Geliş Tarihi:22.01.2018 Doi: 10.18026/cbayarsos.411503 Kabul Tarihi:27.03.2018

THE LAND, COMMUNITY, AND STORYTELLING: COLLECTIVE MEMORY AND SOCIAL IDENTITY IN LOUISE ERDRICH'S *TRACKS*

Aslı DEĞİRMENCİ[1]

ABSTRACT

Native American writer Louise Erdrich's novel Tracks *(1988) focuses on the history of a Native American tribe at the beginning of the twentieth century as many people in the community are about to lose their tribal lands due to the laws of the federal government. Since the land is what ties these people to their past, community, and culture, it becomes significant to tell the story of how these lands were lost in hope of preserving the past, and surviving culturally as well as physically. The novel is narrated alternately by two first person narrators: the tribal elder Nanapush who is attached to the old Indian ways and a mixed-heritage young woman Pauline, who is on the way of denying her Native identity and complying with the dominant white culture. In order to show how Louise Erdrich creates a collective memory and social identity for Native Americans through this novel, this article firstly examines the theories of collective memory and illustrates the exclusion of Native American point of view from the official history and thus their need to preserve their own sense of past and history. Secondly, through examples from the novel, it is explained how three elements brought together in the novel -the land, community, and storytelling- are vital to gaining a collective memory and social identity for Native Americans.*

Keywords: *Louise Erdrich, Tracks, collective memory, social identity, Native American history*

TOPRAK, TOPLUM, VE HİKÂYE ANLATMA: LOUISE ERDRICH'IN *İZLER* ADLI ROMANINDA TOPLUMSAL HAFIZA VE KİMLİK

ÖZ

Louise Erdrich'in İzler adlı romanı 20. Yüzyıl başlarında zorlu bir dönemden geçen bir Kızılderili kabilesinin tarihini anlatır. Bu kabiledeki birçok insanın toprakları federal hükümetin kanunları dolayısıyla ellerinden alınmak üzeredir. Toprak, bu insanları geçmişlerine, toplumlarına ve kültürlerine bağladığı için bu toprakların nasıl kaybedildiğini anlatmak geçmişi korumak ve aynı zamanda hem fiziksel hem de kültürel açıdan hayatta kalmak için önemli hale gelmektedir. Roman iki anlatıcı tarafından

[1] Arş. Gör. Dr., Hacettepe Üniversitesi, İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Bölümü, aslidegirmenci01@gmail.com

anlatılmaktadır. Bunlar kabilenin saygı duyulan yaşlılarından ve kabilenin eski geleneklerine bağlı olan Nanapush ile melez bir genç kadın olan ve Kızılderili kimliğini inkâr edip egemen beyaz kültürüne boyun eğme yolunda ilerleyen Pauline'dir. Louise Erdrich'in bu roman aracılığıyla Amerikan Yerlileri için nasıl toplumsal hafıza ve sosyal kimlik oluşturduğunu göstermek için, bu makale öncelikle toplumsal hafıza üzerine bazı teoriler incelemekte ve yazılı resmi tarihte Amerikan Yerli bakış açısına nasıl yer verilmediğini ve bu sebeple bu insanların kendi geçmiş ve tarih olgularını korumaları gerektiğini göstermektedir. Aynı zamanda, romandan örnekler verilerek, Amerikan Yerlilerinin toplumsal hafıza ve sosyal kimlik kazanması için toprak, toplum ve hikâye anlatma unsurlarının büyük önemi ifade edilmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Louise Erdrich, Tracks, toplumsal hafıza, sosyal kimlik, Amerikan Yerli tarihi*

Louise Erdrich, a prominent figure in contemporary Native American literature, has published over twenty novels as well short stories, poetry, chidren's literature, and non-fiction. An active writer since early 1980s, Louise Erdrich has been awarded with many literary prizes and awards for her works.[2] Having French and Chippewa[3] grandparents on her mother's side and German ancestors on her father's, Erdrich was born in Minnesota and grew up in North Dakota where her parents taught in a Bureau of Indian Affairs school. Although *Tracks* (1988) was the first piece of fiction Erdrich worked on as a graduate student, it was published after her first two novels *Love Medicine* (1984) and *The Beet Queen* (1986). In her cycle of seven novels which is usually referred as Love Medicine series, *Tracks* is the one that comes first chronologically; it tells the beginning stories of many characters readers know from her other novels in the same series.

[2] Recently, her novel *The Plague of Doves* (2008) was awarded Anisfield-Wolf Book Award in 2009 and also was a finalist for Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. Erdrich received the National Book Award for Fiction in 2012 for her novel *The Round House*. She was also awarded the Library of Congress Prize for American Fiction, and her 2016 novel *La Rose* received National Book Critics Circle Award for Fiction.

[3] Louise Erdrich uses the term "Chippewa" to refer to her background as well as for her fictional characters in North Dakota novels. In interviews she uses both "Chippewa" and "Ojibwa," both of which were the names given by Europeans to the original woodland people who were known as Anishinaabeg. In *Tracks*, Nanapush uses "Anishinabe" while Pauline uses "Chippewa."

Tracks conveys the history of a Native American tribe at the beginning of the twentieth century as the community tries not only to survive harsh winters, sickness, and poverty, but also struggles to preserve their land, cultural heritage, and their sense of community which is at stake. While telling the story of this Chippewa tribe set on a reservation in North Dakota, Erdrich inserts the oral storytelling tradition and Chippewa myths and legends into the text. The novel is narrated alternately by two first person narrators, Nanapush and Pauline, who are very different in their tone, lifestyles, as well as their purpose for telling these stories. The tribal elder Nanapush, who is attached to the old Indian ways, is the cultural transmitter of tribal traditions and collective memory to younger generations. Pauline, a mixed-heritage young woman, is on the way of denying her Native identity and complying with the dominant white culture. While Nanapush's narrative provides a vital insightful look to the past, Pauline's narrative is useful in terms of understanding the amount of destruction white culture brings upon the identity and cultural heritage of Native people. The common point in Pauline and Nanapush's narratives is Fleur, the last Pillager, a full-blood and a mystical woman who is believed to have supernatural powers. Through Nanapush and Pauline's fictionalized memories of a series of events happened between 1912 and 1924, Erdrich tries to shed light on a part of Native American history in *Tracks*. Erdrich admits that *Tracks* is a more political text than her other novels simply because "there is no way to speak about Indian history without it being a political statement" (Schumacher, 1994: 174). This article suggests that by giving voice to the Native American point of view, Erdrich creates a collective memory and thus provides a counter-history against the official dominant history of the United States, which is quite significant for the preservation of the social identity of the community. It is further suggested that this collective memory and cultural identity is formed through the significance the narrative gives to three elements: the land, the storytelling, and the community.

History, Collective Memory, and Social Identity

In terms of realizing the part collective memory plays in gaining a social identity, it is useful to examine some definitions by scholars that emphasize the idea of a cultural identity inherent in collective memory. Fentress and Wickham state that social memory

(as they choose to call it) "identifies a group, giving it a sense of past and defining its aspirations for the future" (1992: 25). They also declare that "social memory exists because it has meaning for the group that remembers it" (1992: 87). They even claim that memories, "in a functionalist manner," can be analyzed as "guides, whether uniform or contradictory, to social identity" (1992: 88). Likewise, Barbara Mistzal, in her comprehensive book *The Theories of Social Remembering*, defines collective memory as "the representation of the past, both that shared by a group and that which is collectively commemorated, that enacts and gives substance to the group's identity, its present conditions and its vision of the future" (2003: 7). Collective –or social, communal– memory is perceived by many scholars as a form of social identification of the individuals with the social groups they belong to.

Since minorities in the United States cannot relate to the national collective identity promoted by history books, media, and commemorative events, they feel more inclined to redefine their identity through the works of literature. In addition, their histories have typically been recorded through ephemeral sources that have mostly operated orally. Thus, a need to record and share with others becomes significant in many minority writers' works. Examining American literature written by ethnic writers, Singh, Skerret, and Hogan note that the use of memory in ethnic writing is particularly significant as it "interrupts the linear, conventional narratives in order to make room for multiple voices and perspectives" (1994: 18). These multiple perspectives, in turn, become "a means of creating community as part of the dialectic between the past and the present and moving toward the future" (1994: 18). They also suggest that "this interest in the past" by ethnic writers "is integral to the ways in which alternative cultures oppose and subvert the dominant culture that has historically both repressed and assimilated them" (1994: 18). In another work, Singh, Skerret, and Hogan accordingly state the impossibility of accepting the national memory for ethnic groups, especially for Native Americans:

> The Native American memory and experience both precede the national memory and conflict with it. For native peoples, this is the Old Country, and they refuse to forget it or their original relation to it. They have resisted efforts to make them assimilate, to make them strangers in their own land at a heavy price, which their writing explores. (1996: 4)

It can be concluded that national memory wants the citizens to forget some parts of their past lives, and remember some of the events only in the way it chooses to narrate them. Eviatar Zerubavel also draws attention to the national memory and how it renders a distorted knowledge of the past by using a "tradition of remembering" which he adds is mostly brought to us in the form of required history classes in school. This tradition, he explains, intends to tell us "what we should remember and what we can or must forget" (1996: 286). He further states that certain "rules of remembrance" also determine "how far back we remember" (1996: 286). The memories that remain outside these rules – like the memories of different minority groups in the United States – are considered "irrelevant" and also "forgotten".

Native Americans have long been excluded from the scene of American history, which, from a Euro-American point of view, starts with Columbus's so-called 'discovery' of the continent in 1492. However, by the time first Europeans set foot on the "new world," aboriginal people had already been living on that land for at least twenty thousand years. "When Columbus mistook the Azores for India," Ruoff reports, "there were more than 300 cultural groups north of Mexico, each with its own language" (1981: 327). The white European, however, was more inclined to see these hundreds of culturally diverse groups (each a nation, in fact) as only one social group. The history of Native people since has been marked by continual suffering and loss. In an article, Erdrich draws attention to the enormity of this loss:

> Through diseases such as measles and smallpox, and through a systematic policy of cultural extermination, the population of Native North Americans shrank from an estimated 15 million in the mid-fifteenth century to just over 200,000 by 1910… Entire pre-Columbian cities were wiped out, whole linguistic and ethnic groups decimated. Since the Old World diseases penetrated to the very heart of the continent faster than the earliest foreign observers, the full magnificence and variety of Native American cultures were never chronicled, perceived, or known by Europeans. (2000: 48)

The widely-accepted notion of starting American history with Columbus, Eviatar Zerubavel declares, implicitly suppresses the

memory of the millions of Native Americans who lived there before European contact. "Within that historiographic framework," he concludes, "nothing that predates 1492 belongs in the 'real' history of America" (1996: 288). It is because of this exclusion from the history and national memory that Native American writers, as well as other minority writers, employ memory in their own fiction.

Erdrich likes to reflect the history of her people, whether her characters are Native Americans (like her maternal ancestors), or German immigrants (like her paternal ancestors). James Stripes labels Erdrich's novels as "novelistic histories" or "historical fictions" (1991: 26). He further comments that

> Her novels are interventions in the writing of tribal histories. Disrupting the boundaries between history and fiction, her novels reflect a variety of literary conventions, inscribing revisionist histories of the cultural borderlands near the geographical center of North America. (1991: 26)

What Erdrich does in *Tracks* is to write (or re-write) a part of American history which has long been ignored by the mainstream historians. Even when historians tried to form a subtitle for a 'valid' Native American history under the main title of American history, it was mostly represented as a series of treaties between Native American tribes and the United States; laws and acts that were passed by the Congress, that causes drastic changes in Native American lives. Central to the series of events in *Tracks* is a legislative act passed by the Congress in 1887, Dawes General Allotment Act, which allowed the United States government to survey and divide Native American tribal lands into individual Native American families. Nancy Peterson comments that the aim of this act was to "convert tribes such as the Chippewa from a communal hunting and gathering organization to a capitalistic, individualistic agricultural economy" (1994: 986). According to the original act, the allotted parcels were to be held in trust for twenty-five years during which time the land owners did not need to pay taxes for their land but had the right to lease their land. *Tracks* starts in 1912, at the end of this trust period, when tribal people like Nanapush, Kashpaws, and Fleur, who were able to keep their land during the trust period (because many could not), have to find money to pay the taxes on their allotments. It is from Nanapush we learn that some families had to sell their land for almost nothing: "Starvation make fools of

anyone. In the past, some had sold their allotment land for one hundred poundweight of flour" (Erdrich, 1988: 8). However, soon it turns out that it is not only the government they should be afraid of; other families of the tribe such as the Lazarres and Morriseys who are mixed-bloods are after the land of the families whose allotment will be auctioned if they do not pay the annual fee. The land around Matchimanito Lake, which belongs to Fleur Pillager with thick oak forests becomes a site of attraction for lumber companies. Early in the novel, Nanapush warns Fleur that "the land will go…the land will be sold and measured" (1988: 8). At the end Nanapush proves to be right yet the process how the Pillager land is lost should be known in detail; so, he engages himself in telling the story of this loss to Lulu, Fleur's daughter, and his adopted granddaughter.

The Land and Community

Since Louise Erdrich sets *Tracks* in a specific time period in Native American history during which tribal and communal land was in danger, the land becomes the strongest element directing, causing, and developing a sense of past and, thus, a sense of identity along with it in this novel. In the theory of collective memory, Maurice Halbwachs attaches a special importance to space. He underlines that in the formation of collective memory, the importance of place and time assigned to the memory of that particular social group matters to a great extent. Because all social groups are prone to changes, the members of a group need solid foundations that enable them to rediscover the past in the present and to gain awareness of their own endurance. Therefore, Halbwachs states that "every collective memory requires the support of a group delimited in space and time" (1980: 84). It can be easily seen that the collective memory represented in *Tracks* shows these traits: the year(s) and the season(s) are given at the beginning of each chapter along with the narrator's name. As for the space, the land of the tribe and the risk of losing it to the federal government becomes the focus of this novel.

The significance of land for the community as it is narrated in *Tracks* is voiced by other Native American scholars as well. William Bevis contrasts some American classics to Native American novels and concludes that there are some differences identifying each canon. According to his assessment, "American whites keep leaving home" while "the hero comes home" in Native American novels (1987: 581-582). He further comments that in Native American

novels "coming home, staying put, contracting, even what we call 'regressing' to a place, a past where one has been before, is not only the primary story, it is a primary mode of knowledge and a primary good" (1987: 582). Although Lulu, Fleur's daughter, is not the protagonist in *Tracks*, she does come home to the reservation at the end of the novel, and thus she is saved from the assimilation she would be exposed to in a government school. In the case of six Native American novels Bevis has examined, he suggests, the identity formation of the hero is provided by his "staying," at home or on the reservation and by "a tribal elder" with whom the protagonist "forms a new personal bond," and the ending this protagonist seeks is almost always "related to tribal past and place" (1987: 585). In *Tracks*, Nanapush is the tribal elder, and what he tells Lulu is her personal past mixed with the tribal past. The land not only has a great influence on the identity of Native Americans but it also provides a foundation for the literary texts produced by them. Bevis even suggests that, "Place is not only an aspect of these works; place may have made them possible" (1987: 592). Bevis also emphasizes that the form of identity suggested by Native American novels "is not a matter of finding one's self." It is rather "finding a self that is transpersonal and includes a society, a past, and a place" (1987: 585). Bevis suggests, since reservations and tribes provide the member with "a society, past, and place," they are certainly the perfect way to reach that "transpersonal self."

Kenneth Lincoln, an important scholar on Native American literature, also identifies Indian literature with tribe; he states that

> Grounded Indian literature is tribal; its fulcrum is a sense of relatedness. To Indians tribe means family, not just bloodlines but extended family, clan, community, ceremonial exchanges with nature, and an animate regard for all creation as sensible and powerful. (1983: 8)

In *Tracks*, Nanapush, Fleur Pillager, and the Kashpaws form such an extended family that goes beyond blood relationships. Even Pauline confirms their new community by observing, "They formed a kind of clan, the new made up of bits of the old, some religious in the old way and some in the new" (1988: 70). Nanapush, on the other hand, explains that "[he] is a holdout, like the Pillagers," and comments further that "[he] was a branch, coming from the Kashpaws, that lived long enough to touch the next tree over, which was Pillagers"

(1988: 33), thus confirming his duty as a bridge and transmitter between families, generations and different timelines. Another scholar drawing attention to the significance of land and community on the formation of identity, Hertha Wong, states that

> Native Americans, although individuals, tend to see themselves first as a family, clan, and tribal members, and second as discrete individuals; to find identity in a spiritual context which places one's self in relation to the cosmos; and to connect their identity with a specific landscape (1987: 18).

What can be deduced from all these definitions of Native American identity is that, it is clearly bound to community, land, and past. In *Tracks*, through Nanapush's representation of the tribal collective memory, we can see the attachment to the land and the unifying nature of the land. Space is especially significant in Nanapush's narrative since he is hardly ever outside the reservation, and everything he tells Lulu is the events that happened in Chippewa land and not anywhere else. His connection to the tribal land as the "space" of all his memories is very strong. In addition, Nanapush is the one who does not want to lose the land to whites no matter what is offered in return for it. He is wise enough to know the power of land, and not to trust the power of money or government: "Land is the only thing that lasts life to life. Money burns like tinder, flows off like water. And as for government promises, the wind is steadier" (1988: 33). He realizes the significance of the land as something holding both his people and his memories together, thus turning his narrative to the collective memory of the whole tribe.

Nanapush also informs us of another reason why Fleur's land specifically is important for the tribe. There is a connection between Fleur's land and the mythical lake man; Nanapush explains that "Pillager land was not ordinary land to buy and sell. When that family came here, driven from the east, Misshepushu had appeared because of the Old Man's [Fleur's father's] connection" (1988: 175). Therefore, it is hard for Fleur to accept that the land is gone; when she learns it, her immediate action is to commit suicide by putting all kinds of rocks into her pockets and walking into the lake. Although she is saved by her lover Eli, this incident clearly indicates the sense of hopelessness and trauma losing one's land creates on the individual. It is also significant that Fleur's attachment to her family's land is not about ownership, the pleasure of owning a property, or

having a place to stay[4]. It is rather due to the memories of the land she has such strong feelings about it. All her family is buried on that land, making it a site of memory for her. Another reason is that Fleur's land is situated in the west, the direction the dead Chippewa people head to the other world. Both Pauline and Nanapush encounter the ghosts of their families and other beloved people there. Chippewa ghosts, another means of commemorating for Nanapush, Fleur, and even for Pauline, all reside in the woods of Fleur's land as well. Thus, the loss of Fleur's land turns out to be the loss of an important part of the tribe's history as well.

As the trees near the lake are destroyed, the reader along with Nanapush comes to realize that it is not only the land which is destroyed; the land is sold, the families are torn apart, and the cultural heritage of the tribe is at stake. At the end of the novel, he sadly realizes:

> Once the bureaucrats sink their barbed pens into the lives of Indians, the paper starts flying, a blizzard of legal forms, a waste of ink by the gallon, a correspondence to which there is no end or reason. That's when I began to see what we were becoming, and the years have borne me out: a tribe of file cabinets and triplicates, a tribe of single-space documents, directives, policy. A tribe of pressed trees. A tribe of chicken-scratch that can be scattered by a wind, diminished to ashes by one struck match. (1988: 225)

It is this sense of imminent loss of tribal culture that leads Nanapush to tell his story. As an old man, Nanapush does not lose the 'track' of time, on the contrary, he is the one who keeps it. He sees how their lives are changing, and perhaps with this motivation he feels compelled to transfer what he knows. This urge for him to pass on what he knows and remembers becomes evident as he explains his reasons to Lulu at the very beginning of his narrative:

[4] The allotment money raised together by the Kashpaws, Fleur, and Nanapush in order for them to save their lands turns out to be just enough for Kaspaw land, and Margaret and Nector (Kashpaw) choose to use the money to pay the fee for their own land. As a result of this, Fleur refuses to go to the Kashpaw land and live there, as her lover Eli wants them to do.

> My girl, I saw the passing of times you will never know. I guided the last buffalo hunt. I saw the last bear shot. I trapped the last beaver with a pelt of more than two years' growth. I spoke aloud the words of the government treaty, and refused to sign the settlement papers that would take away our woods and lake. I axed the last birch that was older than I, and I saved the last Pillager. (1988: 2)

In these words, there is a yearning for the past, resistance to the government, and the instinct for survival. With his old age, commitment to the old ways, and ability to remember it all, and also as the last surviving member of his family, Erdrich introduces Nanapush as the cultural lifeguard of the tribe; he in a way becomes the collective memory in flesh.

Although Nanapush represents a sense of loss to some extent, Erdrich does not actually render the history of the tribe as a story of destruction. Even though the opening passage of the novel starts with Nanapush's recounting of how many people died, it ends with how he saved "the last Pillager." The endurance of the tribe is underscored through the survival of Fleur who is a full-blood Native strongly connected to the tribal traditions and to the land very much, a medicine woman, and much speculated lover of the lake man (or thing) Misshepushu. Nanapush combines the story of the tribe and the story of Fleur Pillager, Lulu's mother, to make Lulu know both her individual and communal past. His narration is directed at Lulu who, as a teenager, does not want to see her mother who has sent her away to a government school when she was a child. Thus, some of Nanapush's motives for narrating are personal: to assure Lulu that Fleur had legitimate motives for her actions, and to stop her from marrying into mixed-blood Morriseys. He needs to inform Lulu of how Fleur's land is lost, how her supernatural powers – as a full blood and last Pillager – have declined, and how Pillager land around the lake is lost. His other motive is communal: to give her a sense of community and past, or a sense of what they have gone through as a people.

Storytelling

Storytelling and oral tradition is a rooted cultural element in Native American people's life. It is by means of these stories, genesis myths and legends that most tribes are able to transmit their cultural

heritage to the next generations. They also provide the necessary framework for young people to find their identity in the collectivity of the tribe. Hertha Wong states that storytelling serves more than one end:

> Stories were important as a means to entertain, to educate, and to unite tribal members. Myths and historical stories associated with winter counts helped to define and to express a tribal identity, while personal stories, told to family and tribal members, helped to clarify and enhance an individual sense of self within the tribe. (1987: 23)

This unifying power of oral tradition is also expressed in Nanapush's recounting of his memories. His narrative bears the marks of oral tradition even though we (as readers) have it in the written form. His recounting is directed to a certain listener, his adopted granddaughter Lulu, and the reader is continually reminded of her presence by words like "my girl," or "granddaughter." The storytelling tradition of Native Americans is given life through him. Erdrich states that "a traditional storyteller fixes listeners in an unchanging landscape combined of myth and reality. People and place are inseparable" (2000: 43). So Erdrich posits Nanapush as a traditional storyteller as his narrative abounds with references to Chippewa myths, and he hardly ever recounts an event that happened somewhere else other than the reservation.

Nanapush, as a man of words, believes in the literal power of words. "Nanapush is a name that loses power every time it is written and stored in a government file," he tells Lulu. "That is why I only gave it out once in all these years," he states, referring to fact that he gave his name to Lulu (1988: 32). His motives for talking and telling stories vary: it can be in order to survive, to cure, to teach, to take revenge, or just for fun. After he saves Fleur, and she starts staying in his cabin, Fleur and Nanapush talk about their dead relatives but carefully, "without letting their names loose in the wind that would reach their ears" (1988: 5). However, the dead people, the ghosts who call the living to join them do not leave them alone even after Nanapush goes back to Fleur's cabin, and buries them and asks them to abandon them. Nanapush reports that "we felt the spirits of the dead so near that at length we just stopped talking…This made it worse" (1988: 6). When they do not speak, they lose their interest in living: "we needed no food. A little warmth. Days passed, weeks, and

we didn't leave the cabin" (1988: 6). Erdrich maintains a direct relation between talking and living: when Fleur and Nanapush stop talking, their interest in life decreases. Finally, they are saved when the new priest, Father Damien comes to tell them that another Pillager, Fleur's cousin, has been found in the woods. However, it is not the good news that saves them, but the obligation they feel towards their guest thinking "a guest must eat" that saves them (1988: 7). It is when they sit down, eat, and talk that Nanapush understands he is alive: "The sound of my own voice convinced me I was alive" (1988: 7).

Throughout the novel, Nanapush's ability to survive, save, and, thus, endure is emphasized: it is not only Fleur he saves from death. He saves himself from the sickness and also Lulu from losing her feet at the white doctor's hands. Through Nanapush's words, Erdrich underlines the healing power of the words and stories; she also informs readers on the circular and continuous nature of stories:

> [Stories] are all attached, and once I start there is no end to telling because they're hooked from one side to the other, mouth to tail. During the year of my sickness, when I was the last one left, I saved myself by starting a story…I got well by talking. Death could not get a word in edgewise, grew discouraged, and traveled on. (1988: 46)

Likewise, he helps Moses, Fleur's distant cousin, and saves him by giving him a new name: "In the first days of the fevers, when Moses was small, I spoke a cure for him, gave him a new name to fool death, a white name, one I'd learned from the Jesuits" (1988: 35).

When Lulu walks into the snow in her thin shoes to bring help to Fleur who goes into a labor prematurely for her second child, her feet become severely frostbitten. Nanapush tries to heal her feet by putting them under his arms; when blood rushes to her feet, however, Lulu starts screaming and fighting Nanapush. Yet he does not give up:

> But I know certain cure songs, words that throw the sick one into a dream and cause a low dusk to fall across the mind…Eventually my songs overcame the painful burning and you were suspended, eyes open, looking into mine. Once I had you I did not dare break the string between us and kept on moving my lips, holding you motionless with talking…I talked

> on and on until you lost yourself inside the flow of it, until you entered the swell and ebb and did not sink but were sustained. I talked beyond sense – by morning the sounds I made were stupid mumbles without meaning or connection. But you were lulled by the roll of my voice. (1988: 167)

Although it does not make sense, Nanapush continues to talk as the words become the connection between himself and Lulu. When Father Damien comes with the white doctor who thinks Lulu's feet are frozen and should be cut, Nanapush objects and does not let the doctor take Lulu to his office. He explains to Lulu "saving you the doctor's way would kill you" because Lulu was not a child who could survive without her feet, and Nanapush knew her well enough (168). He takes good care of Lulu after the doctor leaves; he bathes her feet "in water and pickling salt" and fannes "them with purifying smoke" (169). Just like he composes the alternative history of his community, Nanapush makes up alternative ways to save his people. In this way, his narrative registers both physical and cultural survival.

A Contradictory Case: Pauline's Story

The second narrator in *Tracks* is Pauline Puyat, whom the readers know from Erdrich's earlier novels as Sister Leopolda. Her narrative is shaped with loss, loneliness, denial, and forgetting. As such, it stands in full contrast to Nanapush's memories which emphasize survival, community, and the importance of the past repeatedly. Her stories are not directed to any specific listener, she seems interested in justifying her actions to herself only, thus creating a sense of individuality in her stories. Her narrative evokes a written form as well, just as she wants to be white, her style seems to conform to the individualistic ideals of the white world she desperately wants to be a part of. The first chapter Pauline narrates, the second in the novel, gives the reader the first clues of Pauline's denial of her identity as a mixed-blood Native American. When she asks her father to send her to a white town in the south of the reservation (Argus), her father is concerned that she "won't be an Indian once [she] returns" (1988: 14). However, Pauline welcomes such a change:

> 'Then maybe I won't come back,' I told him. I wanted to be like my mother, who showed her half-white. I wanted to be like my

> grandfather, pure Canadian. That was because even as child I saw that to hang back was to perish. I saw through the eyes of the world outside of us. I wouldn't speak our language…He scorned me when I would not bead, when I refused to prick my fingers with quills, or hid rather than rub brains on the stiff skins of animals… "I was made for better," I told him. "Send me down to your sister." (1988: 14)

Pauline's refusal of her Native identity can be explained by a different form of racism. Ann Folwell Stanford explains what Pauline experiences is not racism directly applied to the individual by the dominant culture but "internalized" by the person who believes she needs to be something different (white) than herself (2003: 107). Pauline wants to learn lace-making from nuns instead of doing what her family traditionally does as a clan. However, the nuns at the convent do not accept her, and she finds herself "[sweeping] floors in a butcher shop" (1988: 14). Pauline's situation is very well in accord with what African American critic bell hooks suggests on the nature of forgetting and remembering: "Memory sustains a spirit of resistance. Too many red and black people live in a state of forgetfulness, embracing a colonized mind so they can better assimilate into the white world" (1991: 191). Pauline is certainly one of these people so eager to forget and be a part of the white culture.

After the epidemic winter "that took so many Chippewa," Pauline cannot hear anything from her family: "No one knew yet how many were lost, people kept no track" (1988: 15). And Pauline definitely does not want to keep 'track' of the past, hers is a story of forgetting: "I tried to stop myself from remembering what it was like to have companions, to have my mother and sisters around me" (1988: 15). Yet another sign of forgetfulness surrounding her is exemplified in the loss of their clan name. Both Pauline and Nanapush note that the Puyat clan name was forgotten. Pauline explains, "we were mixed-bloods, skinners in the clan for which the name was lost" (1988: 14). What Nanapush remembers of these skinners is that they "were always an uncertain people, shy, never leaders in our dances and cures" (1988: 38). Although Pauline is "the only trace of those who died and scattered," Nanapush senses something different about Pauline, thinking she was "an unknown mixture of ingredients," and was easy to ignore when she was quiet but "was different once her mouth opened and she started to wag her tongue" (1988: 39). Nanapush also accuses Pauline of "telling odd

tales that created damage," and he even compares her to himself: "She was worse than a Nanapush, in fact. For while I was careful with my known facts, she was given to improving truth" (1988: 39). Pauline herself also gives reason for the reader to doubt her story: When Margaret tricks her into telling what happened to Fleur in Argus, Pauline confesses that "[Margaret] pulled the truth or *some version* of it out of me" (emphasis added, 1988: 65). On the other hand, Pauline doubts the reliability of Nanapush as well. Commenting on the stories old men tell, but really referring to Nanapush, Pauline suggests: "It comes up different every time, and has no ending, no beginning. They get the middle wrong too. They only know they don't know anything" (1988: 31). However, Erdrich does not render one narrator as more reliable over the other; when asked whether Pauline is an unreliable narrator, Erdrich carefully states that "I think it is me, the writer, who in the end is unreliable and continually searching for the truth of an imagined story, a truth which changes with each consciousness and each point of view" (Chavkin, 1994: 224). Nevertheless, Nanapush is given the first and last chapters of the novel thus he has chance to tell more, which implies that his point of view is more noteworthy.

After spending a summer together with Fleur in nearby town Argus[5], Pauline becomes mentally more unstable. She goes back to the reservation to stay with the Morriseys, and help Bernadette in her work of watching dying people in their last hours. She enjoys this task of deathwatch but her mind becomes only more deranged. Her nightmares of what happened in Argus end when she finds peace in watching people die:

> We set them praying into the ground if they were Christians, or if unconverted along the death road of the Old Ones, with an extra pair of shoes. It was no matter to me what happened after life. I didn't care. I accompanied Bernadette, waited for the moment that brought me peace. (1988: 69)

[5] As we learn from Pauline herself, when she and Fleur were working in a butcher shop in Argus, Pauline witnesses three men rape Fleur, after which Fleur takes revenge and kills these men by locking them in the cold meat locker they took refuge in during the tornado which Pauline also believes was a result of Fleur's rage.

This sets another contrast between Nanapush and Pauline: Nanapush is known for his joviality and his humorous ways, which affirms life and gives hope even in the direst situations. On the other hand, Pauline becomes more desolate as she gets attracted to death and dying.

As her story progresses, the denial of identity becomes stronger in Pauline's narrative. After she gets involved in a relationship with Bernadette's brother Napoleon, she learns that she is pregnant; and after several attempts of miscarriage she is stopped by Bernadette who offers to adopt the child. Pauline accepts this offer; after denying her family, heritage, and language, she now disclaims her own child. When she could walk again after giving birth, she goes to the convent again, this time to stay. She gets more religious in a dangerous way, and turns into a zealot experiencing odd penances on her body. Her full denial of her identity reaches the extreme of denying her family and past when she imagines seeing Christ who shows her some facts like "exactly where [she] was from":

> He said that I was not whom I had supposed. I was an orphan and my parents had died in grace, and also, despite my deceptive features, I was not one speck of Indian but wholly white…He told me I was chosen to serve. Other things. I was forgiven of my daughter. I should forget her…I should not turn my back on Indians. I should go out among them, be still, and listen. (1988: 137)

It is after this revelation that Pauline stops using pronouns like "we" and "our" to describe Native Americans; instead, she starts using "the Indians" or "them" (1988: 138). It is also with this vision of hers that her so-called "true background" is revealed and she is accepted to the order to become a nun because the convent would admit "no Indian girls" (1988: 138). As a young woman who has internalized the racism of the mainstream culture, Pauline cannot find solace in the reservation with other Native Americans. The only other place she feels she can belong to, the church, forces her even further to deny her identity completely.

Even after she starts staying at the convent, Pauline still continues her visits to Fleur's cabin. When Fleur goes into a premature labor, she is the only one in the cabin to help her yet she becomes clumsy and cannot bring Fleur the herbs she asks for. Before she takes her vows to become a nun, she pays a last visit to

Matchimanito, determined to bring the water monster down. In fact, she kills Napoleon imagining the lake monster has taken the shape of his body. In a way, these two events reveal how disconnected she becomes with her own culture. As her part of the novel closes, she is given a new name: Leopolda. Just as she starts her new life with her new name, she makes prophecies for the ones she leaves behind:

> I see farther, anticipate more than I've heard. The land will be sold and divided. Fleur's cabin will tumble into the ground and be covered by leaves. The place will be haunted I suppose, but no one will have ears sharp enough to hear the Pillagers' low voices, or the vision clear to see their still shadows. The trembling old fools with their conjuring tricks will die off and the young, like Lulu and Nector, return from the government schools blinded and deafened. (1988: 204)

As she did throughout the novel, Pauline contradicts the other voice in the novel at the end as well. While Pauline continues to stress the destruction and loss as exemplified by her being lost in this world, Nanapush's last chapter is marked by the grief and trauma of losing Fleur's land, and yet a sense of hope also created by being able to bring Lulu home from the government school. Thus, Louise Erdrich's choice of Pauline as the other narrator in *Tracks* is striking in the sense that even when she tries to propose a counter history to oppose that of the dominant culture, she uses a contradictory voice in the same text. If Nanapush seems intent on telling the truth, Pauline seems intent on concealing it – or, at least, concealing the whole truth about her share in the course of events. While Nanapush's motive is a communal one as he tries to save the cultural heritage of the tribe by telling stories, Pauline's is highly personal; she tries to gain acceptance by her stories. Clearly, Erdrich wants to exemplify two different points of view on the same subjects of Native American culture and history. In that sense, Erdrich's use of Pauline as the narrator can be interpreted as an opposition to the general enforcement of a single view of history by the dominant culture which forces official memory and history upon minority people.

The conclusion

Discussing Halbwachs's theory on collective memory, Mistzal suggests that according to him "a group memory lasts only as long the group and that the prominence, and therefore also the duration, of a collective memory depends on the social power of the group that holds it." (2003: 51). In that sense, Nanapush becomes the collective identity in flesh in *Tracks*. The status he holds in the tribe makes him empowered to tell their story. Lulu, the primary audience of Nanapush's narrative, remains silent throughout the novel, so we do not know how she is affected by his stories. We are not informed whether she has forgiven her mother, or whether she has internalized her cultural heritage, claiming the collective identity of her tribe as part of her own. Nonetheless, we can interpret Nanapush's effort for passing on his memories to the next generation to create a collective identity as mission accomplished. The novel ends with an image of Lulu as she gets off the vehicle the government has sent. After Fleur sends Lulu away to school, Nanapush becomes the tribal chairman. Although he does not like being a bureaucrat himself, he has to as it is the only way to get Lulu back home and in the end, he manages to do so (1988: 225). Therefore, it can be deduced that Nanapush is still strong as the novel closes; so is the collective memory of the tribe residing in him.

To conclude, Louise Erdrich provides both a counter-memory and counter-history as opposed to the official memory and history of the dominant culture in *Tracks.* By giving an inside account of how Dawes General Allotment Act affected Native American people in general, and Chippewa tribe in particular, she breaks the linearity of dominant historical narratives. Thus, stemming from the collective memory Nanapush represents, both a social identity and an awareness of their distinct history are created for the members of Chippewa people today as well as the readers. The individual memories of the two narrators transform into a collective memory as they tell their stories. Inherent in this collective memory and these stories are the attachment to the land, community, and traditions which altogether form the necessary means of a social identity for next generations of Native American people.

WORKS CITED

BEVIS, William (1987), "Native American Novels: Homing In", (eds.) Brian Swann and Arnold Krupat, *Recovering the Word: Essays on Native American Literature*, University of California Press, California, 580-620.

CHAVKIN, Allan and Nancy Feyl Chavkin (1994), *Conversations with Louise Erdrich and Michael Dorris*, University Press of Mississipi, Jackson.

COSER, Lewis (1992), "Introduction", Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London.

ERDRICH, Louise (1988), *Tracks*, Harper & Row Publishers, New York.

ERDRICH, Louise (2000), "Where I Ought to Be: A Writer's Sense of Place", *Louise Erdrich's Love Medicine: A Casebook*, (ed.) Hertha D. Wong, Oxford University Press, New York and Oxford.

FENTRESS, James, and Chris Wickham (1992), *Social Memory*, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford and Cambridge.

HALBWACHS, Maurice (1980), *Collective Memory*, Harper and Row, New York.

HALBWACHS, Maurice (1992), *On Collective Memory*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London.

HOOKS, bell (1992), *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, South End Press, Boston.

KRUPAT, Arnold (1998), "America's Histories", *American Literary History*, 10.1, pp. 124-146.

LINCOLN, Kenneth (1983), *Native American Renaissance*, University of California Press, Berkeley.

MISZTAL, Barbara (2003), *Theories of Social Remembering,* McGraw-Hill Education, Berkshire.

PETERSON, Nancy (1994), "History, Postmodernism, and Louise Erdrich's *Tracks*", *PMLA* 109.5, pp. 982-994.

RUOFF, Lavonne Brown (1981), "American Indian Oral Literatures", *American Quarterly*, 33.3, pp. 327-338.

SCHUMACHER, Michael (1994), "Louise Erdrich and Michael Dorris: A Marriage of Minds", (eds.) Allan and Nancy Feyl Chavkin, *Conversations with Louise Erdrich and Michael Dorris*, University Press of Mississipi, Jackson, 173-183.

SINGH, Amritjit, et al., eds. (1994), *Memory, Narrative, and Identity: New Essays in Ethnic American Literatures*, Northeastern University Press, Boston.

SINGH, Amritjit, et al., eds. (1996), *Memory and Cultural Politics: New Approaches to American Ethnic Literatures*, Northeastern University Press, Boston.

STANFORD, Ann Folwell (2003), *Bodies in a Broken World: Women Novelist of Color and the Politics of* Medicine, The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill and London.

STRIPES, James (1991), "The Problem(s) of (Anishinaabe) History in the Fiction of Louise Erdrich: Voices and Contexts", *Wicazo Sa Review*, 7. 2, pp. 26-33.

WONG, Hertha (1994), "An Interview with Louise Erdrich and Micheal Dorris", (eds.) Allan and Nancy Feyl Chavkin, *Conversations with Louise Erdrich and Michael Dorris*, University Press of Mississipi, Jackson, 30-53.

WONG, Hertha (1987), "Pre-literate Native American Autobiography", *MELUS*, 14.1, pp.17-32.

ZERUBAVEL, Eviatar (1996), "Social Memories: Steps to Sociology of the Past", *Qualitative Sociology*, 19.3, pp. 283-299.