito to confront the threat of the devil, which she believes lurks there under the appearance of the lake monster, Pauline rows toward the center of the lake. Yet, when her boat drifts ashore rather than remaining anchored in the middle, she violently strips off all her clothes, clutching only onto her rosary – a visceral shedding of earthly inhibitions that allows her to act on her basic instincts, free from communal judgement. In response to her summons, a figure the size of a man approaches in the darkness. While she initially perceives this entity as the mythical lake monster, it is soon revealed to be Napoleon Morrisey, the man she views as her personal demon and the source of her carnal sin. As Friedman notes, this murder symbolically carries out the psychodynamics of Catholic repression; through the killing of Napoleon, Pauline is effectively attempting to "erase the sin of carnality, of life in the body" that she so fiercely denies (1994, 115). Her previous loveless couplings with Napoleon had sparked an unwanted pregnancy and awakened an illicit sexual pleasure in her, which she subsequently attempted to eradicate through extreme acts of guilt and bodily mortification. Because she projects this sexual guilt onto his physical form, and actively convinces herself that she is battling Satan himself, Pauline violently attacks and strangles him with her rosary (Friedman 1994):

And then I seized him and forced myself upon him, grew around him like the earth around a root, held him still. I strung the noose around his neck and counted each bead in my fingers as I tightened the links. [...] I screamed once and then my tongue flapped loose, yelled profane curses. I stuffed the end of the blanket in his mouth, pushed him down into the sand and then fell upon him and devoured him, scattered myself in all directions, stupefied my own brain in the process so thoroughly that the only things left of intelligence were my doubled-over hands. (Erdrich 2025, 202)

Building upon Friedman's theorization of Catholic repression, Gad's framework reveals that this murder serves as the absolute climax of Pauline's deviated revenge. Through the killing of Napoleon, Pauline executes a twisted form of purification; she externalizes her carnal sins, "turning it into a demonized other that she holds responsible for her failures" (Gad 2013, 128). Consequently, her psychological and somatic self-erasure reaches its terrifying conclusion when she weaponizes Catholic dogma to justify the brutal murder of a Native man. She successfully absolves herself of this violence by concluding that she has simply slain the devil, who can take any form:

I felt a growing horror and trembled all through my limbs until it suddenly was revealed to me that I had committed no sin. There was no guilt in this matter, no fault. How could I have known what body the devil would assume? (Erdrich 2025, 203).

This act is highly symbolic: by employing the rosary as a murder weapon, Pauline transforms an instrument of prayer into a literal weapon of colonial violence against Native bodies. Through this execution, Pauline proves in this sense that her adopted white religion not only facilitates but actively sanctions the physical eradication of Indigenous bodies. Following the murder, she formally enters the convent and takes her vows. Adopting the name Sister Leopolda marks the absolute climax of her assimilation. It represents the permanent death of Pauline Puyat. This is not an example of mere assimilation into white culture. Pauline annihilates her history, her biological reality, and her communal ties, finalizing her somatic and psychological self-erasure and cementing her transformation into an institutional agent of the settler-state.

If Pauline's descent into somatic self-erasure illustrates the chilling success of the colonial project, Fleur Pillager's survival proves that the Indigenous body can remain an

impenetrable, sovereign archive. The two Native women represent the starkly different responses to the assimilation policies of the Allotment Era: Fleur weaponizes her physical presence and deep connection to the landscape to actively resist colonization, whereas Pauline embodies the devastating consequences of internalized colonial hatred. Through Fleur's trajectory, Erdrich demonstrates that the Indigenous woman's body is never a neutral space: rather, it functions as a sovereign somatic archive that physically stores the historical trauma, memory, and survival of the entire community. Despite the eventual expropriation of her ancestral land, Fleur's somatic archive cannot be completely defeated. Her final decision to pack her cart with a few belongings and head toward the white settler town signifies that when traditional resistance is exhausted, the Indigenous body adapts, seeking new and subversive ways to challenge the colonial system from within (Erdrich 2025). Before departing Fleur asks Nanapush for his blessing, which he reluctantly gives to her. As she "buckled herself into the traces of the greenwood cart," Nanapush attempts to convince her to stay with them, yet his plea is met with silence (Erdrich 2025, 224). Nanapush's final image of her is compelling: he watches her figure recede "traveling south," the road eventually widening to meet "government school, depots, stores, the plotted squares of farms" (Erdrich 2025, 224) — the very apparatus of colonial bureaucracy that has hounded her throughout the novel. The fact that Fleur moves toward this landscape, rather than away from it, is highly significant: her somatic archive does not depend on distance from the settler world to remain intact. By carrying her ancestral belongings, Fleur proves that her sovereignty is borne within the body itself, rather than tethered to the land – colonized or otherwise.

This crucial evolution sets the stage for the modern era, demonstrating that the legacy of historical trauma – and the necessity to confront it – endures across decades. Unlike Fleur's public, elemental, and physically destructive retaliation, modern figures such as Geraldine Coutts must navigate a contemporary legal landscape, shifting the battleground to the domestic sphere and employing a private, restorative form of resistance.

Chapter 3: *The Round House* – Bureaucratic Violence, Sacred Space, and the Quest for Justice

While the colonial violence in *Tracks* manifests primarily through environmental, land-based dispossession, *The Round House* shifts the focus toward jurisdictional loopholes and legal voids, proving that while the strategies of colonial oppression have evolved, the systemic violence against Native bodies persists. By juxtaposing Fleur Pillager's personal story with that of Geraldine Coutts, this thesis demonstrates how both women's bodies function as living, somatic archives of embodied resistance against ongoing colonial trauma. Through the depiction of these contrasting responses to internalized historical trauma – an overt, ecologically aggressive retaliation embodied by Fleur, and a quieter, restorative, domestic reaction on Geraldine's part – Erdrich reveals that Native American resistance adapts to the changing nature of colonization. This section first examines the intricate jurisdictional maze and the federal legal void that enables this violence. Subsequently, it explores Geraldine's quiet, domestic reaction in the aftermath of her assault. More specifically, it frames her withdrawal into her bedroom not as a sign of passive defeat, but as a necessary, protective maneuver of self-preservation to survive the visceral trauma and the looming threat of a perpetrator on the loose. The chapter then turns to the desecration of the Round House itself, examining how Linden Lark's crime extends beyond Geraldine's body to profane a communal homeplace built to protect the tribe's future. Finally, it considers the limits of this legal void through Joe's own trajectory, tracing how the law's failure to protect his mother pushes him toward vigilante justice and the irreversible loss of his innocence.

3.1 The Jurisdictional Maze and the Space of Exception: Federal Law and the "Legal Void"

The tangible reality of this legal void becomes immediately apparent in the aftermath of Geraldine Coutts's assault, an event that irreversibly transforms her life as well as the lives of those around her. Most importantly, this traumatic attack sheds light on the reservation's nature as a colonial *contact zone*, namely a place where conflicting systems of power come into contact and collide. As noted by Mary Louise Pratt, contact zones are:

[…] social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today. (Pratt 1991, 34).

It is precisely within such a contested and jurisdictionally fractured area that the rape takes place, providing insight into the legal maze that characterizes tribal arrangements with the U.S. government. While tackling the aftermath of this devastating event, Erdrich does not leave much space for sentimentalism; instead, she promptly brings attention to the legal chaos surrounding the case. From the very beginning, the police investigation proves problematic, and Bazil – Geraldine's husband – is forced to call in a state trooper, a local town officer, and the tribal police solely to determine which jurisdiction should handle the crime:

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. (Erdrich 2013, 16).

Faced with this legal entanglement, police paralysis becomes almost inevitable. Ultimately, this scene is highly significant because it reveals how, in the modern era, colonial trauma operates as a silent form of violence, exploiting legal loopholes to ensure Native Americans cannot seek justice in an efficient manner. Stripped of his own authority by the U.S. legal

system, tribal judge Bazil feels entirely helpless and pessimistic from the very beginning. When his son, Joe, inquiries about what will happen after they find the perpetrator, Bazil softly shrugs away the question, admitting he cannot let himself "think that far ahead right now" (Erdrich 2013, 16). Joe, on the other hand, still holds onto a childlike faith in the U.S. government and legal system. He genuinely believes that the police's questions "would inevitably change the way we sought justice" (Erdrich 2013, 17). However, witnessing the undeniable failure of the law he so strongly believed in is what eventually destroys Joe's innocence, forcing him to realize his disempowered status and marking the beginning of his choice to actively seek justice outside of a broken system.

While the hospital scene encapsulates the immediate reality of this legal void, Joe soon realizes that the jurisdictional chaos characterizing the aftermath of the attack is not an isolated incident; rather, as Bazil painfully illustrates, it is the direct result of a deeply and perpetually flawed historical framework. When the prosecution of Linden Lark fails sometime later and he is released due to a lack of evidence, Joe furiously challenges his father, provocatively questioning his "real" authority: "All you catch are drunks and hot dog thieves. […] You said yourself. You've got zero authority, Dad, one big zero, nothing you can do" (Erdrich 2013, 265). To help Joe understand the roots of police paralysis and the limited agency of tribal law, Bazil uses a physical metaphor: a rotting, half-frozen casserole which he covers with silverware, producing a precariously balanced structure:

[…] he laid a large carving knife carefully on top of the frozen casserole and all round it proceeded to stack one 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. He carried over the other four butcher knives my mother always kept keen. […] These he balanced precariously on top of the other silverware. (Erdrich 2013, 266)

He later identifies this "edifice of knives and silverware on top of the sagging casserole" as "Indian Law" (Erdrich 2013, 266). Through this metaphor Bazil unapologetically depicts the fragility of Native case law, which he reveals to Joe is built on rotten, racist, and highly discriminatory decisions. As Cornelia Vlaicu points out, this legislative architecture was intentionally constructed to limit the rights of Indian nations to govern their internal affairs, even while formally recognizing them as sovereign nations (2019). The cutlery Bazil balances represents specific, discriminatory rulings – such as the *Major Crimes Act of 1885* and *Lone Wolf v. Hitchcock* – that act as a deceitful foundation used by the U.S. government to frame

Native people as inferior "savages" and justify land dispossession (Erdrich 2013, 267). According to Bazil, one of the most damaging modern policies is the 1978 *Oliphant v. Suquamish* ruling, which prevents tribal courts from prosecuting non-Indians, such as Linden Lark, for crimes committed on reservation land.

This calculated legal loophole exemplifies, more concretely, the structural erosion of tribal authority already mentioned in Chapter One. As Mariani argues, this legal framework relies on paternalistic Supreme Court decisions that define the relationship between tribes and the federal government as that of "a ward to its guardian" (2024, 9). By establishing a frail legal system that seemingly grants Native American autonomy yet operates as a legally sanctioned trap, the federal government ensures that non-Native people remain immune to tribal prosecution. Consequently, tribes are left structurally powerless to protect their own people from outward exploitation.

Despite this systematic erasure, Bazil persists in confronting this unjust system, adamantly refusing to give up. When Joe questions his authority, Bazil explains that because the colonial government constantly attempts to erase Native presence, every single decision must be crafted carefully, no matter how trivial, as it is the only way to build a solid foundation for Native sovereignty. He reminds Joe that they are actively trying to "press against the boundaries of what [they] are allowed, walk a step past the edge," because one day every decision will likely be scrutinized by Congress, and these expectations must be met with the appropriate legal preparation (Erdrich 2013, 268). The goal is to slowly overcome this imposed helplessness.

The hypocrisy of this legal framework becomes visually clear yet again when Bazil and Joe attempt to determine if a prosecution of Linden Lark is possible. Together with Joe, he draws a map of the Round House to determine exactly *where* the crime took place. As Bazil points out, three classes of land intersect at the crime scene: the Round House is located on the edge of tribal trust land, federal land, and state land. Because no single authority can determine which jurisdiction applies, a complete legal impasse is produced, and the prosecution cannot continue. As Vlaicu points out, this confusion is not accidental; it is the deliberate result of colonial history designed specifically to produce that effect, to destroy Native sovereignty (2019). Furthermore, she notes that if "maps are vehicles for political statements, this is surely a statement of legally perpetuated Indian disempowerment"

(Vlaicu 2019, 39), highlighting that injustice against Native Americans is a systemic, ongoing historical process.

As demonstrated in this scene, Geraldine's case perfectly matches what Jean-François Lyotard defines as a *différend*, namely a "case of conflict between [...] two parties, that cannot be equitably resolved for lack of a rule of judgment applicable to both arguments" (Lyotard 2002, as qtd. in Vlaicu 2019, 39). In other words, a *différend* occurs when, during a conflict between two entities, the dominant system forces its own regulations onto a weaker group, making it impossible for the latter to apply its own ruling system to seek justice. In this specific context, the U.S. government forcibly imposes its legal *language* onto Native Americans. To navigate this intricate, foreign legal system, Bazil is forced to speak the federal language of property lines and borders, rather than the language of human trauma. Ultimately, the federal legal structure essentially traps them, proving that whoever controls the land dictates the delivery of justice on the reservation. Once more, the issue of territorial control acts as a perpetual deterrent to Native sovereignty and survival.

The combination of a fragile, disempowered tribal authority and an intricate jurisdictional maze creates the necessary conditions for a violent attack such as the one against Geraldine. Linden Lark deliberately exploits this system, choosing the Round House as the site for his crimes to ensure his own impunity, afforded by the reservation's fractured jurisdiction. By stating "I won't get caught […] I've been boning up on the law. […] I know as much law as a judge" (Erdrich 2013, 189), he openly admits that his violence is a calculated maneuver. As he explicitly reveals during this same assault moments before pouring gasoline over Geraldine and Mayla, his violence is fueled by a toxic combination of bigotry, misogyny and a profound racial hatred against Native Americans:

I am really one sick fuck. 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 […] [they] have no standing under the law for a good reason and yet have continued to diminish the white man and to take his honor. I could be rich, but I'd rather have shown you, both of you, what you really are. (Erdrich 2013, 188-189)

Linden's particular sense of both victimization and superiority provides further insight into how warped racist ideology actively functions. By persuading himself that the white supremacist ideology effectively justifies the brutality of his crimes, Linden relies on the

specific structural privilege that allows white criminals to operate on Native land with total impunity. The structural design of the U.S. legal framework is therefore directly responsible for enabling his violence.

Because federal law completely fails to punish her attacker, Geraldine's physical body is reduced to a specific political status. In the eyes of the authorities, Geraldine and Mayla become what Giorgio Agamben defines as *homo sacer* – individuals whose lives can be violated, stripped of rights, or eliminated entirely with impunity, cast into the very state of exception outlined in Chapter One. The government's passivity in bringing Linden to justice ultimately reveals how, within this specific jurisdictional gap, Native American women are effectively denied the legal protections guaranteed to other U.S. citizens.

As previously highlighted, this legal void is not an accidental failure of the justice system; rather, it is a carefully calculated weapon of colonial control. Mbembe extends this logic of sovereign power – already discussed in relation to Agamben – to the colonial context, arguing more specifically that colonial sovereignty is fundamentally based on the power to dictate who "may live and who must die" (Mbembe 2003, 11). Mbembe further notes that the colony is the ultimate testing ground for this kind of terror, serving as "the location par excellence where the controls and guarantees of judicial order can be suspended − the zone where the violence of the state of exception is deemed to operate in the service of 'civilization'" (Mbembe 2003, 24). By legally preventing the tribe from prosecuting violent offenders and exercising full tribal sovereignty, the U.S. government intentionally maintains the reservation as a zone of perpetual lawlessness, safeguarding itself as the sole legitimate authority on that territory. Applying Mbembe's theoretical lens, the reservation mirrors the historical colony: a site where "sovereignty consists fundamentally in the exercise of a power outside the law" and where supposed peace takes the face of a "war without end" (Mbembe 2003, 23). Because colonial rulers operate on the racial denial of any common bond with the colonized, the reservation becomes a frontier zone where standard rules of justice are suspended, and violence is not legally codified or restricted. Ultimately, the federal legal void is a deliberate exercise in necropolitics, systematically abandoning Native women to violence to ensure ongoing colonial dominance.

Given that the U.S. legal system is structurally designed to abandon Native women, Geraldine quickly realizes that engaging with the police and the courts is not only ineffective, but actively harmful. When Bazil and Joe attempt to persuade her to testify and participate in the investigation so they can build a case, she firmly refuses. In a commanding tone, she

warns Joe that he should not "be a part of this […] It is all a violation" (Erdrich 2013, 105). By identifying the legal investigation itself as a "violation," Geraldine equates the government's demand for her testimony with the physical trauma of the rape itself. She is acutely aware that the justice system does not truly wish to help her cope with this dreadful event; the purpose is to extract her trauma to feed its own bureaucratic maze. Realizing that federal law has completely abandoned her, Geraldine makes a radical choice. She chooses to completely withdraw from the outside world and the legal process; instead, she retreats into the only territory where she still possesses sovereignty: her body and her absolute silence.

3.2 The Inviolable Silence of Geraldine Coutts: The Body as an Archive of Persistent Sovereignty

When facing territorial dispossession or the violation of her body by the hands of white men, Fleur Pillager actively weaponizes her body and the land to respond to outward threats aggressively. By contrast, Geraldine Coutts adopts a private, interiorized approach, fighting by preserving her memory within her body. Consequently, following the attack, Geraldine feels so distressed that she immediately takes refuge within her room and refuses any communication with the outside world. Some might argue that Geraldine's reaction is the predictable response of a person whose dignity and life have been threatened, or even a sign of passivity. On the contrary, Geraldine's retreat is neither accidental nor predictable: it stands as a clear act of somatic sovereignty. By creating a barrier between herself and the outside world, Geraldine attempts to process the traumatic event, give space to her emotions and heal, all the while storing somatic evidence within her body and preventing the fractured U.S. jurisdictional system from accessing her memory.

The physical necessity to produce this barrier becomes painfully clear in various instances following the assault, beginning with her arrival at home after being hospitalized. Even though Geraldine has returned from the hospital and Joe has returned to school, their lives are far from normal. Due to Geraldine's post-traumatic stress, the entire household, that used to revolve around her actions, now feels utterly foreign to Joe. Upon entering, he recalls that the "air seemed hollow inside the house, stale, strangely flat […] nobody had baked, fried, cooked, or in any way prepared food" (Erdrich 2013, 27). He detects a "tremendous hush […] [one] that follows in the wake of a huge explosion", a sensation that

envelops the entire building (28). Gradually, Joe is overcome by "a trance of dread", which frightens him and pushes him to burst into his parents' room looking for his mother (28). He throws himself next to her on the bed: "I tried to throw myself down next to her, she struck me in the face. It was a forearm back blow and caught my jaw, stunning me" (28). His mother's violence leaves Joe hurting and in shock: having intended to seek comfort from her, he suddenly realizes that she is no longer able to provide him with the love and kindness that he desperately seeks. Most importantly, Joe immediately masks his shock and disappointment by redirecting the conversation – a small decision that marks the rupture between childhood and adulthood. This is best reflected in the following passage when Joe offers his help by suggesting he bike down to the station to buy milk, to which his mother responds with infinite gratitude, "as though [he] had saved her, like a hero" (Erdrich 2013, 29). Joe thus becomes the reliable, guardian-like figure in whom his parents confide, a responsibility that later leads him to take matters into his own hands to seek justice.

The devastating consequences of the rape on Geraldine's well-being become painfully concrete in the casserole accident, which forces both Joe and the reader to acknowledge the depth of Geraldine's emotional scarring. When Bazil arrives home and attempts to hug Geraldine from behind as if everything were normal, he inadvertently triggers her fear, causing her to drop the casserole and flee to her room:

[…] I heard a splintering crash. And then a keen, low, and anguished cry. My mother was backed up to the sink, trembling, breathing heavily. My father was standing 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. Between them on the floor lay a smashed and oozing casserole. (Erdrich 2013, 51).

As demonstrated in this passage, ordinary moments that once felt familiar and routine cannot be reproduced in the same manner. Whereas Joe's parents used to hug each other in the kitchen upon Bazil's return from work, they now stand "staring at each other helplessly over the broken dish" (Erdrich 2013, 52). Neither Bazil nor Joe fully knows how to adjust to Geraldine's fragility and appear unable to grasp the full extent of the toll the attack has taken on her. To Joe's surprise, instead of crying or laughing as she would have on a similar occasion in the past, Geraldine simply "flushed darkly and an almost imperceptible shudder coursed over her. She took a gasping breath, and put her hand to her wounded face. Then she stepped over the mess on the floor and walked carefully away" (Erdrich 2013, 52-53). Joe further

notes that he would have preferred any reaction on her part over the "frozen suspension of feeling" as she withdraws to her room (53). Watching her retreat, Joe and his father are overwhelmed by the fear that Geraldine is "ascending to a place of utter loneliness from which she might never be retrieved" (53). In their eyes, her dark, locked bedroom resembles a tragic prison encapsulating her post-traumatic stress.

Geraldine's isolation, however, must be evaluated within the context of a traumatic event. Given that the outside world – including the police, the federal courts, and even her well-meaning husband − constantly pressures her to expose her trauma before she is truly ready, Geraldine is forced to create a barrier to protect her physical and mental safety. Building on Sara Ahmed's theory, which argues that emotions do not merely exist inside a person's head but actively create surfaces and boundaries between the self and the world, Geraldine employs her fear and her absolute silence to establish a resistant affective boundary that enables her to protect her somatic integrity. By withholding her bodily presence from a broken legal system, she prevents the authorities from crossing into her personal space.

Once this emotional and physical boundary is established, Geraldine's bedroom transforms into a protective sanctuary, or what bell hooks describes as a homeplace – a concept already discussed in Chapter One in relation to sites of resistance and Black women's domestic spaces of refuge. Within such space, the creation of safety becomes a deeply political act, providing oppressed individuals with a protected environment to process wounds and prepare resistance against a society that constantly violates them (hooks 1990). As a result, within the tranquility of her homeplace, Geraldine recovers her violated dignity and is then able to speak her truth.

Therefore, her withdrawal must be understood as a strategic defense, not as a surrender to her attacker. As Carden argues, Erdrich "presents Geraldine's story as a parable not just about endurance but about survivance" (2018, 110); by shifting Geraldine's path to resilience from a retreat into domestic silence to a reclaiming of her spirit and tribal role, Erdrich effectively portrays Native resistance to the oppressive system. Carden further notes that Geraldine embodies the Ojibwe tradition of the "unkillable mother," similar to the mythical Buffalo Woman who fiercely protects the future of her people (2018, 111). Geraldine deliberately isolates her physical body to shield her community − specifically, to ensure Linden Lark does not discover the truth about Mayla's baby. Her silence operates as a powerful form of Native survivance: it is an active, calculated strategy that allows her to

incubate her strength privately until she is fully equipped to confront the legal maze on her own terms.

While this deliberate silence successfully prevents the authorities from having access to her record, keeping the truth locked away forces Geraldine to use her own body to carry the violent burden of the official archive, eventually causing a visceral physical reaction when the truth is triggered. This active, physical defense is best displayed when Bazil and FBI Agent Soren Bjerke visit Geraldine for a second time to question her, having learned from Joe that she is withholding a crucial piece of information. When Bazil reveals they know about the mysterious file she was looking for on the day of the attack, Geraldine's reaction is explosive: "No! She cried out and there was a crash of what I knew was the breakfast tray, a clatter of silverware skidding across the floor" (Erdrich 2013, 176). Bazil reacts with exasperation, stating, "We'd best get this over with," his face "glossy with sweat" (176). Upon entering Geraldine's room, Joe notices his mother sitting on her bed with her back to them, "the pillow childishly held over her ears" (176). While this behavior strikes the men as the helpless and childish response of a broken woman, it functions in reality as a fierce physical blockade. Misinterpreting her silence, the FBI agent addresses Geraldine with condescending politeness: "I apologize for bothering you again, I'd much rather solve this and let you alone, leave you in peace. But the fact is I need some additional information from you" (176). The phrasing of this request suggests that Bjerke – and by extension the government – views Geraldine merely as a broken memory deposit required to produce clues, rather than a traumatized human being who has barely escaped death. The legal system demands that she translate her visceral trauma into neat, bureaucratic paperwork to process the crime, reducing her somatic record to a mere formal statement. This bureaucratic translation of trauma can be read as an instance of what Foucault describes as the body's subjection to a higher authority which inscribes it within systems of power (Foucault 1975; as discussed in Iuliano 2006). Yet, Geraldine's silence is not only resistance to this bureaucratic process: she is acutely aware that surrendering this information would put her life in direct danger, as Linden Lark had already threatened to kill her.

By refusing to speak a single word and simply outlasting the men's questioning in silence for an entire hour, Geraldine firmly rejects being subjected to what this thesis has already identified as epistemic violence (Spivak 1988) – here manifesting concretely as the demand that the victim translate her testimony into the state's preferred, clinical language. To ensure the integrity of her testimony remains beyond the reach of the law that cannot

protect her from Linden Lark, Geraldine relies on what Joanna Ziarkowska calls "embodied resistance" (2020, 14); thus, her physical body is elevated into a living archive. She locks the truth of the crime inside her own flesh, turning her body into the ultimate site of somatic sovereignty, where testimony is preserved when the law fails to deliver justice.

Geraldine's deliberate choice to break her silence occurs only much later, triggered by the discovery that Mayla Wolfskin's infant is in danger – a decision that underscores her absolute control over her own somatic archive. When Bazil informs her that the corrupt Governor Curtis Yeltow is attempting to adopt Mayla's missing Native child, Geraldine's body is shaken by a physical, violent revulsion:

Clutching the sheet around her, groping forward in her flowered cotton gown, she gave a weird howl that clapped down my spine. Then she actually got out of bed. She swayed and gripped my arm when I stood to help her. She began to retch. Her puke was startling, bright green. She cried out again and crept back into bed and lay motionless. [...] *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.* (Erdrich 2013, 185)

This raw, explosive reaction perfectly demonstrates the concept of the somatic living archive. Notably, Geraldine does not release her suppressed trauma in a chaotic or meaningless manner; rather, she actively fights off an invisible threat, "punching, blocking, pushing" with disconcerting violence (185). This invisible antagonist operates on multiple levels: it represents the crushing weight of the trauma, a physical recollection of her struggle against Linden Lark, and a visceral rejection of the oppressive legal system that constantly pressures her to surrender her testimony. Before she can reclaim her voice and state the truth out loud, her body must physically fight off the invisible pressure of a state apparatus that would only misinterpret her evidence and leave her abandoned. Thus, Geraldine's physical sickness speaks not only to the horrifying crimes perpetrated by Linden Lark, but, most importantly, to the jurisdictional maze caused by colonial violence that refuses to process Indian testimony and deliver justice. Geraldine's catharsis is deliberately portrayed as physical and mental agony, as it perfectly encapsulates the relief of releasing such a massive burden: the weight of knowing she barely escaped death while another woman did not. After her body releases

this suppressed trauma, she finally breaks her silence, looking at Bazil with eyes "black in her gray face" and stating harshly, "I was raped, Bazil" (Erdrich 2013, 185).

Perhaps wishing to be finally understood, Geraldine recounts the events of that night, by providing a cruel and raw description that leaves her husband and child deeply disturbed. During this recollection, Bazil attempts to push Geraldine to remember certain details that might help determine exactly where the crime took place; Geraldine, however, harshly demands human empathy by ordering her husband to "get out of the courtroom" and provide her with emotional support instead (Erdrich 2013, 187). Once more, she reminds her family that she is not giving her testimony to assist with Lark's prosecution or to feed the government's jurisdictional machine. Her goal is to heal by achieving a personal catharsis and to provide any information that might help protect Mayla's baby from the government or, even worse, from Lark. As Carden notes, by stepping up to protect the next generation – embodied by Mayla's infant daughter − Geraldine reclaims her "spirit and sense of self" and returns to society wiser, and stronger in spirit than before (2018, 110). Geraldine's ultimate decision to break her silence is therefore not a surrender to the federal justice system; it is an act of fierce community protection, proving that she will only share her truth stored in her body to achieve justice on her own terms, using her trauma as a weapon for justice rather than letting the state utilize it as a bureaucratic steppingstone.

3.3 Profaning the "Homeplace": The Round House as a Site of Desecrated Memory

In *The Round House,* Erdrich's exploration of colonial violence extends beyond the violation of the individual female body to encompass the profound desecration of Native American heritage. Specifically, the spatial dynamics of Linden Lark's crime reveal how colonization deliberately targets the community's sacred architectural spaces. To fully grasp the magnitude of Lark's crime, one must, therefore, look beyond the physical assault of Geraldine and examine the specific geography of where the violence takes place. The spatial contrast is clear: while Geraldine's bedroom serves as a private sanctuary where she guards her individual trauma, the Round House has historically served as a universal, communal homeplace for the entire Chippewa tribe.

However, when Joe first travels to the site of his mother's assault, he does not initially experience it as a healing sanctuary. Instead, he regards it as the tragic site of his mother's

ordeal. Standing at the bottom of the hill, he perceives the trauma radiating from the building itself, recalling "a moment of intense quiet", followed by a "moan of air [which] passed through the cracks in the silvery logs of the round house […] The grieving cry seemed emitted by the structure itself. The sound filled me and flooded me" (Erdrich 2013, 70). This deep grief embodied by the architecture of the place perfectly matches the building's history.

According to tribal lore, Nanapush originally built the Round House to resemble the physical body and ribs of the Buffalo Woman, a maternal spirit who sacrificed herself to save the people from starvation, cementing it as a vital center for Chippewa religious ceremonies. Specifically, when the government attempted to erase Native culture by outlawing Indigenous religions, the tribe employed the Round House to secretly practice their traditions, hiding their rituals under the fake cover of Catholic Bible studies; as Joe notes "People pretended it was a social dance hall or brought their Bibles for gatherings" (Erdrich 2013, 70). The Round House thus served as the ultimate safe space that kept Native heritage alive. Eventually, Joe makes peace with this place, noting that it "seemed peaceful," and gradually understands that it represents "a part of something larger, […] just a shadow of that way of life" (Erdrich 2013, 251). It appears that Joe is suggesting the Round House carries a dual meaning: on the one hand, it represents the richness of Chippewa culture and stands as a proud monument to surviving Native identity; on the other hand, it functions as a tragic memorial to the cultural identity that has been violently stamped out by white colonization – an absence caused by the government's systematic and violent suppression.

As a result, Linden Lark's decision to assault Geraldine in and around the Round House carries a symbolic weight that extends beyond the individual crime: it links the attack against two Indigenous women directly to the historical, cultural trauma of the entire Chippewa community. More specifically, Lark's choice is driven by two complementary factors: the necessity of picking a contested place to commit this crime to escape the consequences of his crimes through a legal loophole, and, most importantly, the deliberate desire to target this location to physically attack Native memory and identity. By committing extreme sexual violence against two Indigenous women and threatening to murder them "within the precincts of the round house," Lark "simultaneously profanes the sacred feminized body representative of the Ojibway tribe and culture" (Bender and Maunz-Breese 2018, as qtd. in Steiner 2024, 134). As these scholars point out, given its long history of cultural survival, the Round House represents "a metonymic feminine body" (134). The violation of Geraldine's body in this specific building thus serves as an act of spatial

domination, turning a historical site of Indigenous survival and communal love into a horrific zone of white conquest, mirroring how white colonialism historically invaded Native lands to achieve land dispossession and cultural erasure.

The desecration of the Round House extends beyond the erasure of the Chippewa tribal past; it represents a direct assault on its future, given the specific maternal purpose the building was originally built to serve. According to tribal lore, which is brought forth by storyteller Mooshum, the Buffalo woman provided Nanapush with detailed, clear instructions for creating the structure of the Round House, declaring that the building would literally be her body, with the poles as her ribs and the fire as her heart. Most importantly, she claimed: "It will be the body of your mother and it must be respected the same way. As the mother is intent on her baby's life, so your people should think of their children" (Erdrich 2013, 251). Above all, she placed emphasis on the building's core mission, which was to protect the next generation.

Given that the Round House was explicitly designed to safeguard the future of the Chippewa tribe, the fact that Mayla Wolfskin is ultimately murdered there marks the ultimate violation of the place at the hands of the white man. The Round House completely fails to protect one of its "children", a young, vulnerable Native mother; Linden Lark, in fact, assaults Mayla and kills her precisely within the precincts of this maternal sanctuary.

Because of this horrific event, the Round House loses its status as a "bulwark against systemic cultural, political, religious, and economic repression" (Carden 2018, 96) and as a homeplace for Native survival and is instead transformed into a site of cultural erasure and desecration. Lark's individual crime, in this light, is not an isolated incident but part of a much longer historical continuum. Wolfe traces this pattern to a range of tactics through which the U.S. government has historically chipped away at Native sovereignty, including the encouragement of miscegenation, "child abduction, religious conversion, resocialization in total institutions such as missions or boarding schools, and a whole range of cognate biocultural assimilations", alongside "frontier homicide" (Wolfe 2006, 388). Wolfe further observes that this colonial "logic of elimination continues into the present" (2006, 393). Carden applies this framework directly to *The Round House*: Geraldine Coutts' rape, she argues, exemplifies precisely this continuity, deliberately undercutting Native futures by attacking Native women and mothers (2018, 96).

Additionally, this logic of elimination does not cease with Linden Lark's physical violence; it is perpetuated through the bureaucratic violence of the government. After Mayla

Wolfskin's murder, Governor Curtis Yeltow – the powerful white politician who secretly fathered the baby following his affair with Mayla when she was underage – attempts to legally adopt the orphaned child. As revealed throughout the novel, however, Yeltow's motives are far from being driven by kindness or compassion: the adoption of an Indian child would not only allow Yeltow to hide the statutory rape against Mayla, but also improve his bigoted reputation against Native people, all the while protecting his political career. Bazil reveals the hypocrisy of this political move when he informs Geraldine that Yeltow had begun the adoption proceedings for Mayla's infant, noting Yeltow's frustration upon learning that adoptions by non-Indians are severely limited due to the Indian Child Welfare Act. In this instance, the very jurisdictional architecture that elsewhere abandons Native families works, exceptionally, in their favor: unlike the majority of federal rulings examined in this chapter, which have historically eroded tribal sovereignty, the ICWA represents one of the rare cases in which U.S. law actively protects Native children's right to be raised within their community. This does not undermine the novel's broader indictment of the jurisdictional void, however, since Yeltow's very attempt to circumvent this protection confirms that powerful white men continue to view Native sovereignty as an obstacle to be exploited rather than respected. Just as white settlers historically stole Native land and manipulated the law, in modern times powerful white men exploit the legal system to steal Native children; here, Yeltow's failure to do so does not diminish the threat, but rather exposes, with unusual clarity, the colonial desire to conquer and absorb everything Native that persists as an active force in the present.

This layered profanation is not limited to acts of adult violence and political greed; it resurfaces, more banally, in the younger Native generation's own conduct towards the Round House. This is also evident in the behavior of Joe and his friends, whose own treatment of the site – rather than that of the wider community – betrays how far removed their generation already feels from the reverence the building once commanded. When Joe and his friends search the territory surrounding the building for crucial clues that might help investigate Geraldine's case, they realize that the entire area is heavily vandalized with everyday garbage. The boys stumble upon debris like used condoms, "countless cigarettes butts, […] candy wrappers and old balls of toilet paper," and other trash scattered in the woods (Erdrich 2013, 76). Joe's friend Zack reacts by calling these people "disgusting" for leaving behind these massive piles of trash; yet, soon after, the boys' own behavior falls short of the reverence expected in a sacred healing place (Erdrich 2013, 76). Actively participating

in this disrespect, they treat the Round House as a profane playground. This contradiction is itself revealing: it is precisely their adolescent immaturity that blinds them to the sacred weight of the space they are meant to be investigating. Erdrich deliberately draws an intimate picture of boyhood friendship, emphasizing certain small details to demonstrate that the boys are clearly not mature enough. Not only do they lose focus on the amateur investigation they set for themselves, but they also irresponsibly experiment with adulthood. They engage in activities such as drinking stolen beer, proposing to burn the crime evidence they found to avoid police suspicion, and making lewd sexual comments, ultimately revealing an extreme level of immaturity. Clearly, the boys cannot yet reflect beyond their own relationships with authority to prioritize more important tasks.

Joe's behavior further illustrates a tragic hypocrisy: throughout the novel, he desperately wishes to act as the responsible adult who sets out on his own to seek justice for his traumatized mother having lost faith in the institutions, yet he remains a teenage boy who casually disrespects a cultural monument and a protected natural environment. This lingering vandalism is profoundly symbolic. It suggests that even Joe's own generation has begun to internalize a colonial disregard for what the site once represented. Ultimately, the profane debris left in the dirt shows that white violence has successfully stripped the Round House of its sacred aura, ensuring that the next generation views their historical homeplace as nothing more than a ruined hangout place.

3.4 The Limits of the Law and Vigilante Justice: Joe Coutts and the Burden of the Next Generation

As seen throughout this chapter, the violence committed against Geraldine and the desecration of the Round House are not isolated crimes; rather, they represent the direct result of a colonial justice system designed to abandon Native Americans. Because the U.S. government establishes contradictory legal loopholes over reservation land, the white man can commit terrible crimes without ever facing punishment. For an innocent and naïve teenager like Joe, watching this systemic injustice unfold within the small world of his family changes everything.

As the colonial justice system proves entirely incapable of prosecuting his mother's attacker, Joe Coutts undergoes a profound transformation, ultimately rejecting Western law

in favor of Indigenous tradition. At the very beginning of the novel, while sitting in the hospital waiting room in the immediate aftermath of Geraldine's rape, Joe demonstrates a childlike faith in the government's authority, believing that the police and the legal system will easily find and punish his mother's attacker. However, this illusion is slowly shattered as he watches the investigation stall. Joe progressively understands that the intricate rules established on reservation land are designed to protect white criminals like Linden Lark rather than Native victims. When the colonial justice system completely fails to charge Linden due to these loopholes, Joe drastically loses faith in the police, the FBI, and even his own father's power as a tribal judge and feels compelled to step into an adult role and find a way to seek justice himself.

This loss of faith reaches its breaking point after Joe and Cappy murder Linden Lark. Following the killing, Bazil essentially admits he will protect the vigilante if questioned, arguing that the killer fulfilled the ancient requirements of wiindigoo law:

I would say nothing, do nothing, to muddy the resolution. […] 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. […] 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. (Erdrich 2013, 358)

Bazil's reasoning here exemplifies what philosopher Dimitris Vardoulakis calls the "fabulations of the exception": an unpredictable narrative that masks the violence of sovereignty behind a justification, without thereby making that violence just (Vardoulakis 2013, as qtd. in Mariani 2024, 15). As Mariani argues, applying Vardoulakis's framework to the novel, Bazil experiences what the philosopher describes as "sovereign discomfort" in the face of the law's failure, and falls back on his own invented precedent – not because wiindigoo justice genuinely applies, but because the jurisdictional void demands *some* narrative capable of restoring order, however fabricated (Vardoulakis 2013, as qtd. in Mariani 2024, 14).

In this pivotal moment, Joe glances at the Western philosophy and law books in his father's study and realizes that he cannot take inspiration from them on how to deal with the moral weight of taking a life:

I looked at the books as if they could help us. But we had moved way far past books and into the stories Mooshum told in his sleep. There were no quotations in my father's repertoire for

where we were, and it was beyond me at the time to think Mooshum's sleeptalking as a reading of traditional case law. (Erdrich 2013, 358-359)

This specific realization marks Joe's total rejection of the Western legal archive; instead, he fully embraces Native storytelling and the oral traditions of his grandfather to make sense of his actions and to navigate his guilt. However, as Mariani observes, Joe and Bazil are essentially led to a misinterpretation of these Indigenous traditions (2024). Bazil's invocation of wiindigoo law to justify Lark's killing – after suspecting his son's involvement in the murder – exemplifies, in Mariani's words, the same tendency to "fall back on his own set of fabulations of the exception" already discussed above (2024, 21). Furthermore, Mariani signals how true Anishinaabe wiindigoo justice was historically driven by "defence and compassion" with the sole purpose of curing the sick wiindigoo person, not by "retribution and anger" (Borrows 2010, as qtd. in Mariani 2024, 21). As Mariani clarifies, drawing on scholar John Borrows, traditional wiindigoo law followed a gradual sequence of responses – "kindness, care, questioning, healing, separation, supervision, banishment, and death" (Borrows 2019, as qtd. in Mariani 2024, 21) – in which killing represented an absolute last resort. Decisions regarding the wiindigoo's treatment were reached collectively by the community rather than by a single individual, and only after the suspected victim had been granted the right to be heard, to involve their family, and to receive help. On these grounds, Mariani concludes that Linden cannot be juridically conceived as a wiindigoo at all (2024). Therefore, by acting as a lone vigilante, Joe is not actually enacting traditional Indigenous justice; instead, he is executing a Western form of violent retribution disguised as Native law. Notably, Mariani reaches a parallel conclusion through juridical rather than narratological analysis, arguing that no convincing case can be made for describing Linden as a wiindigoo in any legally meaningful sense (2024). Both Mariani and Steiner converge in identifying the same pattern: several scholars belonging to the novel's early readership have replicated Joe's own misreading, treating the wiindigoo analogy as sufficient justification for the killing rather than as one of the novel's central, unresolved anxieties (Steiner 2024, Mariani 2024).

Indigenous tradition is not the only framework Joe attempts to enlist in support of his plan, however. Even before Joe definitively abandons the Western legal archive, he desperately seeks a moral loophole within Catholic doctrine to validate his desire for revenge and justify the horrific act he is about to commit. He decides to attend catechism classes and requests personal instruction from Father Travis with the goal of becoming confirmed by the

end of summer, admitting to the priest that it "would help things […] at home" if he prayed (Erdrich 2013, 293). During one of their individual Catholic sessions, Joe asks Father Travis about the "Sins Crying Out to Heaven for Vengeance"; the priest replies by listing several crimes, including "murder, sodomy, defrauding a laborer, oppressing the poor" (Erdrich 2013, 294). Joe immediately classifies Linden's crime of rape under the category of sodomy and childishly justifies his impure thoughts of Lark's murder as being "covered by church doctrine" (294). Joe's behavior suggests an immature sense of pride, leading him to believe that he has successfully found a theological excuse for his vigilante plan on his very first day of catechism.

However, this flimsy justification rapidly falls apart. During a later lesson, Father Travis teaches Joe about the existence of different types of evil, focusing particularly on "moral evil," which occurs when a person deliberately causes pain and torment to another (Erdrich 2013, 296). Oblivious to Joe's growing unease, the priest inadvertently provokes him by questioning why God would deliberately allow such outrages to occur between humans. The priest argues that God grants human beings the freedom to choose between good and evil, rarely intervening even during horrific events, so that humans may ultimately draw something positive from an evil situation. This specific teaching causes Joe to panic internally. Father Travis's words speak directly to the trauma his mother endured, but more importantly, they force Joe to confront his own impending actions. Joe realizes that his plan directly defies the priest's preaching; instead of responding to Linden's evil with forgiveness by showing "unusual love" (Erdrich 2013, 297), Joe is planning to commit his own act of premeditated murder.

This panic highlights a deep, tragic misunderstanding in Joe's adolescent mind. As Steiner observes in her analysis of the novel, Joe mistakenly confuses vengeance with justice: because Joe's planned revenge is an isolated, "individually motivated" choice, it essentially becomes an act of "moral evil by the standards of wiindigoo justice" (Steiner 2024, 137). By seeking individual revenge, Joe completely misinterprets the Catholic call for mercy, while simultaneously twisting the community-focused Native *wiindigoo* tradition into a Western-style, individualistic punishment. This deliberate decision ultimately suggests that Joe remains a young teenager haunted by Western Catholic morality, and terrified of the judgement of his soul.

Haunted simultaneously by his adolescent misreading of wiindigoo justice and by the moral conflict instilled in him by Catholic doctrine, Joe approaches the novel's violent climax

– namely, Linden Lark's murder – with no framework left capable of restraining him. Joe's attempt to deliver justice on his own terms completely collapses in this compelling scene, which brutally exposes the gap between his adult vigilante fantasies and his reality as a traumatized adolescent.

Joe plans to execute Linden entirely on his own to avoid implicating his friends and to establish himself as the responsible protector of his family. For this reason, he visits the golf course overlook every morning and waits for Linden. Despite feeling prepared for this role, Joe also feels hugely relieved when Lark does not show up for the first three days, suggesting a deeply rooted fear of the consequences of a potential murder. He admits that, at times, he forgot why he was there and wondered if he was crazy to think he could carry out such a terrible plan; yet he forced himself to remember his true motives and fuel his rage by picturing the horrific images of his family's suffering caused by Lark, finding a renewed sense of purpose each time:

Then I remembered my mother stunned and bleeding in the backseat of the car. […] Or how she had stared from the bedcovers as if from a black cave. I thought of my father helpless on the linoleum floor of the grocery. I thought of the gas can in the lake. […] Then I was ready. (Erdrich 2013, 330).

Once more, Joe's deep indecision and internal conflict reveal that he desperately wishes to not become a murderer yet feels compelled to fulfill such a role because of the government's incapability to punish Lark and avenge his family. Despite being certain of his wish to contribute to Lark's suffering, Joe regrettably must admit to Cappy that his plan is "Murder, for justice maybe. Murder just the same," thus emphasizing the inevitable moral weight implicated in this gesture. When the confrontation finally occurs, Joe's adolescent reality shatters his adult fantasy. Joe shoots Linden in the stomach, yet only wounds him: Lark then begins calling for help. Joe desperately attempts to shoot him again, yet in a panic, misses his second shot:

I couldn't tell where that shot went. Once again I worked the bolt, reloaded, aimed, but my finger slid off the trigger – I couldn't shoot. Lark pitched forward. There was another silence. My face was drenching wet. I wiped my eyes on my sleeve. Lark began to make noise again. […] He locked eyes with me. Their blackness knocked me backward. (Erdrich 2013, 332)

When meeting Lark's gaze, Joe finds himself entirely petrified, shocked to his core at the immense weight of taking a life – even that of a man who caused that much pain to his family – and his immaturity is fully exposed. Suddenly, Cappy – who secretly followed Joe because he knew his friend could not complete the task alone – steps in, grabs the rifle from Joe and fires the fatal shot. Joe remains paralyzed by shock, noting that "All sound, all motion, had stalled in the sullen air. My brain was ringing," and is only able to flee the crime scene when Cappy physically forces him to (Erdrich 2013, 332).

This unexpected intervention entirely defeats Joe's attempt at lone vigilante justice, turning the execution into a shared act that severely complicates the morality of the crime. According to Mariani, by stepping entirely outside the boundaries of the law to deliver justice, Joe declares his own state of exception; in doing so, Joe reduces Linden to a *homo sacer*, the same condition of legal abandonment already discussed in relation to Geraldine (Mariani 2024). Furthermore, the fact that Lark's killing turned out to be a communal effort through Cappy's willing intervention illustrates this concept; Linden's death is not merely Joe's personal revenge, but an execution that receives "tacit approval by the tribal community" (Mariani 2024, 18). This unspoken compliance, however, should not be mistaken for collective legitimation of the killing itself. Mariani explicitly cautions against readings – such as those advanced by Bender and Maunz-Breese – that interpret the community's later assistance in concealing evidence of Joe's crime as proof of a ceremonial or ritual act, similar to traditional scapegoating; on the contrary, he insists that "there is nothing communal about the killing of Linden," since the decision to kill him was never reached through collective reasoning (Mariani 2024, 17). The community's silence following the killing, in this sense, resembles more closely what Erdrich, in a later novel of her justice trilogy, defines as "rez omerta" rather than a sanctioned act of tribal justice (Erdrich 2016, as qtd. in Mariani 2024, 17).

Linden's death thus remains, at its core, an individual act of revenge, which is merely concealed by a community unwilling to see Joe punished for delivering the justice the law itself had denied his family. This is also the reason why, in the immediate aftermath of Lark's murder, Joe desperately attempts to absorb all the guilt to protect his friend, telling Cappy, "He would've died though […] You didn't kill him. This is not on you" (Erdrich 2013, 335). However, this attempt to act as the sole sovereign executioner fails, as both boys are fully aware they are undeniably implicated. By sharing the act of murder, Joe and Cappy become permanently tethered together by the dark, emotional consequences of their violence.

The decision to bypass the colonial legal system carries, in fact, a devastating moral price for Joe: Lark's execution does not bring him any real peace or sense of victory for having avenged his family; rather, it plunges him into a psychological nightmare. Shortly after Lark's killing, Joe begins having terrifying dreams. He is haunted by one particularly disturbing nightmare in which he returns to the moment of the shooting and imagines himself switching spirits with Linden just before his death. In the dream, Joe's soul, trapped inside Linden's body, dies, while Linden's evil spirit hijacks Joe's body and flees the scene with Cappy. As a result, Joe dies in the dream knowing that Linden's spirit will eventually kill his best friend. This terrifying nightmare reflects Joe's deep concern that he himself has become a *wiindigoo*. By committing murder to protect his family, Joe worries that he has inadvertently internalized the very monster of white colonial violence he was trying to eliminate. Through this act of lethal retaliation, Joe is thrust into the "gray zone in which victims become executioners and executioners become victims (Agamben 1999, as qtd. in Roldán Sevillano 2016, 146). In this undefined, lawless space, the clear boundary between victim and perpetrator completely disappears, and victims are forced to become executioners just to survive. Ultimately, Joe's intense psychological suffering proves a tragic point about the government's broken legal system. The jurisdictional void does not merely abandon Native families; by forcing Native youth to take the law into their own hands, the colonial state actively corrupts them, pushing them to commit extreme acts of violence that lead to permanent emotional scarring.

Ultimately, the novel closes on a deeply bitter note with the death of Joe's best friend, Cappy. This tragedy occurs on account of the boys' attempt to once again engage in behaviors typical of adulthood for which they are not yet prepared, as a means of coping with the heavy secrets they are carrying – driving without sufficient experience, drinking, and doing both simultaneously – which inevitably leads to a catastrophic outcome. This scene does not merely illustrate the physical danger faced by children who are pushed, whether by circumstance, by institutional failure, or by life itself, into experimenting with adult responsibilities before they are ready. Its significance operates on a much deeper level.

When Joe discovers Cappy's lifeless body, he refuses to let go of it, clinging to him in a state of shock. It is precisely at this moment that he envisions, once more, the ghost of the policeman who had haunted him since Linden Lark's murder:

[…] my ghost had bent over me, backlit the flashlight he held cocked over his shoulder, silver haloed, looking at me with a sour contempt. He shook me lightly. His lips moved but the only words I could make out were Let go *and I would not.* (Erdrich 2013, 370)

The apparition confirms that Mooshum had been right all along: the ghost was, in fact, a spirit from the future, purposefully making its final appearance at the finalization of Joe's dark transition into the adult world.

Later, at the police station, when his parents arrive to collect him, Joe observes that they "walked in the door disguised as old people. I thought the miles in the car had bent them, dulled their eyes, even grayed and whitened their hair and caused their hands and voices to tremble;" Joe himself feels equally aged, "broken and fragile" (Erdrich 2013, 370). Cappy's death, in this sense, constitutes the ultimate step of Joe's dark and irreversible transition into adulthood. Thus, killing Linden Lark did not erase or ease the family's pain; rather, it deepened their psychological trauma.

This final loss of innocence finds its quietest, yet most devastating expression in the closing lines of the novel. Joe recounts driving past the roadside café where his family once stopped for ice cream during his childhood. Now, however, weighed down by a sorrow that has become constant and collective, the family no longer stops. They simply continue driving past.

This bleak, unresolved ending directly connects to the broader argument of this thesis. The jurisdictional void created by the colonial state ultimately compels a child to become a killer, costing Joe his youth and depriving the community of another member: the violence exerted by colonial power does not manifest in the same form it assumed during Fleur Pillager's era in *Tracks*, yet it has by no means disappeared – it has merely been reconfigured. The trauma it generates continues to be transmitted across generations; it remains systemic and ongoing, to the point of becoming an almost constitutive feature of Native experience. As Joe comes to recognize that his true "sentence was to endure," Erdrich demonstrates that individual revenge cannot fix structural oppression; instead, Native survival within this legal void often means silently carrying the weight of colonial history forward – a truth the novel's final lines render with devastating simplicity, as Joe and his family drive past the café of his childhood: "we passed over in a sweep of sorrow that would persist into our small forever. We just kept going" (Erdrich 2013, 370).

Overall, this chapter has shown that the jurisdictional void surrounding the Round House produces a form of colonial violence that is widespread, generational, and inescapable. Whereas Fleur's somatic sovereignty in *Tracks* manifested through a public, ecological defiance that ultimately preserved her autonomy, Geraldine's sovereignty is private and restorative – yet it unfolds alongside the corrosion of her son's innocence, who is forced to seek justice outside a system that has already failed his mother. Joe's transformation from a hopeful child into a traumatized vigilante demonstrates that the jurisdictional maze does not merely abandon Native women's bodies; it destroys an entire family across generations, proving that the "small forever" of sorrow Joe inherits is the direct, structural product of a legal architecture designed to fail (Erdrich 2013, 370). The following chapter turns to a systematic comparison of Fleur and Geraldine's divergent – yet equally powerful – ways of employing their bodies as sites of somatic sovereignty, tracing how Erdrich's protagonists transform historical dispossession and legal abandonment into a century-long archive of Indigenous survivance.

Conclusion: A Century of Somatic Sovereignty – Fleur Pillager and Geraldine Coutts in Dialogue

4.1 Elemental Vengeance, Embodied Guilt: Two Somatic Responses to Violation

As demonstrated in the previous chapters, both Fleur Pillager and Geraldine Coutts employ their body as sites of somatic sovereignty to counter the U.S. government's failure to ensure protection and justice, yet they do so through opposing mechanisms: Fleur's silence operates outward, as an offensive weapon of elemental defiance, while Geraldine's non-verbal response functions inward, as a protective shield. A further difference, however, emerges once the immediate violation has passed – one that concerns not the strategic use of silence itself, but what happens afterward, when Fleur and Geraldine, or those around them, respond to the violence they have endured. In *Tracks*, this response takes the form of a tornado that befalls the town of Argus – a natural calamity that nonetheless seems to target precisely the white men responsible for Fleur's rape. In *The Round House*, by contrast, it is Geraldine's own son, Joe Coutts, who takes on the burden of killing his mother's rapist, Linden Lark, on his own terms. The following section examines what this shift – from an elemental, nature-driven response to a human, morally costly one – reveals about how colonial violence itself does not disappear across the century spanned by the two novels but instead evolves.

In the early 1920s, when *Tracks* is set, the U.S. government was actively engaged in stripping Native communities of their rights: land dispossession, the forced enrollment of Native children in boarding schools, the imposition of Catholicism, and the broader attempt to erase Indigenous identity in favor of Western assimilation. This period, then, is defined by an active, systematic seizure of Native land and culture, still visibly underway.

By the time of Geraldine and Joe, this process has, in a sense, already run its course: reservation lands have long been established, allowing for the construction of Native schools and stores and for the survival of Indigenous culture and heritage. Yet, the aftermath of colonization remains far from resolved – it merely shifted shape.

Consequently, the kind of ecologically destructive vengeance that Fleur enacts is no longer available to Geraldine or Joe. By the late twentieth century, agreements between

Native communities and the federal government have already been settled, and the relevant laws have already been written; little room remains to reclaim anything or to defy the state as openly as Fleur once did. What persists instead are laws that, to this day, fail to protect Native Americans as fully as they protect other U.S. citizens – a failure that is itself proof that the aftermath of colonial violence continues to loom over tribal self-determination. As Roldán Sevillano observes, drawing on Visser, colonialism's "traumatic aftermath continues until our current days" (2016, 150). This failure of the legal system ultimately drives Joe to seek justice on his own terms, in the absence of any government willing to deliver it for him.

That same historical context also explains why Geraldine "transmits her trauma onto her son" (Roldán Sevillano 2016, 145), and why the burden of responding to her violation ultimately falls on Joe rather than remaining contained within her own body. Drawing on psychiatrist Vamik Volkan, Roldán Sevillano argues that trauma is generational: it can be externalized onto a developing child, who becomes "a reservoir for the unwanted, troublesome parts" of the previous generation's pain (Volkan 1997, as qtd. in Roldán Sevillano 2016, 145). Joe internalizes his mother's suffering simply by witnessing her in such a devastating state after the rape. But, following Volkan's further claim that "the traumatized self-images passed down by members of the group […] become part of the group identity," Joe does not merely absorb Geraldine's individual trauma: he inherits the trauma of his entire community, shaped by decades of colonial violence, poverty, and dispossession that preceded him.

Beyond this legal and historical burden, however, Fleur's response and Joe's diverge in one further respect: the two also differ in what their respective acts of vengeance leave behind on their own bodies and psyches. Fleur's revenge against her rapists is mediated through a natural calamity and, as such, remains external to her own person. Consequently, her response leaves no trace on her body or her mind: she simply walks away from Argus, still sovereign and unassimilated. Joe's revenge, by contrast, operates in a fundamentally different way: it is mediated by his own body, mind, and spirit. He becomes the site of the violence himself, and because of that, he can never fully free himself from the crime he has committed – the knowledge of it persists within him. Taking responsibility for Lark's murder brings Joe limited relief since it makes him suffer from perpetrator trauma; as Roldán Sevillano argues, Erdrich portrays Lark's killing as a "haunting and possessive influence" that soon leads Joe to experience nearly every symptom associated with this kind of traumatic experience (2016, 147). This includes the looming guilt threatening to envelop his

identity, recurring nightmares of Lark pursuing him in his sleep, unwanted intrusive thoughts, and, above all, the terrifying fear of having become something monstrous himself.

Drawing on Timothy Schroer, Roldán Sevillano further observes that perpetrators or killers often suffer from violent physical, somatic responses – proof of the "overwhelmingly presence of feelings of shame and remorse" that inevitably follow the commission of a crime. This is what occurs to Joe Coutts, who develops a high fever and frequently vomits in the immediate aftermath of Lark's killing. Joe's physical collapse is accompanied by a genuine fracture of his sense of self. In the wake of the killing, when Cappy asks him, "What are we? [...] What are we now?", Joe can only answer, "I don't know man, I don't know" (Erdrich 2013, 339). These words echo Joe's own subsequent admission when, upon returning home after the shooting, he felt himself "separating [himself] from who [he] was" (Erdrich 2013, 340-341) – a dissociation that Roldán Sevillano identifies as a further trait of perpetrator trauma (2016).

The difference between Fleur's and Joe's reactions reveals something uniquely significant: what marks Joe so deeply is that his body becomes, against his will, the somatic archive of a self-inflicted violence. Joe will carry the weight of having taken a human life for the rest of his existence. Fleur's body, by contrast, embodies the archive of violence suffered by her individually, by her community, by her ancestors: through her open defiance against the government and anyone who sought to harm her, she deliberately turned her body into an archive of trauma and sovereignty, rather than one of guilt. Her battle against land dispossession, moreover, never directly harmed anyone, unlike Joe's. What distinguishes Fleur from Joe, then, is not the legitimacy of their resistance, but its cost: one body remains sovereign; the other becomes the site of a wound it must carry forward alone.

4.2 From Allotment to Jurisdiction: The Evolving Architecture of Dispossession

Beyond the bodily toll of vengeance, the two novels also share a common thread in the bureaucratic instruments through which colonial power operates. Despite taking entirely different forms, the allotment documents that Fleur categorically refuses to sign and the jurisdictional map marking the meeting point of three legal authorities – which embodies the federal government's incapacity to prosecute – serve the same underlying purpose: to undermine Native self-determination and survival, while profiting from Native land and

resources. In Fleur's time, this process is strikingly overt: the government openly strips Native land under the guise of official-sounding laws, wielding its power for colonial and profit-driven ends. By Geraldine's time, the same process continues, but in a subtler form. Historical circumstances have drastically changed: reservation lands have already been established, and tribal institutions already exist. Consequently, the aim is no longer to seize territory outright, but to chip away at tribal self-determination through more indirect means, for instance, by simply failing to help Native Americans like Geraldine seek justice. Both cases, however, reveal the same underlying truth: most laws and agreements between the federal government and Native communities were never designed with Native people's wellbeing or protection in mind, but to serve the government's financial and political interests.

Fleur grasps the full extent of the federal government's deceptive nature from the very beginning, and no matter how much pressure she faces, she categorically refuses to sign any treaty or agreement. When she eventually loses the legal battle against the dispossession of her land, she does not leave passively: she claims the land as her own one final time by bringing down the trees around Lake Matchimanito, placing yet another obstacle in the government's path. In Geraldine's era, the law betrays her differently: it fails to prosecute her rapist, since the legal system was built, from the start, to favor white men over Native Americans. As Erdrich herself points out in her Afterword, Geraldine's story is not an isolated case; countless similar rapes on reservation land by white men go unprosecuted because of these same legal loopholes and jurisdictional gaps – precisely the injustice Erdrich sets out to expose through her "justice trilogy" (Mariani 2024, 9). The scholar traces the roots of this limitation back to the *Marshall Trilogy*, or what he provocatively calls the "injustice trilogy" (9). This legal framework persists into the modern era and continues to restrict Indigenous peoples' right to administer justice within what is supposedly "their" own territory. Such continuity is not merely a comparative reading independent to the present study; Erdrich herself builds it into the fabric of *The Round House*. Mizan-Rahman notes that Joe's own grandfather, Mooshum, is said to have owned an allotment plot himself (Mizan-Rahman 2025), thus inscribing Erdrich's modern narrative into the very allotment-era land regime that structures Fleur's world in *Tracks*. Erdrich thus signals that the jurisdictional maze Geraldine faces is not a historical rupture from Fleur's era, but its direct continuation.

Within this same persistent structure, however, not every character responds to dispossession the way Fleur or Geraldine do. The male counterparts of Fleur and Geraldine

– Nanapush and Bazil – repeatedly attempt, in an effort to advance Native self-determination, to work within the U.S. bureaucratic system, despite its having failed them time and again. Both men thus come to function as a mirror of male powerlessness, one that sharpens the contrast with the sovereign, bodily power embodied by their female counterparts: through their compliance with the law, they represent the outcome of partial assimilation to the federal government's demands. This strategy occasionally pays off, as it enables Nanapush to eventually bring Lulu home. However, abiding by the government's rules always comes at a cost: it either reduces the tribe to what Nanapush calls "a tribe of file cabinets and triplicates" (Erdrich 2025, 225) – nearly powerless – or, as in Bazil's case, demands enormous patience and years of fighting small, seemingly insignificant legal battles just to build a solid foundation for tribal sovereignty over time.

That cost becomes even more apparent when the men's outcomes are set directly against those of Fleur and Geraldine, who pursue the very same goal of tribal self-determination through entirely different means. In *Tracks*, Nanapush manages to bring Lulu back from boarding school by using the very same bureaucratic means that favored the dispossession of Fleur's land. As already noted, though, complying with the government's demands always comes at a cost for Native people. Fleur, too, eventually loses her land; yet she leaves the scene on her own terms, striking and unmistakable, her sovereignty intact within her own body.

In a similar attempt, Bazil tries to navigate the legal system to slowly build a foundation for tribal sovereignty; the goal is the same as Nanapush's, yet the results are minimal, and they require years of thorough work and patience. With regard to his own wife's rape, he is left legally powerless and can do almost nothing beyond researching precedent.

Geraldine, by contrast, stores her trauma within her own body and mind, refusing to reveal it to the authorities until it is safe for her – and for those she seeks to protect – to do so. She breaks her silence only once a further threat to her community demands it (a choice examined more fully in section 4.3). In this sense, however, justice is never truly restored for Geraldine. But knowing that she helped shield a member of the community gives her a form of agency and satisfaction that the legal system itself never could.

This same structural persistence – the ongoing, rather than singular nature of settler invasion that Wolfe identifies as central to settler colonialism's defining logic (2006) – helps explain why the bureaucratic strategies pursued by Nanapush and Bazil ultimately produce such limited results. Wolfe's logic of elimination, as Morgensen further explains, operates not

only through direct violence, but equally through amalgamation, namely the absorption of Indigenous peoples, cultures, and lands into the body of the settler nation in ways that erase the possibility of distinct Native nationhood (2011). Since settler colonial power is not limited to the mere seizure of land but continuously reasserts itself through new administrative forms – allotment fees in one century, jurisdictional voids in the next – working within its structures can, at best, produce partial, provisional gains. Fleur's and Geraldine's bodies, by contrast, remain sites the settler state can never fully administer or contain, precisely because their sovereignty is not granted by that structure in the first place, and therefore cannot be revoked by it either.

4.3 Unkillable Mothers: Motherhood as Somatic and Political Sovereignty

While the attempt to navigate the U.S. bureaucratic system offers men like Nanapush and Bazil only partial, provisional gains, motherhood emerges in both novels as the one force capable of transforming the somatic archive from a site of endurance into one of active, communal regeneration.

Throughout both novels, Erdrich consistently frames motherhood as something that demands sacrifice and danger, pushing both Fleur and Geraldine toward acts of extreme personal cost. This narrative choice connects directly back to the underlying argument of this thesis: the female body as an archive that stores historical trauma – both individual and communal – and, through that, becomes a site of somatic sovereignty. The Native female body does not preserve memory passively; it actively shields it from outside threats.

Native women in Erdrich's novels are, in fact, rarely depicted as sources of pure comfort or safety, and this decision is not accidental; it reflects the fact that no Native person is ever fully safe to begin with. Historically, Native Americans have endured countless outward threats – land dispossession, the government's attempted erasure of tribal identity, racial discrimination, or even a hostile natural environment that must be survived.

Erdrich captures this conceptualization of motherhood perfectly in *Tracks*, particularly when Fleur travels into the spirit world, risking her own life to gamble for her daughter's, and again during Lulu's delivery, when a bear breaks into the cabin (both scenes already discussed in Chapter Two). Similarly, Geraldine offers her son Joe little comfort or safety in the aftermath of the assault – partly because she lacks the strength to, but perhaps

also because she wants Joe to understand exactly what kind of world they live in: one that is fundamentally unjust toward Native people, starting with its own legal system.

As a result, motherhood in both novels is never framed as a purely private, domestic role: instead, it becomes a source of strength for the entire community, a force that protects tribal identity and drives the pursuit of self-determination.

In light of this, Fleur can be read as an "unkillable mother" in precisely the sense Carden (2018) uses to describe Geraldine. Fleur fits this definition not only through her extraordinary strength and endurance which become evident in childbirth and through her journey into the spirit world, but mostly because she herself nearly dies more than once, only to return each time stronger and more resolute.

This resilience, however, is never deployed solely on behalf of Fleur's and Geraldine's own families: as shown throughout both novels, motherhood notably carries a particular political weight. In *The Round House*, Erdrich makes the trigger for Geraldine's testimony a stranger's child – not her own family's safety – to demonstrate that motherhood, for Native women, is never limited to biological family; it extends beyond blood ties into a broader form of communal responsibility. For most of the novel, Geraldine withholds her testimony against Lark partly out of fear that he might try to kill her again, but above all because she is determined to keep her promise to Mayla to look after her baby. Only once she is certain the infant is safe – both from Lark and from Governor Yeltow's political scheme to adopt her – does she finally testify, summoning everything she has as a tribal officer to help another woman's child. By emerging from her exile, Geraldine reclaims her role as "caretaker of Ojibwe identity, guardian and interpreter of records" (Carden 2018, 100).

The extension of motherhood beyond the purely biological is, in fact, deeply rooted in Ojibwe tradition itself. As Carden notes, drawing on Hertha Wong, in Ojibwe culture "the mother is not merely one's biological parent; she is all one's relations (human and animal, individual and tribal)" (Wong 1991, as qtd. in Carden 2018, 100). Wong further observes that Native women have historically been associated with "the continuance of tribal tradition, both through childbearing and through transmission of cultural values," bearing responsibility for clan relationships that sustain both individual and tribal well-being (Wong 1991, as qtd. in Carden 2018, 100). Erdrich's portrayal of motherhood, then, aligns with what Paula Gunn Allen describes as a broader "woman-centered" system in Native cultures – one that stands in direct opposition to the "Western concepts of social order" underpinning

colonialism, according to which "the strong must prevail over the weak […] and the order of patriarchy over all" (Allen 1998, as qtd. in Carden 2018, 100).

Fleur's relationship towards her community follows this same logic. Her connection to her culture and roots is never a purely personal matter: through her aggressive defiance against the government, her refusal to accept land dispossession, her supernatural bond with the natural world, and her outright dismissal of colonial bureaucracy, Fleur works to protect not simply her own bloodline, but the identity and tradition of her entire tribe. This is also visible in her mockery and open defiance of Pauline who, as discussed in Chapter Two, represents the assimilated subject who rejects her own roots entirely.

Taken together, these three points of comparison – bodily vengeance, bureaucratic dispossession, and motherhood – converge on a single, underlying claim about the Native female body itself. Rather than being passive, it is a defiant tool of resilience against both historical trauma and ongoing injustice. Whether through Fleur's ecological defiance or Geraldine's protection of Mayla's infant, the female body consistently preserves memory and shields it from being fragmented or distorted by official, national records. Furthermore, it does not merely embody a potent testimony to personal trauma: it becomes a foundation the entire community can draw on to deconstruct and resist colonial history.

Undeniably, the specific forms colonial violence takes have drastically evolved across a century of history, and the threats each woman faces are shaped by very different historical moments. Yet the underlying condition shaping Indigenous life has changed little: Geraldine, too, must contend, both personally and communally, with the aftermath of colonial violence, embodied in laws and agreements that continue to deny Native Americans the same rights and protections granted to other U.S. citizens. Through both novels Erdrich seems to suggest that no single path – neither Bazil's and Nanapush's attempt to work within the system, nor Fleur's and Joe's turn to defiance and violence – offers a straightforward and easy solution to this injustice. In this respect, the two women's stories diverge one final time. Fleur requires no reconciliation with the system that dispossessed her: she departs the novel sovereign and unresolved, her defiance never redeemed nor punished but simply carried forward within her own body. Geraldine's story, by contrast, remains bound to the very legal architecture it reveals as insufficient; as Steiner argues, drawing on Derrida, Erdrich's fiction does not offer a resolved, achieved justice for Geraldine's community, but rather points toward what she calls a "justice-to-come": a justice still in the process of being sought, still incomplete, but never abandoned as impossible (Steiner 2024, 141). Read together, then, Fleur's departure

and Geraldine's waiting represent two distinct temporalities of resistance: one that claims sovereignty immediately and on its own terms, and one that defers it toward an unwritten future.

In the end, what persists across the century separating Fleur Pillager from Geraldine Coutts is not a single, static form of resistance, but the archive itself: a living, somatic record that survives every attempt to erase it. What Erdrich's fiction discloses, through this archive, is that colonial violence is not an isolated event confined to a single moment in history, but an ongoing, evolving structure that continues to shape Native lives into the present. And yet, as both novels reveal in the end, the same female body that bears the weight of that violence also represents the site where resistance, memory, and survival are preserved. These are the terms in which this thesis has approached Erdrich's fiction.

What is more, the present study does not claim to offer a definitive or complete account of the relationship between the body, trauma, and Indigenous sovereignty in Erdrich's fiction, since it is a subject far too complex and alive to be exhausted by a single thesis. It hopes, instead, to advance a different reading of that relationship: through the female body as archive, as resistance, and as an enduring, unresolved site of survivance.

Works cited

Ahmed, Sara. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. 2nd ed. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014. https://doi.org/10.1515/9780748691142. Last visited 28/02/2026.

Austenfeld, Thomas. "Louise Erdrich in Company: The American Writer and Her Communities." *Critical Insights: Louise Erdrich*. 2012. 68-85. https://perso.unifr.ch/thomas.austenfeld/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/2012_Erdrich_Ebsco_TCA.pdf. Last visited 28/02/2026.

Bird, S. Elizabeth. "Introduction." *Dressing in Feathers: The Construction of the Indian in American Popular Culture*. New York: Routledge, 2018. 1-12. https://api.pageplace.de/preview/DT0400.9780429969454_A35064394/preview-9780429969454_A35064394.pdf. Last visited 28/02/2026.

Carden, Mary Paniccia. "'The Unkillable Mother': Sovereignty and Survivance in Louise Erdrich's *The Round House*." *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 30.1 (2018): 94-116. https://doi.org/10.5250/studamerindilite.30.1.0094. Last visited 28/02/2026.

Coulombe, Joseph L. "History and Context of Native Writing." *Reading Native American Literature*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2011. 18-34.

Daniele, Daniela. "Transactions in a Native Land: Mixed-Blood Identity and Indian Legacy in Louise Erdrich's Writing." *RSAJournal* 3 (1992): 55-68. https://doi.org/10.13135/1592-4467/8979. Last visited 28/02/2026.

DePriest, Maria. "Once Upon a Time, Today: Hearing Fleur's Voice in *Tracks*." *Journal of Narrative Theory* 38.2 (2008): 249-268. https://www.jstor.org/stable/41304886. Last visited 28/02/2026.

Donahue, James. *Contemporary Native Fiction: Toward a Narrative Poetics of Survivance*. New York: Routledge, 2019. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429197093. Last visited 28/02/2026.

Erdrich, Louise. "Rape on the Reservation." *The New York Times* 26 February 2013. https://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/27/opinion/native-americans-and-the-violence-against-women-act.html. Last visited 28/02/2026.

- - -. *The Round House*. London: Hachette Collections, 2013.

- - -. *Tracks*. Large print ed. Waterville: Thorndike Press, 2025.

Foucault, Michel. *Surveiller et punir. Naissance de la prison*. Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1975.

Friedman, Susan Stanford. "Identity Politics, Syncretism, Catholicism, and Anishinabe Religion in Louise Erdrich's *Tracks*." *Religion & Literature* 26.1 (1994): 107-133. https://www.jstor.org/stable/40059588. Last visited 28/02/2026.

Gad, Fadwa Mahmoud Hassan. "The Abode of Evil: The Female Body as a Symbol in Louise Erdrich's *Tracks*." *Retold Feminine Memoirs: Our Collective Past and Present*. Leiden: Brill | Rodopi, 2013. 123-132. https://doi.org/10.1163/9781848881921_012. Last visited 28/02/2026.

hooks, bell. "Homeplace: A Site of Resistance." *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics*. Boston: South End Press, 1990. 41-46.

Iuliano, Fiorenzo. "Sovversioni materiche. Corpi e politiche del corpo nella teoria culturale contemporanea." *ACOMA 32* (2006): 7-27. https://www.acoma.it/it/content/corpi. Last visited 28/02/2026.

Madsen, Deborah L. "Introduction." *The Routledge Companion to Native American Literature*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2016. 1-12. https://www.routledge.com/The-Routledge-Companion-to-Native-American-Literature/Madsen/p/book/9780367365622. Last visited 28/02/2026.

Mariani, Giorgio. "Fabulations of the Exception: Law, Justice, and Violence in Louise Erdrich's *The Round House*." *Recognitions: Crossing Territories across Time, Space, and Textuality in the US and Beyond*. Edited by Enrico Botta, Gianna Fusco, Pilar Martínez Benedí and Anna Scannavini. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2024. 9-25. https://www.degruyterbrill.com/document/doi/10.1515/9783111544601-002/html. Last visited 28/02/2026.

Mbembe, Achille. "Necropolitics." Translated by Libby Meintjes. *Public Culture* 15.1 (2003): 11-40. https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-15-1-11. Last visited 28/02/2026.

Mizan-Rahman, Mohammad. "'The End of Thinking Occurred': Storytelling and Windigo Justice in *The Round House* (2012)." *Preprints 2025*, 2025012176 (2025). https://doi.org/10.20944/preprints202501.2176.v1. Last visited 28/02/2026.

Morgensen, Scott Lauria. "The Biopolitics of Settler Colonialism: Right Here, Right Now." *Settler Colonial Studies* 1.1 (2011): 52-76. https://doi.org/10.1080/2201473X.2011.10648801. Last visited 28/02/2026.

Mrak, Anja. "Liminal Femininity: Magical Realism and the Abject in Louise Erdrich's *Tracks*." *ELOPE: English Language Overseas Perspectives and Enquiries* 19.2 (2022): 211-221. https://doi.org/10.4312/elope.19.2. Last visited 28/02/2026.

Porter, Joy. "Historical and Cultural Contexts to Native American Literature." *The*

Cambridge Companion to Native American Literature. Edited by Joy Porter and Kenneth M. Roemer. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. 39-68. https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL0521822831.002. Last visited 28/02/2026.

Pratt, Mary Louise. "Arts of the Contact Zone." *Profession* (1991): 33-40. https://www.jstor.org/stable/25595469. Last visited 28/02/2026.

Roldán Sevillano, Laura. "From Revenge to Justice: Perpetrator Trauma in Louise Erdrich's *The Round House*." *Revista de Estudios Norteamericanos* 20 (2016): 137-158. https://zaguan.unizar.es/record/62121. Last visited 28/02/2026.

Sergi, Jennifer. "Storytelling: Tradition and Preservation in Louise Erdrich's *Tracks*." *World Literature Today* 66.2 (1992): 279-282. https://www.jstor.org/stable/40148133. Last visited 28/02/2026.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Edited by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg. Houndmills: Macmillan, 1988. 271-313. https://voidnetwork.gr/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Can-the-subaltern-speak-by-Gayatri-Spivak.pdf. Last visited 28/02/2026.

Steiner, Makayla C. "Seeking a Justice-to-Come in Louise Erdrich's *The Round House*." *Great Plains Quarterly* 44.2 (2024): 123-143. https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/gpq.2024.a961608. Last visited 28/02/2026.

Vlaicu, C. "'There Are Many Kinds of Justice': Confessing Growing Up an Indian Legal Subject in Louise Erdrich's *The Round House*." *Linguaculture* 10.1 (2019): 29-45. https://doi.org/10.47743/lincu-2019-1-0133. Last visited 28/02/2026.

Wolfe, Patrick. "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native." Journal of Genocide Research 8.4 (2006): 387-409. https://doi.org/10.1080/14623520601056240. Last visited 28/02/2026.

Ziarkowska, Joanna. *Indigenous Bodies, Cells, and Genes: Biomedicalization and Embodied Resistance in Native American Literature*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2020. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003036890. Last visited 28/02/2026.