Article

Not peer-reviewed version

“The End of Thinking Occurred”: Storytelling and Windigo Justice in the Round House (2012)

Mohammad Mizan-Rahman *

Posted Date: 29 January 2025

doi: 10.20944/preprints202501.2176.v1

Keywords: Storytelling; Justice; Windigo Justice; Indigeneity

Article

"The End of Thinking Occurred": Storytelling and Windigo Justice in *The Round House* (2012)

Mohammad Mizan-Rahman

University of Wisconsin-Platteville; rahmanmo@uwplatt.edu

Abstract: Published in 2012, *The Round House*, the latest novel of Louise Erdrich (Chippewa[1]), has received much critical attention in academia. All the major events of this novel revolve around Joe's family. Joe's mother Geraldine becomes the victim of rape which leads her husband Bazil to look for justice; however, justice is first delayed and then denied by legislatures. Joe, a thirteen-year protagonist, eventually ensures justice through hunting a white-windigo. Erdrich's text deals with many important literary issues and devices like religious views, especially the church's role and the church's hostility towards women's bodies, supernaturalism, medical ethics, law and justice, Indian and Non-Indian[2] identity. *The Round House* is included even in the curricula of Law and Medical disciplines for its subject matters—a high accolade. In the first part, this article will deal with three political aspects of storytelling: i) as a process of decolonization; iii) in terms of land tenure; and iv) as ceremony and healing. In the second part, I will explain how storytelling as a cultural tool formulates the concept and execution of justice. Here in this part, I will first discuss the way Erdrich's novel reflects an Indigenous experience of justice—how justice excludes and how justice excludes through inclusion. The analysis of three important characters—Joe, his mother, and his father—and their envisioning of legal and windigo justice will therefore be brought into the discussion.

Keywords: storytelling; justice; windigo justice; indigeneity

Introduction

Indigenous nations have a rich natural, social, economic, and political life. Shawn Wilson (Opaskwayak Cree), in *Research Is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods* (2008), explains the term "Indigenous" stating that it refers to "Indigenous [P]eople and [p]eoples" as well as to political affiliation (15). "Indigenous" does not refer to an ethnically negligible group of people; in fact, the representation of Indigenous nations is highly politicized, an effect achieved over the course of time. A lack of genuine Indigenous representation left non-Indigenous people ignorant and misguided regarding Indigenous culture and ideals. In her "Introduction" to *Indigenous American Women: Decolonization, Empowerment, Activism* (2003), Devon Abbott Mihesuah (Oklahoma Choctaw scholar) also points out that the "'Natives' are still stereotyped in movies, on television, in literature, and as sports team mascots" (xi). In the footnote, she elaborates the types and modes of this misrepresentation. Here I cite Mihesuah's complete footnote about stereotypes for readers so that we, the Indigenous-knowledge seekers, are aware of them, ultimately to dispel them:

> Indians are all alike; Indians were conquered because they were weak and powerless; if Indians had banded together, they could have prevented the European invasion; Indians had no civilization until Europeans brought it to them; Indians arrived in this hemisphere

[1] The Chippewa people are also known as Ojibwe and Anishinabe; however, as Erdrich widely used Chippewa in her writings and interviews, I will follow this example.

[2] In this article, I will use the term Indigenous, but when I refer to Erdrich or any other Indigenous scholars, I will use their terminologies within a quotation mark.

 doi:10.20944/preprints202501.2176.v1

> via the Siberian land bridge; Indians were warlike and treacherous; Indians had nothing to contribute to Europeans or to the growth of America; Indians did not value or empower women; Indians have no religion; Indians welcome outsiders to study and participate in their religious ceremonies; Indians are a vanished race; Indians are confined to reservations, live in tipis, wear braids, and ride horses; Indians have no reason to be unpatriotic; Indians get a free ride from the government; Indians' affairs are managed for them by the BIA; Indians are not capable of completing school; Indians cannot vote or hold office; Indians have a tendency toward alcoholism; "my grandmother was an Indian"; Indians are all full-bloods; all Indians have an "Indian name"; Indians know the histories, languages, and cultural aspects of their own tribe and all other tribes; Indians are stoic and have no sense of humor; and Indians like having their picture taken. (173)

To defy stereotyping, the Indigenous-knowledge seekers need to rely on the representations of Indigeneity from the experiences and perspectives of Indigenous writers, scholars, and academics, rather than from sources that endorse ideas derived from "white political-studies." Having stated that scholarship derived from Indigenous academics is crucial to a correct representation of the Indigenous experience, I would also suggest that some non-Indigenous scholarship and critical theory provide insights. Notably, there have been scholars, who although Euro-Americans, have contributed to an understanding of how misrepresentation has occurred.

For the title of this article, I borrowed the phrase "storytelling and justice" from Leanne Simpson's (Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg) *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back: Stories of Nishnaabeg Re-creation, Resurgence, and a New Emergence* (2011). Simpson argues, "[t]hrough storytelling, we can experience the spaces of freedom and justice" (33). Simpson also argues that "storytelling is a process of remembering, visioning, and creating a just reality where Nishnaabeg live as both Nishnaabeg and peoples" (33).

I. Storytelling and *The Round House*

In an interview titled "Conversation: Louise Erdrich, Author of *The Round House*," Erdrich states that she was haunted by political matters for a long time, and she thinks that *The Round House* is a perfect platform to convey her political message, although she had no intention to write a political diatribe. In this first section, I posit that Erdrich's storytelling has political and artistic functionalities, but specifically I will deal with three political aspects of storytelling: i) as a process of decolonization; iii) in terms of land tenure; and iv) as ceremony and healing.

The Round House opens with the protagonist Joe, who provides his thoughts about some of the matters which are quite political, especially those about law and treaties that accelerate the theme of politics right at the outset of the text. Treaties were made by the settler state to hegemonize the Indigenous nations politically. Joe thinks, ". . . our treaties with the government were like treaties with foreign nations" (3). Staying in their own land, the Indigenous nations underwent treaties and allotment policies with the settler state. Vine Deloria, Jr. and Clifford M. Lytle state, "[w]hen the Indian [N]ations treated with the United States government, they undoubtedly assumed that the negotiated agreements would endure 'ad infinitum.' To their surprise, dismay, and chagrin, the treaties hardly lasted long enough for the ink to dry in most cases" (43). This particular description characterizes the true ironic nature of treaties. [Add Dawes Act, Reorganization Act, Cheating from Takaki, TMK]

Joe is informed about laws and treaties from old Mooshum; Joe recollects this, "[t]hat the grandeur and power my Mooshum talked about wasn't entirely lost, as it was, at least to some degree I meant to know, still protected by the law" (3). This statement also signifies the issue of Native sovereignty, which is not lost completely. Joe receives this glimpse of political knowledge and ideas from the Elderly Mooshum, whose "next birthday [is] coming up [,] and Mooshum claim[s] he would be 112" (197). The Elders survived physically, and they preserved their culture effectively.

 doi:10.20944/preprints202501.2176.v1

Storytelling, thus, serves the purpose of transmitting knowledge, in this respect political knowledge, from generation to generation—a man of hundred plus age (Mooshum) to a boy of thirteen (Joe).

How Storytelling Was Ruptured Through Wounded Knee and Sand Creek Massacre?

Storytelling as a Process of Decolonization

Long-persisting colonialism affected Indigenous nations in many respects: culturally, socially, politically; nevertheless, the Indigenous peoples survived and revived their cultures, traditions, and heritages. Simpson narrates that long term colonialism has destroyed Indigenous people's bodies, minds, and hearts. Still, the Indigenous nations survived—they survived not just physically, but through protecting and preserving their languages, cultures, and other socio-political systems. While echoing Ellen Gabriel's words, Simpson writes, "[the Indigenous peoples] have nothing to be ashamed of [for colonialism], and we have done nothing wrong" (14). The Elders of Indigenous nations not only survived from the vicious matrix of colonialism, but also resisted through storytelling; hence, the present generation should not be trapped with 'shame.' Simpson documents, ". . . Ancestors often acted within the family unit to physically survive, to pass on what they could to their children, to occupy and use our lands as we always had" (16). Simpson goes searching for stories of her ancestors—stories of resistance—since she can narrate them for new generations (14). Simpson goes on to say that the ancestors resisted the political aggression of settlers through holding stories.

In *The Round House*, Joe learns from Randall through storytelling about the hanging (oak) tree which he and Sonja came across. Joe narrates, "Red, blue, green, white, the old-time Anishinaabe colors of the directions, according to Randall. Some cloths were faded, some new. This was the tree where those ancestors were hanged. None of the killers ever went on trial" (209-10). In this context, Mihesuah argues that "the effects of colonialism have indeed been devastating, prompting the use of terms such as 'holocaust' and 'genocide'" (xii). The Anishinaabe ancestors suffered from colonial aggression, which Joe came to know through storytelling. Storytelling is an important cultural tool to resist colonialism, and mediate the effects of oppression. Indigenous nations resisted colonial oppressions, and almost all of their resistance against colonialism is non-violent.[3]

Different manifestations of colonial hegemonic forces are in being operations in Indigenous societies across the world. One such hegemonic force could be surveillance and dataveillance ("the collection, organization, and storage of information about persons" (Simon 1)) systems.

The history of surveillance is traced out in many western works including the poststructuralist Michel Foucault's, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Foucault established the concept of surveillance based on Jerome Bentham's conception of panopticon technology in which the central figure was assigned to bring discipline and justice through modifying human behavior. Erdrich exposes the 'white-surveillance-system' within an Indigenous context. When Joe and Sonja come from depositing 'luck money,' Sonja says: "People are watching us. Who's watching us? White people" (211). In other words, Sonja reveals the condition of reservation people, who are under constant watch by the settler state. The white invasion covers not only geographic territories, but also technological, ceremonial, and overall cultural grounds.

There was violence on people and land. Over time and space, Indigenous peoples have been spaced out, degraded, and frowned upon politically, socially, discursively, and in popular culture.

---

[3] Some of them engage with intra-tribal clashes as Charles Bowden claims in *Trinity*; however, I think Bowden's literary journalistic writing arouse question about trust and truth. Bowden's description may have biases because he is neither a historian nor an Indigenous writer. Although if we consider that Bowden's claim is true, sporadic intra-tribal clashes were not as big as Columbus's appearance on the shore and immediately making the Natives as slave.

 doi:10.20944/preprints202501.2176.v1

These discursive productions and arguments against these marginalized voices in popular culture, politics, and the media become a threat to their independence, autonomy, and freedom of choice. The land has symbolic and tangible significance to Natives. In Native culture, the land is treated as renewable and integral to sustaining the community, their history, and the continuation of their way of life for future generations.

How can a monument protect a place? *America Divided: Who Controls the Land* (2018) is a documentary film by Native American actor Martin Sensmeie, who from the Tlingit and Koyukon Athabaskan tribes of Alaska, visited Bears Ears to understand the occurrences there. The Navajo, Hopi, Zuni, and two other Ute nations came together to protect lands and sites in San Juan County, Utah. Utah Dine Bikeyah (UDB), the tribe group that lobbied for Bear Ears. Bears Ears is the home of 100,000 archeological sites. Bears Ears is a holy ground for Indigenous Americans. Like many other struggles, local Indigenous tribes continue to fight to keep Bears Ears and Grand Staircase National Monuments intact. The documentary shows the split of the population into the first two categories such as native and non-native, and the second, divided again between Mormon and Gentile. Mormons wanted to control the land; the history of the place starts with the Pueblo people for a long time. The national monuments celebrate the stories of the Indigenous peoples. In order to protect the land, the crowd spontaneously responds, "hell no, we won't go" (05:24). A monument gives a platform for everyone to be united. To be in the community is important to fight against Neoliberal ideals, as argued by Noam Chomsky, among others. In this documentary, the speaker Jami is partly Native but explains that it is not required to establish a monument, who even does not want to acknowledge the existence of race. Education is the key too; Indigenous Americans should not depend on the systems. Importantly, preserving the place and site means, "the rocks, the rivers, the trees, they are not going to go away" (15:34). Indigenous peoples get sustenance from the land; they are connected to the land; hence, they should protect the land. It is important to protect the land for the present time and for a future times.

On June 10, 2009, federal agents arrived in Blanding and arrested the residents. Even a doctor named James Redd died because of the raid (due to an associated suicide). "Everyone is deserving of care and of respect" (02:28). Native sacred objects were looted, and even people looted the graves, there are so many more ways to justify the native demand for protectiveness. Disrespect to a Native grave means disrespect to Native peoples and cultures. What is an important cue from the documentary is one of the speakers says racism, discrimination, and marginalization are not the problem of San Juan County or Utah. People across the United States need to sit down for respectful dialogue with Indigenous nations. According to the documentary more than half of the county's population is Native, but official recordings show the Natives are a minority. This questions good governance as it failed to address the racial division.

The role of politics and law became questionable as always when in 1886 the US v. Kagama states that local communities are "deadliest enemies" (33:40). Trump's admin promises to undo Obama's declaration: first Standing Rock and now Bears Ears. Crowds enchanting, "Go home, Trump!" (41:39). This is a fight about "who controls the land" (36:39). Natives struggled for their land, for survival, for the vote, for education, for protecting graves, and for protecting the sacred places. "Slavery didn't end in 1865, it just evolved" (01:56), but eventually "the land will remain and with it the people" (47:32).

I also bring Ann Mcgrath's "Conquering Sacred Ground?" thought piece into the discussion to show how these National Parks and monuments are linked to sovereignty, how Indigenous nations have been excluded, and their attempts for inclusion in white spaces. McGrath explains how settler nations conquer Indigenous lands to create national parks and monuments; how the debate of transnational juxtaposition over national landmarks has been challenged by Indigeneity; and how they made uncountable attempts to stop the Native ceremonies and rid the ceremonial places (the "Bear Lodge," for example) and ceremonies of storytelling of their sacred value. Finally, I resonate with Paul Sutter, who in "Geographies of Hope Lessons from a World of National Parks" sums up the assimilation and resistance: "despite their frequent origins in colonial contexts in which the

 doi:10.20944/preprints202501.2176.v1

preservation of nature often resulted in the dispossession of indigenous peoples, national parks have also been flexible spaces—she evocatively refers to them as 'elastic signifiers of the sacred'" (12). The clause of the Dawes Act of 1867 "Bring the Indian into the fullness of Caucasian civilization" and/or "kill the Indian, save the man" still exists in modern-day America. Racism against Indigenous peoples was structurally different from the people of color. As a means to distinguish themselves from the European setting, Americans aspired to represent themselves with Native natural liberty.

Sara Mills writes, "The colonial authorities felt that it was their duty to produce information about the colonised country, by producing detailed maps of the territory, describing architecture in great detail, providing grammars and dictionaries of the [I]ndigenous languages, describing the manners and customs of the people" (71). While in the process of collecting data about colonized nations and states, quoting Mary Louise Pratt, Mills goes on to say that, about the flora of a country for instance, "the Western botanist was setting the information within a Western classificatory system which, in the process, erased the system of classification developed by the [I]ndigenous [P]eople[s], which might focus on the use of plants in medicine or in ritual, rather than on the morphological features of the plant, as in the Western model" (71).

Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Ngati Awa and Ngati Porou) also among others addresses such white invasion of Indigenous land. She exposes "the imperial legacies of western knowledge and the ways in which those legacies continue to influence knowledge institutions to the exclusion of [I]ndigenous [P]eoples and their aspirations" (xii).

The production of knowledge is formulated from a vantage point, which is 'compartmentalized' (in Frantz Fanon's phrase) and partial—a knowledge which does not see other values and other points. Whites produce their own knowledge system through geographical and cultural invasions not only in Indigenous lands but in other parts of the world. Postcolonial scholar Edward Said underlines this production of knowledge, which he terms "Orientalism[4]," — rooted in the Western consciousness. Said's work deals with the orient, but his work provides a substantial insightful knowledge and information about whites' cultural and political aggression. Although the whites deploy surveillance on the reservation to maintain discipline, ironically, Geraldine and her family are deprived of receiving justice. In response to Joe's queries about clothing and beer cans, which he found in the round house, Bjerke answers that these belong to Bugger Pourier. This answer gives the implication that the area is under a surveillance system, but they are unable to locate the attacker of Geraldine—because it is a non-white matter, a subject not worthy enough to receive justice. Storytelling can be used as a tool for Indigenous critiques of colonialism. Storytelling strategies are important to dehegemonize the 'surveillance and dataveillance' systems of settlers.

Land Tenure

King states that the relationship between Indigenous People and land "has a spiritual aspect to it, it is also a practical matter that balances respect with survival" (113). Land allocation is the most important political constituent in relation to Indigenous Peoples' lives. The land allotment process is like a "red in tooth and claw" procedure for the Indigenous nations. I bring the example of Betonie, the medicine man in Silko's *Ceremony*, who says, "Indians wake up every morning of their lives to see the land which was stolen, still there, within reach, its theft being flaunted. And the desire is strong to make things right, to take back what was stolen and to stop them from destroying what they have taken" (127-8). The history of losing land is narrated in almost all Indigenous literary and cultural texts.

---

[4] In *Orientalism*, Said says, "Orientalism can be discussed and analysed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient—dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by making it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (3). Said uses the phrase "Other" to describe the Western fascination with the Orient.

 doi:10.20944/preprints202501.2176.v1

In *The Round House*, Mooshum, the venerable, along with others becomes the victim of this land allotment policy. Joe says, "Mooshum owned the old allotment about four miles away, where Uncle Whitey lived" (36). Erdrich's other novels including *Love Medicine* and *Tracks* also address the land allotment agenda; for instance, the narrator in *Love Medicine* mentions allotment policy as 'joke' (12) and the grandpa's mother's receives a piece of land in Montana in place of North Dakota (18). Nanapush, one of the two narrators in *Tracks*, describes land 'allotment and stolen' program—"the wholesale purchase of our allotment land by whites" (98) and "[s]ome signed their land away with thumbs and crosses" (99). In *The Round House,* Erdrich sends the message about land to her readers right at the beginning when Geraldine was taken to the "white" hospital. Joe faces coercion from a pregnant lady patient in the hospital: "Don't you Indians have your own hospital over there? Aren't you building a new one?" (12) Whether the rape happened inside or outside the reservation has become a major burning question before filing a case in the court for justice.

When Geraldine is in the hospital, Joe and his father engage in a conversation about the attacker and investigation process. Joe's father says, "Now if the police would come. They need to get a statement" (18). "Which police? I asked. Exactly, he said" (18). Joe's questioning and his father's responding show how justice is denied by reservation land regimes. Erdrich explicitly narrates this long-term unfinished question: "My father had insisted that [police officers] 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" (emphasis mine, 19). The demarcation of land plays a role even in the critical situation of Geraldine's life. As an early teenager, Joe knows the severity of rape, and he knows that the disputable issue of land contributes to his mother's trauma. What worries Joe is this demarcation of land-matter, which inevitably hinders the justice process. An immediate thought clicks in Joe's mind: "I already knew, too, that these questions would not change the facts. But they would inevitably *change the way we sought justice*" (emphasis mine, 19). Joe's basic instinct informs him that justice will obviously be denied. The investigators, in this case the police officers, spend time on the investigation without any concluding resolution. As if he were the Atlas of Greek mythology, the police officers' mute expression shows that the whole earth is held on their shoulder; "Each police officer went into the room with a notebook and a pen, and came out again in about fifteen minutes, *expressionless*" (emphasis mine, 19).

Much time is spent on investigation and interview, but there is no progress. Joe narrates, "[My father] was also meeting daily with the tribal police, and talking to the federal agent who was assigned to the case" (63). Being a tribal judge, Bazil pushes both tribal police and federal agent to handle the case; hence, we, the readers, can understand the complexity of handling the case. Joe stubbornly engages himself in a conversation with his father about the attacker. Joe's parents ask him to stop showing inquisitiveness about the attacker; however, Joe goes searching for clues. Joe's father argues, "It is a police matter, do you understand?" (138) Joe further questions, "Who? Tribal? Smokies? FBI? What do they care?" (138); these questions demonstrate that there is no progress in the deadly serious case. On one hand, the victim is almost dying, the husband suffers from powerlessness; the son gets frustrated about his mother's deteriorating condition. On the other hand, the law and enforcement agencies are taking a serious situation lightly and even jovially as they delay matters by talking about jurisdiction (Who/which authority will proceed on the case). The location of the crime is more important than ensuring justice: "Three classes of land meet there . . . Tribal trust, state, and fee" (239). Joe sees through his dream vision and critiques the FBI agent Bjerke's presence in Anishinaabe land as "toothless sovereignty" (213). In regards to storytelling as a visionary process, Simpson's argument is germane, "[It] is an important process for visioning, imagining, critiquing the social space around us, and ultimately challenging the colonial norms fraught in our daily lives" (34). Joe is a perfect embodiment of Indigenous thought, which he displays in the conversation with Bjerke. "We'll do an affidavit," says Bjerke. "All in time. If we have *a case*" (emphasis mine 214). Joe's sharp comments, "[M]ay be we should do it now. Before I forget" (214). Joe is desperate to get back his mother as before in order to live a good life/"Mino bimaadiziwiin" (Simpson connotes this phrase as "living the good life" or "the art of living the good life" (27)). The settlers stole the land, tried to

 doi:10.20944/preprints202501.2176.v1

subvert the cultural components through colonialism and imperialism, but they failed in their mission. King states, "After some five hundred years of vigorous encouragement to assimilate and disappear, [the Indians] are still here" (128). Colonialism failed to assimilate or terminate the Indigenous cultures, history, and ideals.

Ceremonies and Healings through Storytelling

Stories can be healing, and they can be traumatizing. Stories are traumatizing because either stories narrate details about trauma or listeners/ readers experience a traumatic event. Stories are very powerful. In order to show the grave importance of stories, King cites Silko: "I will tell you something about stories. They aren't just entertainment/Don't be fooled/They are all we have, you see/All we have to fight off/Illness and death. You don't have anything/If you don't have the stories" (92). Stories are so vital that without them existence becomes jeopardized. King talks about healing through storytelling. He says, "stories [are] medicine, that a story told one way could cure, [and] that the same story told another way could injure" (92). King cites the example of Momaday's writing on his Kiowa grandmother, "for her words [are] medicine; they [are] magic and invisible" (100).

Storytelling plays a healing role, but also traumatizes the events in *The Round House*. Sweat lodges are places where storytelling occurs, and the heart is healed. The round house is a sacred sweat lodge—a place where community people gather for healing, and energizing bodies, minds, and souls. Community people need to gather in order to complete a storytelling ceremony. That is to say, physical gathering is one of the major strategies of storytelling. Simpson argues that a physical act of gathering strengthens the web of relationships which keep communities together (34). Joe talks about the sweat lodge first when he recollects that he helps Randall to make the lodge (52). The stones are referred to as grandfathers or grandmothers in the ceremony (56). The shape and size of sweat lodges vary from Nation to Nation. The persons inside and outside of the lodge are engaged within the ceremonial procedure. The shaman narrates story through imageries, songs, and other techniques, and engages others in meditation. Mooshum, the shaman, instructs Doe on how to build the sweat lodge (58). The Elders are the center of storytelling ceremonies, and in this case, Mooshum is the center of attraction.

Colonialism and imperialism made uncountable attempts to stop the ceremonies and rid the ceremonial places (the round house) and ceremonies of storytelling of their sacred value. The round house is the epicenter of all actions in the text; it not only carries ceremonial significance, but also carries the central subject matters: the rape of Indigenous woman and receiving justice. In response to Joe's question pertaining to his mother's attacker, Bazil discloses the scene of the crime, "[b]ecause of the round house" (83). Erdrich shows how colonialism tries to destroy the sanctity of a sacred place: for instance, a case is filed against a party for violating the code of round house while drinking in the place; the Elders pretend to read the Bible inside the round house when the priest arrives; Joe and his friends, while searching for clues in the round house, find lots of petrified condoms.

The sweat lodge is the place of storytelling, a space for decolonization, and in that context, Simpson explains that "storytelling becomes a space where we can escape the gaze and the cage of the Empire, even if it is for a few minutes" (34). King also explains the history of colonial aggression in destroying libraries of Tenochtitlan and Alexandria, where stories were lost. King states, "If we stopped telling the stories and reading the book, we would discover that neglect is as powerful an agent as war and fire" (98). In order to preserve ceremonial places and Indigenous cultural systems, storytelling should not be stopped, and sweat lodges are required to maintain the storytelling process.

In a similar theme, stories are spiritual and healing in Silko's *Ceremony*. Tayo hears stories from Old Ku'oosh and Old Betonie. Old Ku'oosh reminds Tayo about old stories (38). The medicine man Betonie gives treatment to Tayo through storytelling; Betonie narrates stories of many things: stories of land, medicine, ceremony, art and paintings. The whites attempted to destroy the cultural aspects, especially storytelling and ceremonies of the Indigenous Nations. Old Betonie says, "They will try to stop you from completing the ceremony" (125). Although whites failed to stop the ceremony, there

 doi:10.20944/preprints202501.2176.v1

is a change in it, due to the change of the world order by the whites. Betonie confirms: "the ceremonies have always been changing" (126). Through ceremonial procedures and storytelling, Betonie's medicine heals Tayo as the Old man brought change in his medicines.

The ceremony of stories is extended in other processes. In *The Round House,* Sonja dances in front of Mooshum and Joe on the birthday of Mooshum. In *Ceremony*, Night Swan dances and shares story with Josiah: "One day I got up and walked down the main street of Socorro" (87). Both Night Swan's and Sonja's dancing can be connected to earth as Silko states, "[dancing] connect[s] them to the earth" (104). The beauty and artistry of storytelling is that they are rooted to the earth.

Storytelling and Windigo Justice

Justice is a key-concept in *The Round* House, and justice is not done by institutions but by the protagonist Joe, who receives the concept of justice from the Elder Mooshum through storytelling. I will here explain how storytelling as a cultural tool formulates the concept of justice. Simpson also describes this relationship by explaining that through storytelling "we can experience the spaces of freedom and justice" (33). I will analyze how three important characters—Joe, his mother, and his father—envision legal and windigo justice. I will first discuss the way Erdrich's novel reflects an Indigenous experience of justice—how justice excludes and how justice excludes through inclusion.

How Justice Excludes

In his "Preface" to *The Idea of Justice,* Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen argues that "Justice is ultimately connected with the way people's lives go, and not merely with the nature of the institutions surrounding them" (x). Sen posits a question, "Can there be a satisfactory understanding of ethics in general and of justice in particular that confines its attention to some people and not others, presuming—if only implicitly—that some people are relevant while other simply are not?" (117) We do not really understand justice as long there is a division in society—some are getting justice and some are not. This question fits into settlers' attitudes towards Indigenous Peoples. Despite the gravity of his crime (killing Mayla and her infant, raping Geraldine), Linden walks free. Sen's analysis covers key-thinkers from western epistemology, and he cites Henry Sidgwick: "That whatever is right for me must be right for all persons in similar circumstances—which was the form in which I accepted the Kantian maxim—seemed to me to be certainly fundamental, certainly true, and not without practical importance" (qtd. in Sen 118). Ethics should ensure justice equally irrespective of class, caste, race, and nationality. Although western thinkers talk in great detail about ensuring justice, the real-world scenarios in the west are different. Being a family member of an Indigenous tribal judge, Geraldine became the victim of rape. The issue of justice is complicated by the trio of state law, federal law, and tribal law.

How Justice Excludes through Inclusion

When Geraldine shares her sad story with Bazil and Joe, she reports Linden Lark's notion of law. Linden just dehumanizes Indians, especially Indian women (241). Geraldine depicts, "He said we have no standing under the law for a good reason and yet have continued to diminish the white man and to take his honor" (241). Linden's remark on law explains that whites are free from law. Linden's audacity reaches its apotheosis when he says further, "I know as much law as judge. . . I make things the right way around for me. The strong should rule the weak. Instead of the weak the strong! It is the weak who pull down the strong. But I won't get caught" (241-42). Linden expresses the reality of white attitudes towards law when it comes to Indigeneity. Whatever a white wants to do with Indigenous Peoples, s/he has freedom to do so. I would label this white attitude to Indigenous Peoples "homo sacer."[5]

[5] Italian philosopher Georgio Agamben theorizes the concept of homo sacer. In "Whatever Politics," Jenny Edkins explains Agamben's concept with different literary and critical sources:

 doi:10.20944/preprints202501.2176.v1

Linden Lark's attitude towards law and towards Indigenous Peoples overall is an example of homo sacer.

In an interview titled "Critiquing Colonial Discourse and Imagining Indigenous Futures: A Conversation with Jodi Byrd," Jodi Byrd, a Chickasaw scholar, says,

> [*The Transit of Empire*] is rather dense and is often engaged in theoretical debates ranging from a critique of Gilles Deleuze to an analysis of how Indians are rendered *homo sacer* within legal rulings . . . Chickasaws work to preserve our intellectual, artistic, and governance traditions.

The Transit of Empire states that "the problem of the sovereign is not necessarily just the state of exception but the project of democracy itself" (192). Byrd also cites Agamben, who states that "Western politics is a biopolitics from the very beginning, and that every attempt to found political liberties in the rights of the citizens is, therefore, in vain. . ." (192). Mark Rifkin argues that "the resultant bare life is also bare habitance, through which the 'biopolitical project of defining the proper 'body' of the people is subtended by the geopolitical project of defining the territoriality of the nation, displacing competing claims by older/other political formations" (qtd. in Byrd 199). People are controlled by the government imposing rules and regulations and displacing/pushing out the values and beliefs of the people in that space. There were (and are) many efforts to include Indigenous Nations within euro-American hegemonies, but those attempts were, and continue to be, an attempt to exclude through inclusion. Linden's attitude can be considered a pristine example in that regard.

Legal Justice

King states that "legislation, in relation to Native people, has had two basic goals. One, to relieve us of our land, and two, to legalize us out of existence" (130). King's argument highlights the issue of stolen land and termination. Although storytelling and justice are the two most important aspects that *The Round House* addresses, legal justice of a more euro-American kind (more bound up with state, federal, and tribal laws and less with storytelling) is also a significant issue in this text because it contrasts windigo justice.

The major complexity of legal justice is to locate the scene of the crime—where Geraldine was raped. Unlike most Indigenous texts, this novel tells us that the lawmaker's family has become the victim of crime. Bazil has limited opportunity to exercise power over non-Indigenous people which is evident in his voice: "I was able in [Tommy Thomas et al. vs. Vinland Super Mart et al.] case to claim limited jurisdiction over a non-Indian-owned business, said my father" (75). Bazil keeps seeing the ray of hope that his family will receive justice from white authorities: "I feel certain of it, Geraldine, and there will be justice" (235). Geraldine screams in a "hoarse voice," when Bazil asks her: "What about the ground—gravel? brush? Was there a barbed-wire fence?" (239) Bazil shows desperation to locate the scene of the crime as a professional legal prosecutor, which annoys Geraldine and Joe: "Get out of the courtroom, get the damn hell out, my mother said" (239). Geraldine is in a state of delirium, but she expresses her extreme anger towards her husband for always thinking about the legal sides of law. In particular, Bazil is concerned about the location of the crime so that

---

> The 'protagonist' of [Agamben's book] is bare life, the form of subjectivity or personhood produced by, and captured in, sovereign power. . . Sovereign power has operated through the distinction of bare life (*zoe*), the life of the home (*oikos*), and politically qualified life (*bios*), the life of the public sphere (*polis*). . . Bare life in such a state of inclusive exclusion is described as *homo sacer*, a form of life that can be killed without accusation. (qtd. in Edkins 75)

The gist of the homo sacer concept is it excludes through inclusion; thus, the exception becomes the norm, and all life becomes bare life (Edkins 75).

 doi:10.20944/preprints202501.2176.v1

the investigation can maintain legal procedures, but legal justice fails to provide any concrete solution because of its bureaucratic complexities.

The second complexity of legal justice is that it is a time-elapsing process. As a tribal judge, Bazil faces a dilemma. On the one hand, he spends time locating the scene of the crime, and prosecuting the case legally; on the other, he struggles hard to tolerate the delay of justice. When he picks up Lark's photo, Joe says, "it hurt his fingers to touch the photograph that the mute image emitted a jagged force" (317-18). Nevertheless, Bazil legitimizes his procrastination: "*We want the right to prosecute criminals of all races on all lands within our original boundaries.* Which is why I try to run a tight courtroom, Joe. What I am doing now is for the future, though it may seem small, or trivial, or boring, to you" (346-47). Bazil's efforts to establish laws to prosecute cases are for future generations and for a solid Indigenous sovereignty.

Indigenous laws have unique features different from Euro-American legal justice. In *Justice Within: Indigenous Legal Traditions*, the Law Commission outlines Indigenous laws as "non-prescriptive, non-adversarial and non-punitive. They generally promote values such as respect, restoration and consensus and are closely connected to the land, the Creator and the community" (3). Although there are diversities and differences among Indigenous Nations, all Indigenous laws promote common norms, values, and ethics. Elder Ken Goodwill explains the less retributive and more restorative focus of Indigenous laws (3). Elder Goodwill tells "how, faced with the murder of one of its citizens by another citizen, the members of a Dakota community gathered together to determine how to respond" (3). Elder discusses the response to a murderer in Indigenous Nation: "In front of the community, the father of the murderer gave his son to the parents of the victim to assume their son's duties of hunting, chopping wood and otherwise providing for them. By this act, witnessed and approved by the community, the murderer was obliged to restore part of what he had taken away by his wrongful act" (4). Indigenous laws do not promote any violent activities in the name of justice; rather, they uphold the concept of forgiveness as a form of justice. Elder Goodwill's story again connects the concept of legal justice, to some extent, to storytelling. Through storytelling, we learn the codes of Indigenous legal justice.

Windigo Justice

Indigenous scholars and critics theorize the concept "windigo justice." Basil Johnston in the "Glossary" to *The Manitous* provides information about windigo:

> [Windigo/Weendigook/Weendigoes is a] giant cannibal (or cannibals). These manitous came into being in Winter and stalked villagers and beset wanderers . . . [t]he irony is that having eaten human flesh, the Weendigoes grew in size, so their hunger and craving remained in proportion to their size; thus they were eternally starving. They could kill only the foolish and the improvident. (247)

Johnston says, "Anishi[naabe] history and heritage were taught by the [E]lders and others, who instructed the people in everything from history, geography, and botany to astronomy, language, and spiritual heritage, at family and community gatherings during winter months" (xx). The concept of windigo justice is also discussed by the Elders during winter months and some other times of the year. Forbes also provides a great detail about windigo in his *Columbus and Other Cannibals*: "*Wetiko* is a Cree term (*windigo* in Ojibway, *wintiko* in Powhatan) which refers to a cannibal or, more specifically, to an evil person or spirit who terrorizes other creatures by means of terrible evil acts, including cannibalism. *Wetikowatisewin*, an abstract noun, refers to 'diabolical wickedness or cannibalism'"(33). A windigo person is involved in cannibalism; however, Forbes also argues that imperialism and exploitation are two different forms of cannibalism (34). In a similar line of argument, Simpson argues:

> In contemporary time, Windigo is often used to refer to colonialism and its capital manifestations, particularly around natural resources. The state is seen as having an insatiable hunger for natural resources, to the point where it will eventually destroy itself

 doi:10.20944/preprints202501.2176.v1

> through over-exploitation. This resonates with Indigenous Peoples who read this as cannibalistic. (70)

Simpson's arguments explore the evil sides of colonialism and capitalism not just as something that happened in past but in present time too.

Storytelling and windigo justice are interwoven. Mooshum tells stories in dream, and in those dream sequences, he narrates the windigo justice elaborately. In the dream-story "Akii," Mooshum illustrates, "A windigo could cast its spirit inside of a person. That person would become an animal, and see fellow humans as prey meat" (271). Mooshum continues, "[Buffalo woman] said windigo justice must be pursued with great care" (282). Nanapush learns about windigo justice from his buffalo grandmother, which Mooshum passes on in his dream to Joe. In the story "Akii," Nanapush saves his mother, who was almost killed by her husband and husband's brothers. This could serve as a message for Joe to save his mother from all the evils. In the second story, "The Round House," Mooshum conceptualizes Windigo. He says, "It was true that there could be wiindigoog—people who lost all human compunctions in hungry times and craved the flesh of others. But people could also be falsely accused. The cure for a wiindigoo was often simple: large quantities of hot soup" (322). Mooshum also talks about a white windigo story (Liver-Eating Johnson). On a metaphoric level, Mooshum's chasing the white windigo is an indication, I suggest, for Joe to chase Linden. The storytelling tradition constructs the platform for Joe to become a windigo hunter.

Although Bazil shows a great amount of restraint, his providing the photograph of Linden Lark to Joe suggests, I believe, a license for Joe to pursue windigo justice (317). Bazil emphasizes the old Indigenous history of deprivation which further accentuates the demand for windigo justice. Bazil explains justice to Joe: "Any judge knows there are many kinds of justice—for instance, ideal justice as opposed to the best-we-can-do justice, which is what we end up with in making so many of our decisions" (463). Bazil has both Euro-American and Indigenous notions of justice, further demonstrated in his view about Linden's death: "Lark's killing is a wrong thing which serves an ideal justice. It settles a legal enigma. It threads that unfair maze of land title law by which Lark could not be prosecuted. His death was the exit" (463). Perhaps, Bazil tries to achieve 'critical awareness' through legitimizing Linden's death. Forbes says, "a critical method limited to the arena of socio-political human behavior as perceived through materialism is one which will never solve the problem of *wetiko*ism. Why? Because one must take 'critical awareness' beyond the limits of purely human situations in order to fully grasp the milieu in which we humans actually have our existence" (136). This critical awareness slows Bazil's punishment of Lark's crimes, which is ultimately concluded by Joe through windigo justice.

Windigo justice is about healing too. Geraldine becomes a victim of trauma, suffering from sickness of the soul and body. Forbes argues:

> Most of the great teachers of the earth have taught things, or set examples, which can help us overcome the *wetiko* psychosis. 'Psychosis' means 'sickness of the soul or spirit.' And so it is that we must turn to those things which have to do with the spirit or soul when we seek to find a cure. 'Pragmatism' and opportunism offer no answers, nor do the psychiatry or psychotherapy of the usual kind. *Wetikos* can be very 'pragmatic' at times and people treated by psychologists or psychiatrists can learn to 'adjust' or 'accept themselves. (137)

Forbes here addresses the spiritual and healing power of windigo justice. The role of storytelling is seen as very effective in Geraldine's understanding; she says, "It's something Daddy told me. A story about a wiindigoo. Lark's trying to eat us, Joe. I won't let him, she said. I will be the one to stop him" (374). Geraldine displays a strong spiritual power to catch the windigo, which also helps Joe to take a resolution: "The end of thinking occurred" (375). Joe's killing windigo Linden heals the soul of Geraldine.

Windigo justice plays a role of scavenger—a role that wipes out the dirt from the society. Indigenous cultures promote forgiveness, unlike western popular culture which promotes revenge. Joe shows his sheer determination to catch the perpetrator right from the beginning: "Mom, listen.

 doi:10.20944/preprints202501.2176.v1

I'm going to find him and I'm going to burn him. I'm going to kill him for you" (132). Joe keeps revealing his motif, "I imagined myself killing him over and over" (376). Joe seeks justice in order to bring balance to the community. Napoleon and Friedland suggest:

> The *wetiko* is . . . better understood as a legal concept that describes people who are harmful or destructive to others in socially prohibited ways within these societies. When properly understood, the *wetiko* legal category shares commonalities with, or is even roughly comparable to what we currently characterize as criminal law. (2-3)

Windigo refers to the elimination of destructive people who are detrimental to the harmony and peace of community. Joe narrates, "The tribal council had given Lark notice that he was barred from the reservation, but there was really no way that could be enforced" (403). Joe's narration explains in great detail the toothlessness of laws, which further accelerates the demand for windigo justice. Napoleon and Friedland also suggest that "Just like people today theorize and philosophize about the causes of crime, and struggle to understand criminal behaviour, Cree and Anishina[abe] people had theories about the causes of *wetiko* behaviour. These theories were often, but not always, spiritual in nature" (5). Although these behaviors are not often spiritual, it is spiritual for Joe. As Joe tells Cappy, "Wouldn't you think that a kid who witnessed all this would need spiritual help?" (387) It has become a must act for Joe to become a windigo hunter as this will heal the heart of his dearest mother.

Artistry of Storytelling in Louise Erdrich's *The Round House*

"Indigenous literary traditions pre-date European and Euroamerican encounters," writes P. Jane Hafen, "[o]ral in nature, each tribe has a sophisticated system of creation stories and records of history" (*Reading Louise Erdrich's Love Medicine* 7). Hafen explains the long-term existence of Indigenous literatures. Indigenous literatures existed before the invasion of Euro-American forces in an oral structure. That is to say, orality is the root to Indigenous literatures. While talking about Louise Erdrich, a great Chippewa novelist, Hafen says, Louise Erdrich's writings explore "her Turtle Mountain Chippewa and Euro-American heritages" (5).

In this paper, I am concerned with artistic features of storytelling as these features represent the strength of Indigenous cultures by resisting against Euro-American influences and manipulations. In particular, I will focus on the following: the narrative structures of multiple stories; Erdrich's use of language in relation to aesthetic functions of storytelling; the cultural affiliation with orality; and lastly, the role of symbolism, especially the animal imagery. I will add two of Erdrich's other novels, *Love Medicine* (1984) and *Tracks* (1988) and *Ceremony* (1977) by Leslie Marmon Silko (Pueblo) to this analysis in order to show the effect and art of storytelling.

In order to introduce storytelling from Indigenous epistemology, in *Research Is Ceremony*, Shawn Wilson cites a Cree Elder, Jerry Saddleback, who, according to tradition, states that there are three styles or levels of storytelling: sacred stories, Indigenous legends, and stories of experiences of self and other (98). Wilson explains these three types of styles or levels of storytelling in great detail. Sacred stories are at a higher level, and they are specific in form, content, context and structure. These stories carry the history of Indigenous people. The Indigenous legends carry morals, lessons, and events; however, the style of storytelling depends on a particular storyteller. As for stories of personal experience, Wilson says, "Elders often use experiences from their own or others' lives to help counsel or teach" (98). Erdrich's *The Round House* incorporates all three styles or levels of storytelling.

Narrative Structures: Single-Voice Narrator

Critic Lorena L. Stookey argues that "Erdrich's plots, comprised of multiple, interconnected stories, do not necessarily unfold through a chronologically linear progression but rather serve as the threads whereby characters' stories are woven together" (14). Erdrich's novels carry multiple narrators and multiple stories. Moreover, Beidler and Barton argue that "[Erdrich] handles multiple points of view, intertextual allusion, and temporal dislocation with skill rivaling that of the best of

 doi:10.20944/preprints202501.2176.v1

modern and postmodern writers of the Western tradition. At the same time, she weaves these techniques seamlessly with narrative elements from the Ojibwe oral tradition" (2). There is a blend of western and Indigenous writing trajectories in Erdrich's writing. Silko talks about Erdrich's writing style. While talking about Erdrich's narrative strategies, Beidler and Barton sum up, "'Confusing[,]' 'Thick with characters[,]' 'Complex relationship[,]' 'Difficult to keep the characters straight[,]' 'Always another point of view[,]' 'Circling back and forth through time[,]' 'Overlapping stories[,]' 'Shaggy[,]' 'Chaotic[,]' 'Cryptic[,]' 'Tangled.'" (4) Critics also refer to "Mazelike narrative" when they talk about Erdrich's fictions (qtd. in Beidler and Barton 9).

Although Erdrich criticizes the role of Catholicism, the protagonist's name derives from monotheistic religions—"When I was eight, I realized that I'd chosen the name of my great-grandfather, Joseph," says Joe (7). Joe informs, "I had actually just turned thirteen. Two weeks ago. I'd been twelve" (4). Joe, a thirteen-year old, is the narrative voice who is portrayed by following western tradition of bildungsroman genre. For this, there is a mixture of pre-adolescent and adult voice. Erdrich deploys a kind of fluidity in between youthfulness and manliness in her narrative voice. All major happenings revolve around Joe's family. Joe's mother Geraldine, the victim of rape, does not tell her own story. She does not voicing her own story, which can be labeled as silence narrative. As a tribal judge, Geraldine's husband only focuses on legal sides which can be phrased as legal narrative. Their son Joe seeks justice right from the beginning of the incident. Joe, a teenager boy who is desperately in love with 'aunt-like' Sonja, shows his desperate love and affection for his mother. Joe can be considered showing a balanced action; sometimes he shows typical teenager immaturity, and sometimes he shows man-like action (investigating the case, planning for taking revenge, and turning out his plan into action, etc.).

Erdrich focuses on Euro-centric traditions not only in case of making her protagonist Joe, but also following the tone of language sometimes. Joe comments on the relationship of his parents. Joe's father seems a feeble minded person when Joe says, ". . . I was glad that he was so definite—find her, not just look for her, not search" (5). Joe's comment sounds like his father suffers from indecision, but when Geraldine was missing, he shows definitiveness. Joe's father's uttering of "Oh, Geraldine!" (8-9) on three occasions in quick succession echoes Shakespearean/European medieval tone. The same phrase appears in other chapters too (113 and 461). The style and tone of these phrases sound Shakespearean, although in order to ascribe a kind of writing or style to Shakespeare, it would require computational work with stylistics to attribute an authorial signature. As for Shakespearean style (1590s-1630s), it is hard to say if Bazil's phrase (Joe lets us know that Bazil's bookshelf has numerous books on Shakespeare) is directly influenced by that period, but such exclamations could be found in Geoffrey Chaucer or in other medieval romances. Most importantly, the recurrent phrase arouses empathy among the readers as these demonstrate strong emotional bondage between husband and wife.

As for storytelling traditions, Erdrich incorporates stories from Western epistemology. For instance, Joe narrates, "There are many stories of children who were forced to live alone, my father went on, including those stories from antiquity in which infants were nursed by wolves" (232). This indication of "infants were nursed by wolves" reechoes the story of Romulus and Remus of Roman mythology, in which twin brothers were saved by a river first, and then by an wolf.

Use of Language: Short Sentences/Syntax Structures—Orality

Language is a cultural phenomenon, and it is a dynamic tool for storytelling. Stories and language are closely associated as King argues that "we are surrounded by stories, and we can trace these stories back to other stories and from there back to the beginnings of language" (95). King's statement exhibits the concentric circle between language and stories. Erdrich uses short sentences all through her novel. These sentences demonstrate the form of orality; the sentences are written as if these were for spoken communication. When Joe and his father start searching Geraldine, Joe reveals his thoughts about his father and mother relationship, where he utters many broken sentences. "A Sighting" (8). "Only that" (8). These are a few of the instances that show Erdrich's usage

 doi:10.20944/preprints202501.2176.v1

of language is unique. The fragmentary usage of sentences in spoken format reinforces the style of storytelling. Sometimes only a word finishes a sentence "Rich" (135). Erdrich's usage of short sentences signifies orality, which is a trajectory of storytelling as King argues that "orality [is used for] storytelling strategies" (154). Allen states that since contact with white people the oral tradition has been a major force in Indigenous resistance.

Orality kept the people conscious of their national identity, their spiritual traditions, and their connection to the land and creatures. Contemporary poets and writers including Erdrich and Silko take their cue from the oral traditions, to which they return continuously for theme, symbol, structure, and motivating impulse as well as for the philosophic bias that animates our work. (qtd. in Schulz 5) Orality is powerful and compelling because they "articulate reality . . . that reality where thought and feeling are one, where speaker and listener are one, where sound and sense are one" (Allen qtd. in Schulz 5). *Ceremony* also demonstrates that language is associated with storytelling, "each word had to be explained with a story about why it must be said this certain way" (35). Medicine man Betonie says while indicating the whites, "They don't understand" (117). Betonie's remark explains the power of oral language—a typical and precious Indigenous cultural tool.

Erdrich's language is rhythmic and it carries a poetic tone. Joe's depiction about evening seizes the beauty, "Sounds were mutes—a horse neighed over the trees. There was a short, angry bawl way off as a child was dragged in from outdoors. There was the drone of a faraway motor chugging down from the church on the hill" (221). Stookey writes, "Erdrich employs characteristics of the poetic in her prose fiction in a variety of ways. [Erdrich] uses recurring images and metaphors as unifying devices, as elements of the stitching whereby she weaves her novels' stories together" (17). Erdrich's narrating stories through metaphors and metonyms ("euphoric" (427), "loud silence" (427), etc.) captures the aesthetic. Wilson narrates, "And I think that we need to talk in metaphor. Cause our language is built like metaphor. One word is like a zip file, zip disk that crunches all this information into it" (112).Erdrich also uses Chippewa languages and phrases(Wiinag (307), Miigwayak (304), Ma chere niinimoshenh (326), etc.) throughout the text. In that context, Simpson states that "Indigenous languages carry rich meanings, theory and philosophies within their structures" (49). Likewise, in "Is That All There Is? Tribal Literature," Basil H. Johnston (Anishinaabe) writes, "In my tribal language, all words have three levels of meaning. There is the surface meaning that everyone instantly understands. Beneath this meaning is a more fundamental meaning derived from the prefixes and their combinations with other terms. Underlying both is the philosophical meaning." (349) Johnston talks about three levels of meaning in Anishinaabe language, which are surface meaning, fundamental meaning, and philosophical meaning.

Cultural Affiliation with Orality

Storytelling is a spoken rather than a written process. And spoken language is culturally associated. Stories are important for existence as Thomas King says, "the truth about stories is that that's all we are" (32). While talking about the significance of storytelling, King cites Gerald Vizenor, "You can't understand the world without telling a story, [and] there isn't any center to the world but a story" (32). Once King was invited to Northern California to a program called "Indian Awareness Week," where 'unlike other guest speakers,' he shares stories—"[s]tories about broken treaties, residential schools, culturally offensive movies, the appropriation of Native names, symbols, and motifs" (62-3). King used orality as a strategy for his talk in order to share stories. Stories have cultural affiliation with orality; stories are created for orality, not for written procedure. King states, "[stories are] the cornerstones of our culture" (95).

Apart from oral association of stories, they also carry other cultural phenomena: the role of Elders and the role of storytellers and listeners. In regard to the role of Elders, Simpson states that Elders are the major source of storytelling. Simpson notes that "[Elders] embody gentleness and kindness" (19). Simpson also argues that "[the Elders] are anything but [colonial] victims [,] [but] [t]hey are our strongest visionaries and they inspire us to vision alternative futures" (22). In addition, Simpson explains that the "Elders tell us that everything we need to know is encoded in the structure,

 doi:10.20944/preprints202501.2176.v1

content and context of these stories and the relationships, ethics and responsibilities required to be our own Creation Story" (33). The Elders pass on the Creation Stories to generation after generation. The Creation Stories carry significance to a great extent as these stories set the theoretical framework or provide the ontological context that help to interpret other stories and pedagogical experiences (32).

Erdrich's novels are no exception with the inclusion of Elders. At the outset, when Joe and Bazil go searching for Geraldine, Joe mentions about old Mooshum, who used to call Joe as "Oops." The most Elderly person of the community is generally called the shaman. The shaman is the central-figure of a storytelling ceremony. In *The Round House*, Mooshum is the senior-most Elder who provides worthy directions with wisdom and wit to the rest of the community members. Randall refers to Mooshum to seek suggestions about his visualization of Joe's mother's perpetrator (63). Simpson states that dreams and visions provide glimpses of decolonized spaces, and dreams are guides and mentors (35). Mooshum sees and talks in dream; in fact, Mooshum is the visionary Elder of the community.

The relationship between storytellers and listeners is also important in a storytelling ceremony, as Simpson argues (34). The storyteller, in most cases the Elders, plays a performative role whereas the listeners' role becomes dynamic by engaging in a pro-active role. This performance becomes a collective and individual experience, which lifts up "the burden of colonialism by visioning new realities" (34). In this context, Wilson also states that in the stories of Indigenous legends (second style/level of storytelling), listeners and storytellers shape the stories according to their experiences (98). The relationship between Mooshum and Joe or the relationship between Bazil and Joe demonstrates the importance of storytellers and listeners in *The Round House*. Joe hears lot of stories from Mooshum and Bazil (for instance: Herodotus and concerns Arion of Methymna (232), etc.), which help him to form Indigenous identity because stories reveal cultural aspects through which character is shaped.

Storytelling is a cultural tool which is tied up with orality. The Elders and the relationship between storytellers and listeners are also important in storytelling ceremony as these demonstrate the potential power and dominance of Indigenous cultures—a power which I suggest is unique to Indigenous peoples.

Role of Symbolism: Animal Imageries

The human and the more than human world are deeply interconnected in Indigenous cultures. In *Ceremony*, Old Grandma says, "Back in time immemorial, things were different, the animals could talk to human beings and many magical things still happened" (94). Old Grandma's statement shows that animals and humans were closer before as they both related to the land. The animals are used in Erdrich's text as metaphors. Joe learns about 'clan system' from his father, "The crane, the bear, the loon, the catfish, lynx, kingfisher, caribou, muskrat—all of these animals and others in various tribal divisions, including the eagle, the marten, the deer, the wolf—people were part of these clans and were thus governed by special relationships with one another and with the animals" (230). This explains that the relationship between humans and animals is important; in fact, having special relationship with one another (clans) and with the animal is "the first system of Ojibwe law" (230).

The Indigenous names are associated with animals, and this association is related with stories. That is to say, everything has a story, and stories are the foundations of Indigenous cultures, as King states. For examples, Mooshum's brother's name is Shamenga (Monarch Butterfly), which is associated with butterfly. Betonie's helper's name is Shush, which means bear (128).Silko explains that there are stories about butterflies and dragonflies too (95). In *Tracks*, the animal imageries are working as metaphors too. Nanapush, a trickster figure ("Because it's got to do with trickery and living in the bush" (33)), says, "I think like animals, have perfect understanding for where they hide. . . " (40). Fleur, the shaman character in *Tracks* got frightened with bear and gave birth her daughter (60). Michelle R. Hessler argues,

 doi:10.20944/preprints202501.2176.v1

> According to Ojibwa ontology and the concept of 'soul dualism,' each person possesses two souls which can metamorphize into other animate objects as they travel. The 'stationary soul' resides in the heart and provides cognitive powers, emotions and the ability to act. It can leave the body for a short time, but a long separation causes sickness and even death. The 'traveling soul' dwells in the brain and exists separately from the body. (3)

Fleur's soul transforms into a bear. Fleur with unusually great powers can metamorphize into bears to perform magic (qtd. in Hessler 3). Moreover, Erdrich describes the images of turtles, eagles, buffaloes, wolf, lion, etc. in *Tracks*. Erdrich and Silko bring all the animals, including insects, because these are not insignificant neither in Indigenous cultures (Chippewa or Pueblo or any other Indigenous cultures), nor in storytelling. The smallest creature or smallest detail, which seems insignificant through a western lens, turn out to be very important to the storytelling and to Indigenous cultures. Humans and animals—everything is interconnected. Erdrich's Fleur, Joe, and other characters as well Silko's Tayo and all of us are connected together and to the world. Forbes articulates this, "Native American traditions point out to us that all forms of life, including humans, animals, birds, plants, and insects, are children of the same parents" (21). The smallest insect and the smallest word carry great significance.

The humans and more than humans relationship is also found in *The Round House*. Joe narrates,

> Ojibwe person's clan meant everything at one time and no one didn't have a clan, thus you knew your place in the world and your relationship to all other beings. The crane, the bear, the loon, the catfish, lynx, kingfisher, caribou, muskrat—all of these animals and others in various tribal divisions, including the eagle, the marten, the deer, the wolf—people were part of these clans and were thus governed by special relationships with one another and with the animals. (229-30)

The relationship between humans and non-humans world is significant in storytelling process. Storytelling tell us both humans and non-humans are center to the world. This relationship also signifies the concept of deep ecology. Neil Carter in his *The Politics of the Environment: Ideas, Activism and Policy* explains the concept "deep ecology" as an holistic perspective, which hold views that moral status should be extended to non-human entities like natural resources that are traditionally not thought of as having moral status. Unlike western civilization, Indigenous Nations do not require this knowledge (ecological thought) as it is innate in Indigeniety.

Conclusion

Diane Glancy says, "There are stories that take seven days to tell, [and] [t]here are other stories that take you all your life" (qtd. in King 122). This quotation explains the subterranean and profound effect of storytelling. Erdrich describes colonial consequences through the lens of storytelling. The disappearance of buffaloes, the destruction of land, windigo and its modern manifestations happened and are continuing to happen due to "white bitterness" towards Indigenous nations. Atrocities are committed on Indigenous women, but the "institutional" justice remains silent; however, research shows that the ceremonial and storytelling process could be a strong counter-hegemonic force against those colonial and imperial apparatuses.

I agree with Simpson who urges: "[Indigenous people] need to act against political processes that undermine [Indigenous] traditional forms of governance, [Indigenous] political cultures, [Indigenous] intellectual traditions, the occupation and destruction of [Indigenous]lands, violence against [Indigenous] children and women, and a host of many other issues" (53). My research, built on a basis of respect, and focused on Erdrich's *The Round House*, particularly on storytelling and justice, has provided insight into the political and cultural tool of storytelling and its future potential.

References

Bowden, Charles and Michael. P. Berman. *Trinity.* Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009. Print.

 doi:10.20944/preprints202501.2176.v1

Byrd, Jodi A. *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011. Print.

---. Interview with Jodi A Byrd. http://www.firstpeoplesnewdirections.org/blog/?p=3977

Deloria, Vine, Jr. and Clifford M. Lytle. *American Indians, American Justice.* Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983. Print.

During, Simon. *The Cultural Studies Reader*. London and New York: Routledge, 2007. Print.

Edkins, Jenny. "Whatever Politics." *Georgio Agamben: Sovereignty & Life.* Eds. Matthew Calarco and Steven Decaroli. California: Stanford University Press, 2007. Print.

Erdrich, Louise. *The Round House.* New York: HarperLuxe (HarperCollins Publishers), 2012. Print.

---. *Tracks.* New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1988. Print.

---. *Love Medicine.* New York: Henry Hold and Company, Inc., 1993. Print.

---. "Interview with CBC." http://www.cbc.ca/news/aboriginal/louise-erdrich-wins-dayton-literary-peace-prize-s-achievement-award-1.2739805

Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove Press, 2004. Print.

Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Vintage, 1995. Print.

Forbes, Jack D. *Columbus and Other Cannibals: The Wetiko Disease of Exploitation, Imperialism and Terrorism*. New York: Autonomedia, 1992. Print.

Gramsci, Antonio. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci.* Trans. and Eds. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971. Print.

"Highway of Tears" http://www.highwayoftears.ca/about-us/highway-of-tears

Hessler, Michelle R. "Catholic Nuns and Ojibwa Shamans: Pauline and Fleur in Louise Erdrich's 'Tracks.'" *Wicazo Sa Review* 11.1 (1995): 1-7. PDF file.

Johnston, Basil H. "Is That All There Is? Tribal Literature." *New Contexts of Canadian Criticism*. Ed. Ajay Heble et. al. Canada: Broadview Press, 1997. Print.

---. *The Manitous*. Ontario: Key Porter Books Limited, 1995. Print.

King, Thomas. *The Truth About Stories: A Native Narrative*. Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 2003. Print.

Kovach, Margaret. Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010. Print.

Law Commission of Canada. *Justice Within: Indigenous Legal Traditions*. Ontario: Law Commission, 2006. Print.

Mihesuah, Devon Abbott. *Indigenous American Women*: *Decolonization, Empowerment, Activism*. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2003. Print.

Mills, Sarah. *Michel Foucault*. London and New York: Routledge, 2007. Print.

Napoleon, Val and Hadley Friedland. "Indigenous Legal Traditions: Roots to Renaissance." 1-20. PDF file. http://www.law.utoronto.ca/utfl_file/count/users/mdubber/CAL/1314/Napoleon%20and%20Friedland,%20Roots%20to%20Renaissance,%20formatted.pdf

PBS News hour. "Conversation: Louise Erdrich, Author of *The Round House*." Online video clip. *You Tube.* You Tube, 19 October, 2012. Web. 4 June, 2015. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sDL5QqH5I1s

Said, Edward. *Orientalism.* New York: Vintage, 1979. Print.

Schultz, Lydia A. "Fragments and Ojibwe Stories: Narrative Strategies in Louise Erdrich's 'Love Medicine.'" *College Literature* 18.3 (1991): 1-17. PDF file.

Sen, Amartya. *The Idea of Justice*. Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009. Print.

Silko, Leslie Marmon. *Ceremony*. USA: Penguin, 1977. Print.

Simon, Bart. "The Return of Panopticism: Supervision, Subjection and the New Surveillance." *Surveillance & Society* 3.1 (2005):1-20. PDF file.

Simpson, Leanne. *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back: Stories of Nishnaabeg Re-creation, Resurgence, and a New Emergence*. Winnpeg: Arbeiter Ring Publishing, 2011. Print.

Smith, Linda Tuhiwai. *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples.* London and New York: Zed Books, 2012. Print.

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. *Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.* (2015): 1-388. PDF file. http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Findings/Exec_Summary_2015_05_31_web_o.pdf

 doi:10.20944/preprints202501.2176.v1

Wilson, Shawn. *Research Is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*. Halifax & Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing, 2008. Print.