PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF ALGERIA

MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

UNIVERSITY OF MOHAMED BOUDIAF - M'SILA

FACULTY OF LETTERS AND LANGUAGES
DEPARTMENT OF LETTERS AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE

DOMAIN: FOREIGN LANGUAGES
STREAM: ENGLISH LANGUAGE

OPTION: LITERATURE & CIVILIZATION N

An Ecocritical Study of Indigenous Resistance in Louise Erdrich's *The Night Watchman*

Dissertation Submitted to the Department of English in Partial fulfillment of the Requirements for the Master's Degree

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Academic Year: 2024/2025

Declaration

We, Mr. Seif Edine Hadji and Mr. Zine elabidine Seghiour, hereby declare that the dissertation entitled "An Ecocritical Study of Indigenous Resistance in Louise Erdrich's *The Night Watchman"* is our own original work, and all the sources we have used have been properly acknowledged through references.

Dedication

In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful, Alhamdulillah for granting me strength, patience, and guidance throughout this journey. Without Allah's countless blessings, none of this would have been possible. I sincerely thank my beloved parents, my mother and father, for their unconditional love, endless sacrifices, and unwavering support. Their faith in me has been my greatest source of strength and perseverance. I am also deeply grateful to my dear brothers, sisters, and my cherished nephew Imad Eddine Farhati for their constant encouragement, care, and presence. They have brightened this path and made every step more bearable.

Hadji Seif Edine

Dedication

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.

I thank Allah for granting me strength, patience, and guidance throughout this journey. Without His blessings, none of this would have been possible.

I dedicate this moment to everyone who has been part of my journey to every soul who walked with me through a path that was far from easy to those who planted hope in my heart and lit my way when darkness grew heavy, this achievement is for you to my beloved mother, my first refuge and my unwavering support to my brothers and sisters, each of whom holds a special place in my heart—because of you, the journey was warmer and more meaningful to my dear friends who shared with me the joy and the fatigue, like stars that illuminated the long nights of study to my distinguished professors, who were more than teachers—they were mentors and a source of inspiration and to my English Department family, whose warmth was always a shelter, making me feel truly at home..

May Allah bless and protect you always. With all my love and deepest thanks.

Seghiour Zineelabidine

Acknowledgments

All praise is due to Allah, the One and Only, the Lord of all worlds. We thank Him for His endless mercy, guidance, and strength throughout this work. There is no god but Him alone, and to Him we turn in gratitude and humility. May He accept this effort and continue to bless us with knowledge and wisdom.

The Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, said: “Whoever does not thank people, does not thank Allah.” Following this noble teaching, we would like to express our sincere gratitude to our supervisor, Miss Rebahi Khaoula, for the time and effort she provided throughout this research. Her generous guidance has been invaluable in helping us achieve this work. We are truly grateful for her unwavering support, her thoughtful and precise feedback, and the trust she placed in our abilities.

Besides our supervisor, we would also like to extend special thanks to Miss Amel Benia and Dr. Nassima Amirouche for their invaluable guidance and support.

We are also thankful to the members of the Board of Examiners for kindly agreeing to review this work. Their time, insights, and constructive feedback will greatly enrich its final quality.

Finally, we extend our heartfelt appreciation to Mohamed Boudiaf University of M’sila—its teachers, administrative staff, and all workers—for creating an environment that fosters learning, growth, and perseverance.

Abstract

In a time of ongoing environmental crises and Indigenous marginalization, literature becomes a vital space for reclaiming land, memory, and cultural identity. Louise Erdrich's novel *The Night Watchman* is a significant example of Native American literature that portrays resistance in the face of colonial domination and oppression. Set against the backdrop of the 1950s Termination Era, the novel explores how land, identity, and traditional knowledge become central to Indigenous resistance. By utilizing this novel as a corpus, this dissertation intends to demonstrate how Indigenous resistance is expressed through a deep relationship with land, nature, and ancestral knowledge, emphasizing the cultural and ecological ties that colonial forces attempt to sever. Drawing on the frameworks of Ecocriticism and Ecocolonialism, and engaging with concepts such Arne Naess's concept of deep ecology, Rob Nixon's theory of slow violence, and Gerald Vizenor's concept of survivance. This research reveals how colonial policies enact gradual ecological and cultural violence, while Indigenous narratives serve as acts of resistance and survival that reclaim land as a vital source of resilience and continuity.

Keywords: Deep Ecology, Indigenous, Ecocriticism, Ecocolonialism, Resistance.

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General Introduction

In recent decades, environmental issues have become a major concern for both humanity and the planet. The overuse of natural resources has brought us to a critical point. Forests are being destroyed, fossil fuel reserves are shrinking, seasonal cycles are becoming unpredictable, and ecological disasters are happening more often around the world. These crises are not merely ecological but deeply intertwined with systems of power and inequality, a connection foregrounded by Indigenous activists and scholars. In 2021, at the 26th United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26), a global meeting where countries come together to discuss actions to address climate change. Txai Suruí, a 24-year-old Brazilian Indigenous climate activist, delivered a powerful speech that resonated globally:

> Today the climate is warming. The animals are disappearing. The rivers are dying, and our plants don't flower like they did before. The Earth is speaking. She tells us that we have no more time [...] Let us stop the answering with lies and fake promises. Let us end the pollution of hollow words. Let us fight for a liveable future and present. It is always necessary to believe this dream is possible. May a utopia be our future on Earth.

Txai Suruí's words embody the Indigenous imperative to treat environmental crisis not as an isolated issue, but as a collective responsibility rooted in ancestral knowledge and ecological interdependence. This perspective, often overlooked in dominant environmental narratives, emphasizes care, reciprocity, and the sustained balance between human and non-human life. These principles resonate deeply in Native American literature, where storytelling serves as a powerful form of resistance and a means of preserving cultural identity, memory, and the sacred bond with the land.

In Native American literature, the environment is regarded as sacred, often portrayed as a living, spiritual entity deeply intertwined with human existence. Many Indigenous stories, myths, and contemporary works reflect a worldview in which nature is not merely a resource, but a relative and teacher. As Paula Gunn Allen, a Laguna Pueblo writer, explains: "We are the land … the Earth is the mind of the people as we are the mind of the earth … It is part of our being—dynamic, significant, real. It is ourselves" (qtd. in Booth 329). Native American literary works have been deeply shaped by the long-lasting impact of colonialism, particularly in how they represent and engage with nature. Colonial invasion not only led to the physical dispossession of Indigenous lands but also attempted to erase traditional ecological knowledge and spiritual connections to the environment. As a result, Native literature often emerges as a form of resistance, portraying nature not just as sacred, but as a site of struggle, memory, and survival. Many writers use storytelling to reclaim their relationship with the land, highlight environmental injustices, and critique the ongoing effects of colonialism. From this perspective, environmental destruction is not merely a crime against nature, it becomes a crime against Indigenous identity, sovereignty, and continuity.

Through literature, Native authors resist not only historical erasure but also environmental violence, positioning their works as acts of ecological and cultural defense. Louise Erdrich, one of the most celebrated and influential voices in contemporary Native American literature, is a Pulitzer Prize-winning author of Ojibwe descent and an enduring champion of Indigenous stories. Born in 1954 in Minnesota and raised in North Dakota, she is an enrolled member of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa, and her deeply rooted cultural heritage infuses her acclaimed novels, poetry, and children's books. Erdrich's work, which has earned Major accomplishments such as the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award, masterfully blends fiction with historical truth,

offering profound insights into Indigenous resistance, cultural survival, and the enduring impacts of colonialism.

Her Pulitzer-winning novel *The Night Watchman* (2020) stands as a towering achievement, drawing inspiration from the life of her grandfather, who fought against the U.S. government's Native termination policies. Through this powerful narrative, Erdrich illuminates the intersections of land protection, environmental harm, and Native resilience, solidifying the novel as an essential text for understanding both historical and ongoing struggles. Beyond her writing, Erdrich's commitment to uplifting Indigenous voices extends to her work as the owner of Birchbark Books, an independent bookstore dedicated to promoting Native literature.

Native American literary narratives mirror the struggles of the marginalized communities across the Global South and beyond—those in the East, West, North, and South—who have been subjected to violence, colonialism, environmental degradation, and exploitation in regions such as Africa, Asia, and elsewhere. Although Native Americans live within powerful nation like the United States, the irony lies in their ongoing marginalization and powerlessness in a country that outwardly champions human rights, equality, and environmental preservation—particularly beyond its own borders. In this context, we have chosen Louise Erdrich's novel *The Night Watchman* to critically examine Western ideology and expose its contradictions. The novel offers a compelling lens through which these injustices are explored and challenged.

This research is further motivated by an academic interest in Indigenous worldviews and their intrinsic connection to land. The novel's portrayal of the U.S. government's 1950s termination policies—aimed at removing Native people from their ancestral territories—strongly resonates with the ongoing colonization and occupation of Palestine by Israel. This parallel becomes even more urgent in light of recent political statements, such as current U.S. President Donald Trump's 2025 plan to forcibly remove Palestinians from their land.

Just as Native Americans view the land as sacred and inseparable from their identity, Palestinians too share a profound bond with their homeland—one rooted in memory, heritage, and survival. In both cases, the land is not merely a physical space but a living part of their cultural and spiritual existence. This attachment goes beyond politics; it is ecological, emotional, and existential. By examining these experiences through ecocritical and ecocolonial lenses, this study highlights how resistance to land dispossession is not only a political act but also an act of environmental, cultural, and spiritual preservation.

Furthermore, this study focuses on Louise Erdrich's *The Night Watchman* as a primary literary text for examining Indigenous resistance through an ecocritical and ecocolonial lens. It explores how the novel represents the relationship between Indigenous communities and the land, particularly in the context of environmental exploitation, land dispossession, and cultural survival. The analysis highlights three key dimensions: land as an epistemological framework, resource exploitation as a form of colonial violence, and ecological practices as *Survivance*. The study is limited to this single work and does not extend to Erdrich's broader writings or to wider Indigenous literary traditions. It emphasizes themes of resistance, land, and environmental consciousness within the historical context of mid-20th-century U.S. assimilation policies. Scientific ecological analysis and comparative examinations of global Indigenous experiences fall outside the scope of this research.

In line with the aims of this research, the objectives of this thesis are to examine the representation of Indigenous resistance in *The Night Watchman* through ecocritical and ecocolonial lenses; to explore the role of land as a source of knowledge, identity, and survival within the novel; to investigate how land dispossession and termination policies threaten the cultural survival of the Turtle Mountain Chippewa, with a focus on intergenerational knowledge transmission and spiritual

connections to the land; and to explore how *The Night Watchman* portrays the power of community in resisting colonial oppression and preserving cultural identity.

Building on these points, the dissertation will investigate the following question: How does Louise Erdrich's *The Night Watchman* portray Indigenous resistance to environmental and cultural erasure through ecocritical and ecocolonial lenses? In order to examine the central question more thoroughly, the following sub-questions will guide our analysis: How does the novel portray land as a source of knowledge, memory, and cultural continuity in the face of colonial disruption? In what ways does *The Night Watchman* illustrate environmental injustice through depictions of land exploitation and policy-driven erasure? How are ecological practices in The Night Watchman portrayed as acts of *Survivance*, and how do they contribute to the preservation of Native identity and culture?

Literature Review

Louise Erdrich's literary works have been the subject of extensive literary analysis, as she is widely recognized as one of the most knowledgeable authors on Native American culture, particularly as a member of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa. Erdrich's novel *The Night Watchman* (2020) has garnered significant critical attention for its use of magical realism as a form of cultural resistance. Amel Abbady's article "You Cannot Assimilate Indian Ghosts': A Magical Realist Reading of Louise Erdrich's *The Night Watchman*" examines how Erdrich employs supernatural elements to challenge dominant historical narratives. Abbady argues that Erdrich's ghosts serve as "reminders of communal crimes, crises, cruelties" (Zamora qtd. in Abbady 4), particularly in their representation of boarding school trauma. These spectral figures reveal how government policies sought to "'quarantine' Native children from their families" (Abbady 6). She

contends that Erdrich's use of magical realism allows her to “re-envision” Native American history from the perspective of those who have been "dispossessed, silenced, and marginalized" (Slemon qtd. in Abbady 1). By blending the supernatural with historical documentation, Erdrich asserts what Abbady identifies as a powerful narrative of cultural survivance.

An additional analysis of this work is provided by Florencia Lauria in her research “More than 'A Matter of Deciding To': Citizenship, Border Positionality, and Irresolution in Louise Erdrich’s *The Night Watchman*,” where she explores the novel’s depiction of Indigenous refusal to accept U.S. citizenship. Lauria argues that Erdrich’s characters navigate “border positionalities,” a concept she coined to describe the conflict between U.S. and Indigenous political identities, resulting from the unresolved relationship between U.S. and Chippewa sovereignties (Lauria 692). She suggests that while the novel depicts characters engaging with federal systems, it ultimately refuses the exclusivity of U.S. citizenship by asserting Chippewa kinship as an independent political identity. Lauria builds on Audra Simpson’s theory of refusal to highlight Erdrich’s use of “irresolution,” a narrative strategy that mirrors the contradictions in the characters’ experiences. Her article shows that the novel’s structure itself enacts resistance by refusing a clear ending, emphasizing ongoing colonial violence and uplifting Indigenous ways of understanding as an alternative to U.S. political views.

Another important analysis is undertaken by Yanlin Zhang and Qu Tang in their article "Nature • Animals • Non-Human: A Study of Community Consciousness in *The Night Watchman*" (2021). Their study examines how Louise Erdrich challenges anthropocentric worldviews by presenting a networked community where humans, animals, and spirits coexist as equal members (Zhang and Tang 22). Focusing on key relationships, they demonstrate how Erdrich articulates a distinctly Chippewa ecological philosophy, arguing that “the novel’s treatment of non-human

entities offers an Indigenous alternative to Western paradigms of environmental domination" (Zhang and Tang 25). They show how Erdrich's work challenges human dominance over nature, presenting instead an Indigenous perspective of mutual coexistence.

Moreover, Ayesha Farooq, Zareena Qasim, and Munnzza Noreen, in their article "Suppression of Native Americans Through Law: An Althusserian Critique of Erdrich's *The Night Watchman*," present a comprehensive examination of systemic oppression through Louise Althusser's theory of Ideological State Apparatuses. They argue that U.S. law operates as what Althusser terms a "necessarily repressive" mechanism of control (Althusser qtd. in Farooq et al. 569). Analyzing Louise Erdrich's novel, they highlight how the 1953 Termination Bill aimed, as Erdrich writes through the character Thomas Wazhashk, to "solve the Indian problem by getting rid of us" (Erdrich qtd. in Farooq et al. 573). The authors further contend that institutions such as boarding schools functioned as "vital tools in the eradication of Native American identity" through forced cultural assimilation (Farooq et al. 574). Notably, their study emphasizes both "state-sanctioned oppression" and Indigenous resistance, concluding that the novel demonstrates how literature can interrogate institutional power (578).

In addition, Shuang He adopts a distinct feminist approach in his research paper *"Survival and Continuation: An Analysis of the Women Characters of the American Indian Community in Louise Erdrich's The Night Watchman."* Grounded in intersectional and Indigenous feminist thought, his study examines how Erdrich portrays Native American women as central to cultural survival, resistance, and identity formation. By referencing feminist scholars such as Paula Gunn Allen and Simone de Beauvoir, He emphasizes the gendered dimensions of colonial oppression and the active role of women in confronting both patriarchal and colonial structures. His analysis

shifts the focus from general tribal resistance to the nuanced experiences and agency of Indigenous women.

While existing scholarship on Louise Erdrich's *The Night Watchman* has examined themes such as Indigenous resistance, historical trauma, and cultural *survivance*, few studies have approached the novel through an ecocritical lens. This research extends the current conversation by investigating how environmental relationships, land-based knowledge, and ecological imagery function as acts of Indigenous resistance. By applying ecocriticism to Erdrich's narrative, this study seeks to illuminate how the natural world is not merely a backdrop, but an active agent in the characters' struggle against settler-colonial power.

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive approach grounded in the fields of ecocriticism and postcolonial ecocriticism, with particular emphasis on the concept of ecocolonialism, to analyze Indigenous resistance in Louise Erdrich's *The Night Watchman*. Through close textual analysis, the research examines how Erdrich portrays the relationship between land, identity, and survival within an Indigenous worldview. This method allows for an in-depth exploration of how the novel reflects the environmental and cultural consequences of settler colonialism while highlighting resistance strategies rooted in spiritual, ecological, and communal values. The study relies on both primary textual evidence from the novel and theoretical foundations that inform its critical framework.

Ecocriticism, which emerged in the late twentieth century, constitutes a critical scholarly response to the growing awareness of environmental degradation. As one of the most significant revisionist movements in the humanities, it has gained substantial prominence amid escalating global ecological crises. The term was first introduced by William Rueckert in his 1978 essay *Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism*. Etymologically, the prefix "eco" comes

from the Greek *oikos*, meaning "household" or "earth," while "criticism" derives from *logos*, signifying "logical discourse." Ecocriticism therefore involves a critical examination of the natural environment as represented in literary texts. It is an interdisciplinary approach that draws from environmental science, ecology, cultural theory, and literary studies. Its aim is to understand how literature reflects and shapes human attitudes toward the environment.

Within this broader field, the study also draws upon the framework of ecocolonialism, a strand of postcolonial ecocriticism that emphasizes the ways in which colonial powers exploited both human populations and ecosystems. This perspective is especially relevant in the context of Native American literature, where cultural, spiritual, and physical survival is deeply connected to the land. The lens of green criminology intersects with this approach by examining how environmental harm disproportionately affects Indigenous communities. In *The Night Watchman*, these theoretical perspectives illuminate the ecological dimensions of settler colonialism and the forms of resistance that arise through Indigenous relationships with land, history, and collective memory.

Accordingly, this dissertation is structured into two chapters. The first, titled *"Colonial Disruption and Indigenous Literary Resistance,"* lays a foundational framework by exploring the history, identity, and enduring resistance of Indigenous peoples in North America. It begins by defining key terms and offering various understandings of who Indigenous peoples are, grounding the discussion in historical and cultural context. The chapter then delves into the profound disruptions brought about by European colonization, such as land dispossession, forced assimilation, and cultural erasure, implemented through oppressive policies like the Dawes Act and the establishment of residential boarding schools. In response to these forces, the chapter highlights how Indigenous communities have maintained resilience through oral storytelling

traditions and increasingly through literature, which emerges as a powerful vehicle for reclaiming identity and challenging colonial narratives and the socio historical context of *The Night Watchman*. Concluding this chapter is an introduction to the theoretical lenses of ecocriticism and ecocolonialism, which will serve as key analytical tools in the examination of Louise Erdrich's *The Night Watchman*.

For the second chapter, entitled "Land, Resistance, and the Colonial Gaze – An Ecocritical and Ecocolonial Reading of *The Night Watchman*," the analysis is conducted through the combined frameworks of ecocriticism and ecocolonialism. It begins with a brief overview of Louise Erdrich and her novel, followed by a focused application of the ecocritical lens, particularly Arne Naess's concept of deep ecology, with emphasis on the ecological self and self-realization. Ecofeminist perspectives are also incorporated to highlight the intertwined oppression of women and nature within ecological and colonial contexts. The analysis also adopts an ecocolonial approach, drawing on Rob Nixon's concept of *slow violence* to explore the impacts of ecological imperialism and the erasure of traditional ecological knowledge, while engaging with emotional and cultural responses such as *solastalgia* and Gerald Vizenor's concept of *survivance*, which articulate the characters' resistance, survival, and enduring connection to the land. Ultimately, this chapter examines how land, memory, and identity converge amid colonial disruption.

Chapter one: Colonial Disruption and Indigenous Literary Resistance

Introduction

"I have heard you intend to settle us on a reservation near the mountains. I don't want to settle. I love to roam over the prairies. There I feel free and happy, but when we settle down we grow pale and die." These words by Chief Satanta of the Kiowa reflect the deep disruption caused by colonization. The arrival of Europeans brought forced removals, foreign governance, and cultural suppression, transforming Indigenous ways of life. This chapter begins with a broad overview of the concept of "Indigenous peoples," then focuses on the Indigenous nations of North America. It explores their precolonial connection to the land, rooted in oral storytelling, folklore, songs, and spiritual traditions that shaped identity and ecological balance. Colonization shattered this harmony through dispossession, relocation, and policies aimed at erasing Indigenous identities—boarding schools, missionary work, forced conversions, and laws like the Dawes Act. These actions not only attacked culture but damaged the environment, leading to deforestation, resource depletion, and displacement. Selected conflicts will be discussed to illustrate the struggle for land, sovereignty, and survival.

Despite these challenges, Indigenous peoples have continued to resist erasure. Literature became a powerful form of resilience—preserving oral traditions, confronting colonial narratives, and affirming Indigenous worldviews. This chapter will introduce key developments in Indigenous literature, leading to a focus on Louise Erdrich and her novel *The Night Watchman*. The following chapters will analyze this novel through Ecocriticism and Ecocolonialism, exploring how Erdrich addresses Indigenous identity, land sovereignty, and environmental justice in both historical and contemporary contexts.

Indigenous peoples have shaped the land for centuries, their stories and traditions rooted deep in the earth. As the first storytellers and guardians of knowledge, their identities have often been denied—not because they are unclear, but because recognition has been withheld. The word "Indigenous," meaning "born in a specific place" (*Concise Oxford Dictionary*), reflects this deep belonging. Definitions by the United Nations and the International Labour Organization avoid rigid terms, instead affirming self-identification, cultural continuity, and a strong connection to land. It is a definition of rights, not limits one that honors sovereignty, diversity, and ongoing resistance. This understanding is key to confronting both past and present injustices.

José Martínez Cobo, former UN Special Rapporteur to the Sub-Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, defines Indigenous communities, peoples, and nations as those maintaining historical continuity with pre-colonial societies that once occupied their territories. They remain distinct from dominant societies and are committed to protecting, nurturing, and passing on their ancestral lands and cultural identities. This continuity is essential to their survival as distinct peoples, preserving unique cultural practices, social structures, and legal systems (Martínez Cobo).

He further outlines that Indigenous identity is shaped by interrelated factors that tie individuals and communities to their ancestral heritage. A central element is their enduring connection to ancestral lands, either in whole or in part, along with shared descent from the original inhabitants of these territories. Cultural continuity reinforces this identity and includes a range of expressions—religious beliefs, tribal ties, traditional dress, subsistence strategies, and distinct ways of life. Language is another crucial marker, whether it functions as a mother tongue, habitual language, or primary means of communication. Geographic location also plays a role, as Indigenous identities are often rooted in specific regions. These elements, combined with other

social, cultural, and historical factors, form the basis for recognizing Indigenous peoples as distinct within larger national and global societies.

Indigenous peoples in North America, as the original inhabitants of the continent, possess distinct languages, cultures, and governance systems that long predate European colonization. The terminology used to describe them has evolved through colonial imposition, legal classification, and Indigenous self-determination. Early exonyms such as *Indian*, rooted in Columbus's mistaken belief he had reached Asia, and *Eskimo*, meaning "eaters of raw meat" and widely rejected by Inuit communities, reflect colonial power shaping identity. The term *Native American*, defined by the *Cambridge Dictionary* as "a member of one of the groups of people who were living in North and South America before Europeans arrived," gained prominence in the U.S. during the civil rights movements as a more conscious alternative. In Canada, *First Nations* emerged in the 1970s and 1980s to assert political and cultural identity, though it lacks a legal definition. *Métis* and *Inuit* remain distinct communities. Meanwhile, terms like *Indian* persist in legal frameworks such as Canada's Indian Act but are considered outdated beyond their administrative use. State classifications like federally recognized tribes in the U.S. continue to reflect tensions between self-identification and imposed categories.

Beyond legal terms, offensive labels like *Redskin* and *Amerindian*—a now-obsolete 1902 academic coinage have been condemned for reinforcing Eurocentric and dehumanizing narratives. Contemporary scholarship calls for capitalizing *Indigenous Peoples* to recognize sovereignty and collective identity, while emphasizing nation-specific names such as *Diné* (Navajo Nation) and *Haudenosaunee* (Iroquois Confederacy), which reflect self-definition over colonial terms. While broad terms like *Indigenous* or *Native* are still used in pan-tribal contexts, they are secondary to culturally precise identifiers. As Linda Tuhiwai Smith argues in *Decolonizing Methodologies*,

terminology is not just semantic, it is an assertion of existence and survival in the face of colonial erasure. Academic writing must therefore remain aware of this weight, centering Indigenous voices and resisting imposed labels (Smith 6–7).

1.1 From Invasion to Erasure: Colonial Strategies and Cultural Destruction

European arrival in the Americas during the 15th and 16th centuries sparked widespread fascination with Indigenous peoples, often filtered through a colonial lens that mixed curiosity with control. While Native cultures were sometimes admired, they were also seen as inferior, justifying conquest, conversion, and assimilation. Powerful nations like Spain, France, and England competed for territory, promoting their beliefs as superior. English geographer Richard Hakluyt, in *A Discourse of Western Planting* (1584), encouraged colonization for economic and religious gains. Likewise, Thomas Harriot, who joined Raleigh's Roanoke expedition, described in *A Brief and True Report* (1588) how Indigenous peoples viewed European technology as divine, believing Europeans had a closer connection to the gods, which made them more open to conversion (Hariot 22).

The ideology of white supremacy, upheld by Europeans in their interactions with non-white populations, has been documented throughout history from early periods to the present. While it was once overt and widely recognized, today it operates in more subtle and concealed forms. The traditional structures of colonialism have evolved into new frameworks, such as the "humanitarian excuse" (White Savior Complex) and Kwame Nkrumah's concept of "neo-colonialism." These modern mechanisms include debt trap diplomacy, divide-and-rule strategies, soft power, and cultural imperialism, whereby former colonizers impose their values, ideologies, and lifestyles through media, education, and language to normalize their influence. Although former colonies

may appear politically independent, economic, political, and cultural control is often maintained through these hidden mechanisms, ensuring continued dominance in a less visible yet equally pervasive manner. Between the 17th and 19th centuries, colonial powers employed both overt and covert mechanisms to advance territorial expansion through warfare, forced displacement, and the systematic erosion of Indigenous cultures. These strategies not only inflicted physical harm but also enforced cultural, political, and religious oppression through assimilation policies, divide-and-rule tactics, and the devastating consequences of disease and environmental degradation—all of which profoundly disrupted Indigenous sociocultural systems.

The Pequot War of 1637 was not merely a conflict between two opposing forces but a calculated act of colonial violence that sought to dismantle Indigenous sovereignty under the guise of Puritan self-defense. English expansion was deeply tied to economic, political, and religious motives, with the Puritans not simply seeking to defend themselves but actively working to establish dominance. They used pretexts of justice and divine providence to justify violent land acquisition, often citing biblical passages such as 1 Samuel 15:3 – "Now go and attack Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and do not spare them; but kill both man and woman, infant and nursing child, ox and sheep, camel and donkey." Puritans applied this verse to Native Americans, viewing them as equivalent to the Amalekites. The Puritans framed their aggression as a righteous campaign against a supposed existential threat, employing religious rhetoric to justify extermination while conveniently ignoring their role in escalating tensions. In *The Pequot War*, historian Alfred A. Cave examines how the Puritans justified their actions, describing the Pequots as *"Satan's agents"* This characterization reinforced the belief that eliminating Indigenous resistance was both a spiritual and civilizational obligation, providing a theological justification for colonial violence.

This ideology culminated in the massacre at Mystic, where hundreds of Pequot men, women, and children were burned alive. This act of mass violence exemplifies the war's genocidal intent, setting a precedent for future policies of Indigenous displacement and subjugation. Rather than an inevitable clash of civilizations, the Pequot War reflects the calculated strategy of settler colonialism, where violence was not a response to Native aggression but a tool for securing land and asserting English dominance. The English settlers strategically exploited divisions among Indigenous peoples, allying with the Mohegans and Narragansetts[1] to wage war against the Pequot. The Mohegans, who had previously been subject to Pequot dominance, saw an opportunity to assert their own power by aligning with the colonists. This manipulation of intertribal conflicts ensured that Indigenous groups fought against one another, ultimately serving the interests of colonial expansion and weakening unified resistance against European encroachment.

Another devastating event in Indigenous history was the Wounded Knee Massacre of 1890. Following decades of forced removals and suppression of Native cultures, tensions rose with the emergence of the Ghost Dance movement, a spiritual revival that combined elements of Christianity with traditional Indigenous beliefs. This movement was a new development for many Native communities, emerging as both a tool of empowerment and a response to colonial disruption. While it symbolized Indigenous resistance, it also reflected the deep influence of colonialism on Native spiritual practices, as Indigenous peoples integrated imposed religious elements into their own traditions. The U.S. government, fearing an uprising, sent the Seventh Cavalry to disarm Lakota Sioux at Wounded Knee Creek in South Dakota. A chaotic confrontation led to the indiscriminate killing of at least 250 Lakota men, women, and children. This massacre

[1] *The Mohegans* and *Narragansetts* are Indigenous peoples from the northeastern United States, primarily Connecticut and Rhode Island, who historically inhabited the region before European colonization.

marked one of the final episodes of open military aggression against Indigenous peoples and symbolized the brutal culmination of policies aimed at erasing Native sovereignty and traditions.

This brutal culmination was not only expressed through military force but also through institutional and religious abuse. The physical, sexual, and cultural violence inflicted upon Indigenous peoples especially children by Christian missionaries reached a level of devastation so profound that even the Church was eventually forced to confront its crimes. To the level where, on July 25, 2022, in Maskwacis, Alberta, Canada, Pope Francis openly condemned the Church's actions as a "disastrous error," declaring, "I humbly beg forgiveness for the evil committed by so many Christians against the Indigenous peoples." And in the United States, political leaders also reckon with these historical injustices. In addition, on October 25, 2024, the former President Joe Biden issued a formal apology for the United States' policy that, for more than 150 years, forcibly separated Indigenous children from their families in an effort to suppress their culture and identity. Speaking at a tribal site, Biden stated, "I formally apologize as president of the United States of America for what we did. It's long overdue". These formal apologies reveal that the wounds of colonial history are not relics of the past but open scars that continue to shape the present. More than a century may have passed, but for many Indigenous communities, the trauma remains vivid, carried in memory, language, and lived experience. The enduring pain is a testament to how deeply these injustices penetrated cultural and spiritual foundations.

These conflicts were just examples of many violent encounters between Indigenous peoples and colonizers. While numerous other wars and massacres occurred across the continent, their consequences were equally complex and far-reaching, extending beyond immediate destruction to long-term cultural and societal disruptions. Not isolated incidents but part of a broader settler-colonial strategy that sought not only territorial control but also the erasure of

Indigenous cultures. Warfare, forced removals, cultural suppression, and enslavement evolved into assimilation policies, boarding schools, and systemic displacement. As Patrick Wolfe argues in "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," settler colonialism is not merely a historical event but an ongoing structure that perpetuates Indigenous erasure as a precondition for land expropriation and colonial dominance (Wolfe 390). The erasure of Indigenous cultures under settler colonialism finds parallels in other historical and contemporary contexts. Wolfe's analysis compares the colonization of North America to the ongoing displacement of Palestinians, where settler ideologies seek to eliminate Indigenous presence both physically and symbolically.

Just as Native Americans faced cultural suppression through forced conversions, language loss, and the destruction of traditional ways of life, Palestinians have experienced systematic erasure through territorial encroachment, linguistic suppression, and efforts to redefine historical narratives. Zionism, in particular, has played a role in reshaping Palestinian identity and history, much like the settler-colonial frameworks used against Indigenous peoples in North America. The forced displacement of Palestinians, restrictions on their language and cultural expressions, and efforts to overwrite their historical presence mirror the tactics used by European settlers against Native American nations. Wolfe's argument reinforces that settler colonialism is an ongoing structure, not a concluded event, continuously operating through policies of land dispossession, cultural erasure, and the imposition of dominant national narratives.

Following the discussion on Colonial Encounters and Cultural Disruption, federal policies significantly impacted the lives of Indigenous communities. Changes in land ownership, assimilation efforts, and restrictions on traditional practices reshaped Native societies. Policies aimed at restructuring land use and promoting assimilation affected Indigenous cultural and social structures in lasting ways. Boarding schools, religious conversion, and legal measures sought to

integrate Native peoples into the dominant society while undermining their traditional ways of life. These policies, combined with population loss caused by disease, war, and displacement, brought widespread challenges to Indigenous societies. The impact of these disruptions influenced various aspects of life, shaping the experiences of Native communities and their connections to land, culture, and identity.

The Dawes Act of 1887 was a federal policy aimed at assimilating Native Americans into white American culture by dividing communal tribal lands into individual family plots. While reformers believed private landownership would promote values like individualism and agricultural labor, the policy ultimately caused massive land loss and weakened tribal sovereignty. The Lakota Sioux, for example, lost much of their Great Sioux Reservation as "surplus" land was sold to settlers. Many, unfamiliar with private ownership, lost their allotments through forced sales or seizure, resulting in poverty and social breakdown. Robert W. Hanning criticizes the Dawes Act in his essay, highlighting how its "civilizing" mission was rooted in ignorance and racism. Using the metaphor of Custer's mirages, he reveals the false promises of assimilation that led to cultural and material devastation for Native communities.

This destruction was further compounded by the demographic collapse following European contact. The Columbian Exchange introduced deadly diseases like smallpox and measles to which Indigenous peoples had no immunity, resulting in catastrophic loss of life. Alfred W. Crosby and Russell Thornton both document how millions perished, with the Indigenous population in what is now the U.S. dropping from over 5 million in 1492 to around 250,000 by the late 1800s. In addition to disease, war, forced displacement, and cultural erasure accelerated this collapse. Missionary campaigns and assimilation policies deliberately targeted Native languages, ceremonies, and traditions, outlawing practices and severing spiritual ties. The combined effects

of biological, territorial, and cultural assaults led to the near-erasure of entire communities and disrupted the continuity of Indigenous identities across generations.

Native Indian boarding schools were created to suppress Native American traditions and assimilate students into mainstream American culture. Beginning in the mid-19th century, these schools were established by the government or Christian missionaries. At first, many Native families were compelled to send their children, but later, some enrolled them voluntarily due to a lack of other educational options. At these schools, Native children were separated from their families and cultural heritage for extended periods, sometimes exceeding four years. They were forced to cut their hair, abandon traditional clothing, and replace their meaningful Native names with English ones. Speaking their native languages was strictly prohibited, often resulting in punishment, and their spiritual practices were replaced with Christianity. They were taught that their culture was inferior, with some teachers ridiculing their traditions, leading to feelings of humiliation and shame about their identity. These experiences harmed their self-esteem and contributed to the decline of Native languages and customs.

Captain Richard Henry Pratt's 1892 speech, delivered at the National Conference of Charities and Correction in Denver, Colorado, outlined his philosophy of forced assimilation, encapsulated in the phrase: "all the Indian there is in the race should be dead. Kill the Indian in him, and save the man." (Pratt 46) meaning that Native Americans should abandon their traditional identities and fully adopt American ways. His ideas were foundational to the establishment of the Carlisle Indian School and similar boarding schools across the U.S., which sought to "civilize" and "Americanize" Indigenous children by erasing their cultural identities. This systematic suppression of Native traditions and identities was deeply intertwined with the imposition of Christianity and severe restrictions on Indigenous religious practices. These measures not only severed Native

communities from their spiritual and cultural roots but also reinforced federal policies aimed at eradicating Indigenous ways of life. This was exemplified by the Indian Religious Crimes Code of 1883, which marked a significant escalation in the suppression of Indigenous spiritual and cultural expressions.

Under this law, Congress banned all Native dances and ceremonies, including the Sun Dance, Ghost Dance, potlatches, and the practices of spiritual healers. The law grants Indian agents the authority to ban these cultural traditions through force, imprisonment, and the withholding of rations, enforcing federal assimilation policies. Courts of Indian Offenses and federally controlled Indian police forces are established to replace Native governance. The enforcement of this ban ultimately leads to the 1890 massacre of Big Foot's band at Wounded Knee. In 1933, the law is amended to lift the ban on Native dances, but many ceremonies, such as the Ghost Dance and Sun Dance, have already been driven underground. This ban remains in place until it is officially repealed in the 1970s.

1.2 From Story to Script: Indigenous Resistance in Oral and Written Literature

The history of the Americas did not begin with Columbus's arrival in 1492, despite what many schoolbooks suggest. Long before European colonization, the North American continent, known as Turtle Island by many Indigenous peoples, was home to hundreds of distinct nations with their own languages, cultures, and systems of governance. Joy Porter notes that the region includes "more than three hundred cultural groups and more than two hundred languages" (Porter 41). The name Turtle Island comes from oral traditions in which the turtle symbolizes life and embodies values such as interconnection, respect for nature, and spiritual belief. These traditions reflect the deep cultural roots that existed long before European influence.

Prior to the dominance of written language, Indigenous peoples preserved their histories, beliefs, and teachings through oral storytelling. Myths, legends, songs, and communal narratives were essential for passing down knowledge and values. Oral tradition remains a cornerstone of Indigenous literature. Writers such as N. Scott Momaday and Leslie Marmon Silko have incorporated storytelling into their work, as have contemporary authors like Richard Wagamese and Louise Erdrich. These narratives function as more than communication; they are sophisticated literary forms. Martin Padget describes Native literature as one that is "oral, spoken or sung, and aural, to be listened to in a communal context" (Padget 18). Scholars like Ramirez argue that oral storytelling underpins all literatures (Ramirez 1). These traditions act as living archives, preserving cultural memory and reinforcing identity. Contemporary Indigenous literature both preserves and reshapes these forms, blending them with Western structures to resist colonial narratives and uphold cultural continuity.

The deliberate efforts to erase Indigenous identities and traditions fractured Native societies, disrupting ancestral knowledge and cultural continuity. Yet, these same colonial policies—through displacement and cultural suppression—also fueled the emergence of Native American literature as a powerful form of resistance. Indigenous writers, drawing from their histories and collective memory, reclaimed their voices to challenge colonial narratives and assert their presence. Their literature not only preserves cultural heritage but also serves as an act of defiance, bridging past and present. Through storytelling, Native authors amplify Indigenous perspectives, affirm resilience, and ensure that their traditions and identities endure. The loss of elders due to disease and conflicts has resulted in gaps in cultural knowledge, making this role even more vital.

Since the languages of the indigenous people have nearly disappeared due to the aggression of the colonizers, who imposed their Western norms such as language and culture—the indigenous people strategically adapted to this imposition. They appropriated the English language as a strategic instrument of resistance. This aligns with postcolonial linguistic resistance: Native American authors use English to fight English, particularly through Oral Tradition, which was originally only verbal before the Europeans arrived as mentioned before. Native American writers bring this literature back to life as both a mechanism of resistance and preservation for future generations. As an example, the use of Code-Switching and Hybrid Language in their literary texts is evidence of their attempts to revive their native languages and to demonstrate their existence to both native and non-native readers. Many Native American authors mix English with Indigenous languages. N. Scott Momaday, in *House Made of Dawn* (1968), exemplifies this by opening the novel with the Kiowa word " Dypaloh," which means "Once upon a time." This reinforces the presence of Indigenous language and storytelling traditions.

In addition, Native American writers engage in Rewriting Colonial History by producing texts that restore the history of their ancestors before, during, and after colonialism. They ensure that future generations know the full story of their history from their perspective, rather than being taught a potentially false, misleading, or even deliberately neglected version by the colonizers. Louise Erdrich's *The Round House* (2012) sheds light on the legacy of colonial violence and its lasting effects on Native communities, offering a narrative that challenges dominant historical accounts. Similarly, Tommy Orange's *There There* (2018) portrays the contemporary struggles of urban Native Americans, weaving historical trauma into modern experiences. These works serve as acts of historical reclamation, resisting colonial narratives and preserving Indigenous perspectives. This demonstrates the postcolonial linguistic resistance that Native American writers

employ in their literary works, as their use of the English language ultimately backfires on the colonizers by subverting its intended role as a tool of oppression and instead transforming it into a medium of resistance and empowerment.

What does it mean to carry history in words? For Indigenous peoples, storytelling is more than an act of remembrance—it is a testament to survival. Indigenous literature carries the weight of history, resistance, and renewal. The power of oral traditions—the stories, songs, and teachings passed down through generations—has long shaped Indigenous expression. Written literature extends these voices beyond the immediacy of voice, creating permanent records of struggle, memory, and hope. This shift from spoken to written word does not abandon tradition; instead, it amplifies it, using the tools of literacy to challenge systems that sought to silence Indigenous peoples. It is now more widely acknowledged that American literature did not originate in 1492 or 1776 but is instead part of an ongoing tradition of expression that dates back to the earliest use of language in the land now known as the United States. However, there is no universal agreement on the origins of the first people who articulated language in this region or how long they have been present.

The emergence of written Indigenous literature marked a shift in how Indigenous voices resisted colonial oppression. While oral storytelling remained vital, writing allowed authors to document histories, challenge imposed narratives, and assert cultural sovereignty. This began in the late 18th century with figures like William Apess, who used the written word to defend Indigenous identity. Protest literature and autobiographies became key tools, taking the form of petitions and testimonies advocating for land, self-determination, and cultural preservation. The Native American Renaissance of the late 1960s brought greater recognition to Indigenous writers focused on identity, trauma, oral tradition, and resistance. Authors like Leslie Marmon Silko,

James Welch, Gerald Vizenor, and N. Scott Momaday whose *House Made of Dawn* (1968) draws on Jemez Pueblo oral traditions—redefined Native literature. As Louis Owens notes, the novel presents “another language, another way of knowing” (Owens 63). Since then, Indigenous writing has expanded across genres and themes. Stephen Graham Jones explores trauma through horror in *The Only Good Indians* (2020), and Rebecca Roanhorse blends mythology with science fiction in *Trail of Lightning* (2018). Louise Erdrich bridges past and present; her novel *The Night Watchman* (2020), inspired by her grandfather’s activism, revisits the 1950s termination policy while focusing on land sovereignty and political resistance. This novel will be central to our analysis of Indigenous identity, survival, and resistance.

2. Socio-Historical Context of the Night Watchman

2.1 A Policy of Erasure: The Birth of Termination (1953)

It was the 1950s in America, a period marked by political instability as Cold War tensions escalated. The United States focused on the idea of national unity, strength, and a singular American national identity, rejecting cultural pluralism. In this climate, anything that seemed "different" or "separate" was viewed with suspicion and often seen as a problem or threat to U.S. national unity. Native American tribes, due to their sovereign status and unique cultures, were particularly viewed with suspicion. Many government leaders believed that tribal independence did not align with their vision of a unified nation, prompting efforts to reduce the power and rights of Native communities.

In this context, House Concurrent Resolution 108 emerged as a political blow to Native American culture, identity, and even existence. This policy was not merely a bureaucratic decision; it carried profound and lasting consequences. Its primary goal was to end the federal government's

recognition of Native American tribes as distinct political and sovereign entities “at the earliest possible time,” as stated in the act. One of its key architects, Senator Arthur Vivian Watkins of Utah, viewed Termination as a civilizing mission. He wrote that his goal was to “help the Indians stand on their own two feet and become a white and delightsome people as the Book of Mormon prophesied they would become.” Watkins likened Termination to the Emancipation Proclamation and framed it as a moral imperative. Accordingly, Congress declared that certain Native American tribes and individuals should be released from U.S. government control and no longer subject to the special laws applied only to Native Americans. The tribes affected by this policy included the Flathead Tribe (Montana), Klamath Tribe (Oregon), Menominee Tribe (Wisconsin), Potawatomi Tribe (Kansas and Nebraska), and the Chippewa Tribe—specifically those on the Turtle Mountain Reservation in North Dakota, where Louise Erdrich’s novel *The Night Watchman* is set.

House Concurrent Resolution 108 marked the formal beginning of what became known as the Termination Policy. The term "termination" itself revealed the core aim of the policy: to end not just federal services or treaty obligations, but, fundamentally, tribal sovereignty. The policy sought to dismantle the federal government’s recognition of Native American tribes as distinct political entities. The ultimate goal was to assimilate Native individuals fully into mainstream American society by treating them not as members of sovereign nations, but solely as individual U.S. citizens—deprived of federal recognition, legal protections, and their collective identity as Indigenous peoples.

One reason for the implementation of this policy was rooted in traditional assimilation ideologies, which promoted the belief that Native Americans should abandon their distinct identities and integrate into mainstream American society. However, another significant factor was the Cold War mentality. During this period of heightened political tension, the U.S. government,

driven by fears of appearing divided, believed that maintaining internal unity was crucial for projecting strength against the Soviet Union. Consequently, the existence of sovereign Native nations within the United States was perceived as a threat to national cohesion and the nation's global image.

2.2 Broken Promises and Unbroken Voices: Relocation & Resistance

After the Termination Policy was introduced in the early 1950s, the federal government launched a new initiative in 1953 known as the Urban Relocation Program. This program was designed to encourage Native Americans to leave their reservations and move to urban centers such as Chicago, Denver, Los Angeles, Cleveland, and Seattle. It was presented by the government in a positive light, with promises of opportunity, employment, and a better quality of life. At first glance, the name suggested progress and hope, and the policy aimed to support assimilation into mainstream American society. But in real life Native Americans who participated in the Urban Relocation Program were placed in unfamiliar urban environments with little to no support. They were often left without community ties, proper preparation, or guidance to help them adjust to a drastically different way of life. Employment opportunities were typically limited to low-paying, unstable, and short-term jobs, leaving many underpaid, undertrained, and overworked.

Housing conditions were often poor, with families placed in segregated and deteriorating neighborhoods. Government support was minimal, with few long-term resources or safety nets available to assist in their transition. Termination directly contributed to the social and cultural decay within many Native American tribes. The policy's consequences were devastating, leading to widespread poverty, alcoholism, and high suicide rates. It disrupted traditional family structures, resulted in poor housing conditions, and caused alarmingly high dropout rates from schools.

Educational achievement declined sharply, while trafficking of Native women for prostitution became more prevalent. Native Americans were increasingly overrepresented in penal institutions, infant mortality rates rose, life expectancy declined, and many experienced a severe loss of identity. These outcomes show that Termination policies not only failed to "uplift" Indigenous communities, as policymakers like Senator Watkins claimed, but actively dismantled them. Over 100 tribes were terminated under this policy, and over a million acres of land were removed from trust status. When the Bureau of Indian Affairs' urban relocation efforts began, only about 8% of Native Americans lived in cities. By the 2000 Census, that number had increased to around 64%. To the extent that, many Native Americans who returned to the reservations felt out of place and no longer identified with or related to those who had remained behind.

Though it was still the 1950s, Indigenous communities did not stay silent. Grassroots resistance to termination emerged across tribal nations, where elders, activists, and community members organized meetings, wrote letters, and voiced opposition to federal policies threatening their survival. Some tribes blocked termination altogether; others worked to reverse it. These early efforts—though not yet public protests—demonstrated a shared determination to defend Indigenous rights and identity. One of the most powerful strategies was direct testimony before Congress. Tribal leaders traveled to Washington to deliver personal accounts of land loss, poverty, and cultural destruction. These testimonies, appealing not to statistics but to national conscience, gradually shifted public perception of termination from reform to continued colonial oppression.

A major turning point came in 1961 with the American Indian Chicago Conference, where over 400 representatives from 90 tribes issued the *Declaration of Indian Purpose*, calling for self-determination and cultural preservation. Still, more visible change followed in the late 1960s, as a new generation—shaped by relocation and poverty—adopted a bolder approach. In 1968, the

American Indian Movement (AIM) was founded in Minneapolis, launching a new phase of resistance through protests, media action, and occupations. One of the most iconic was the 1969 Alcatraz Island occupation by the "Indians of All Tribes," who invoked the Treaty of Fort Laramie to reclaim the land. Lasting 19 months, the protest became a lasting symbol of Indigenous defiance—bold, unapologetic, and rooted in demands for sovereignty and justice.

2.3 From Termination to Self-Determination : Nixon's Reversal and a New Era

By the late 1960s, years of resistance from Native communities had built considerable pressure on the U.S. government. For over a decade, Indigenous peoples had been organizing, testifying before Congress, writing, and mobilizing to oppose the damaging effects of the Termination and Relocation policies. The consequences of these policies are widespread poverty, land dispossession, cultural loss, and the erosion of tribal sovereignty that had become impossible to ignore. In 1970, a significant and unexpected development occurred: President Richard Nixon addressed Congress and publicly denounced the federal policy of termination. He stated plainly, *"This policy of forced termination is wrong, in my judgment, for a number of reasons."(Nixon).* This marked a very important shift in federal Indian policy. Nixon acknowledged the government's long history of broken promises, decisions made without Native consent, and the systematic dismissal of tribal voices.Instead of continuing policies aimed at erasing tribal identities, Nixon advocated for a new direction: self-determination. This approach called for the federal government to recognize tribes as self-governing entities capable of managing their own affairs.

Following Nixon's address, the federal government began to formally dismantle the Termination policy. Some tribes that had previously lost federal recognition were reinstated, and the broader objective of assimilation through termination was officially abandoned. This marked

the end of a chapter in U.S. Indian policy that had sought to dissolve tribal sovereignty. The 1970s saw a new policy direction centered on tribal self-governance. Rather than eliminating tribal status, the federal government began supporting tribes in managing their own services and institutions. A key milestone was the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975, which allowed tribes to administer federal programs in areas such as education, health care, and law enforcement. For the first time in modern U.S. history, federal policy was guided by the principle that Native nations should have the authority to determine what is best for their own communities.

While this policy shift did not erase the deep harms caused by termination and relocation, it represented a major turning point in Native American history. Challenges remained, including legal disputes, funding limitations, and ongoing struggles for full sovereignty. Nonetheless, the move toward self-determination opened the door to a new era of tribal empowerment and federal-tribal relations based on mutual respect. What began as an attempt to erase Indigenous identity ultimately sparked a powerful movement of resistance, resilience, and renewal, transforming federal policy from forced assimilation to a recognition of Native nations' inherent right to self-rule.

In conclusion, while Nixon's 1970 rejection of termination marked a major policy shift and offered hope to Native communities, it did not bring an end to Native American protest. The fight for justice, sovereignty, and survival continued because the wounds of colonization ran deeper than a single policy. Activists knew that promises meant little without real change, and so the resistance evolved from fiery occupations like Wounded Knee in 1973 to legal battles and cultural revival throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Native voices pushed back through courts, media, and education, reclaiming land, language, and identity. This enduring spirit of protest surged again in 2016 at Standing Rock, where thousands of Native and non-Native water protectors came together to resist

the Dakota Access Pipeline and defend sacred land and water. Rather than fading, Native protest movements have adapted to new challenges while keeping the same core message alive: survival, dignity, and self-determination, a struggle that continues into the present day.

3. Theoretical framework

3.1 Ecocriticism

Elders in Native American and First Nations communities pass down teachings about the deep connection between humans and nature, both before and after the European encounter. They emphasize that humans are neither superior to nor separate from the natural world but exist as equal participants in an interconnected system where all life forms depend on one another. This perspective fosters a sense of responsibility toward the environment, urging individuals to respect and preserve the delicate balance that sustains life. Russell Means, of the Oglala Lakota Nation, once said:

> Before I was six years old, my grandparents and my mother had taught me that if all the green things that grow were taken from the earth, there could be no life. If all the four-legged creatures were taken from the earth, there could be no life. If all the winged creatures were taken from the earth, there could be no life. If all our relatives who crawl and swim and live within the earth were taken away, there could be no life. But if all the human beings were taken away, life on earth would flourish. That is how insignificant we are. (Means)

These words encapsulate a worldview that challenges human exceptionalism and affirms the deep interdependence between all living beings. Rooted in Indigenous ecological wisdom, this perspective resonates with the core principles of ecocriticism, a field of literary and cultural

analysis that interrogates the relationship between humans and nature. Ecocriticism rejects the notion of nature as merely a backdrop for human activity and instead explores how literature and culture reflect, shape, and often distort humanity's place within the ecological web. Ecocriticism emerged as a more earth-centered approach that was urgently needed in order to analyze and read the different texts which tackle environmental issues, as well as to emphasize the significance of the relationship between the human and the non-human in literature. By foregrounding the voices and narratives that emphasize interconnectedness, ecocriticism urges a reexamination of how we perceive and engage with the natural world.

William Rueckert was the first to introduce the concept of Ecocriticism in his 1978 essay *"Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism."* He stated that he was "not just interested in transferring ecological concepts to the study of literature, but in attempting to see literature inside the context of an ecological vision" (Rueckert 107). This means he does not simply want to apply ecological ideas to literature as an external framework. Instead, he seeks to place literature within an ecological perspective, understanding it as part of a broader ecological system. His approach goes beyond borrowing scientific ecological concepts; he aims to develop a way of reading, teaching, and analyzing literature that aligns with ecological thinking, allowing for a deeper exploration of how literature interacts with the environment rather than merely using ecological theories as analytical tools. Rueckert calling for a new way of engaging with literature—one that integrates ecological thought into both literary analysis and real-world action. He argues that simply recognizing nature's interconnectedness in literature is not enough; Ecocriticism should go beyond passive appreciation and work toward practical environmental awareness and change. He urges scholars, teachers, and critics to view literature within an ecological vision that

does not just describe nature but actively contributes to addressing ecological crises (Rueckert 107-108).

While Rueckert was the first to introduce the term ecocriticism, emphasizing the potential of literature to contribute to ecological thinking, his work did not immediately lead to a structured academic movement. In the 1980s and early 1990s, ecocriticism began to take shape as a structured academic discipline through the efforts of both British and American scholars. the movement was known as green studies. It was not until the 1990s that Cheryll Glotfelty built upon this foundation, formally institutionalizing ecocriticism as a recognized field of study. Defining it as ‘’*the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment.”*(Glotfelty xviii), she played a key role in shaping its academic trajectory. Her edited volume, *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996), brought together foundational essays, solidifying ecocriticism as a discipline that explores how literature engages with environmental issues and ecological consciousness.

In the late 1990s, figures like Lawrence Buell expanded ecocriticism into a more comprehensive theoretical framework in *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture (1995)*. He emphasized the ethical role of literature in shaping environmental consciousness and argued for a commitment to environmental praxis. As Buell defines it, "Ecocriticism might be defined as the study of the relation between literature and environment conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmentalist praxis" (Buell 430). Lawrence Buell defines ecocriticism as the study of the relationship between literature and the environment, but he emphasizes that this study must be conducted with a commitment to environmentalist praxis. This means that ecocriticism is not just an academic field concerned with analyzing how nature is represented in literature; rather, it carries an ethical responsibility to engage with real-world environmental issues. By using the term "praxis," which refers to the

process of applying theory through practice and action. Buell urges ecocriticism to move beyond theory by promoting environmental awareness and activism. He views literature as a means to shape ecological consciousness and encourages integrating environmental concerns into both literary study and daily life.

Additionally, he coined the concept of *Environmental Imagination* in the same book. Although he did not provide a fixed definition of environmental imagination, he identified four key features that characterized an environmental text. First, the nonhuman environment was not merely a backdrop but a significant presence, revealing the connection between human history and natural history. Second, these texts resisted anthropocentrism, recognizing that nonhuman interests also mattered. Third, they reflected an ethical orientation, emphasizing human accountability to the environment. Lastly, the environment was portrayed not as static, but as a process, shaped and reshaped over time. These four features collectively illustrate how literature can foster ecological awareness by challenging dominant human-centered narratives. Through the concept of Environmental Imagination, Buell encouraged readers to reimagine the relationship between humans and the natural world as dynamic, reciprocal, and ethically bound.

Ursula K. Heise expanded the concept of *Environmental imagination* in her book *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global* (2008) by critiquing the narrow focus on the 'sense of place' and shifting the perspective from a purely local or place-based approach, as emphasized by Buell, to a global and interconnected framework. She stated "Rather than focusing on the recuperation of a sense of place, environmentalism needs to foster an understanding of how a wide variety of both natural and cultural places and processes are connected and shape each other around the world, and how human impact affects and changes this connectedness" (Heise 21). when Buell outlined how literature reflected the ethical and historical

ties between humans and the environment, Heise argued that such a view was no longer sufficient in an era shaped by globalization and climate change. She expanded the concept by introducing the idea that the environmental imagination must also account for the planetary scale of ecological issues. That means thinking not only about our immediate surroundings but also about how ecosystems, cultures, and communities around the world are interlinked.

Building on this, Greg Garrard refines ecocriticism by structuring it into distinct thematic categories. Greg Garrard, in his book *Ecocriticism*, organizes the field into distinct thematic categories that shape how literature engages with nature. He examines key concepts such as *the pastoral*, which romanticizes rural life; wilderness, which explores the myth of untouched nature; and apocalyptic narratives, which depict environmental catastrophe. Garrard states, "Ecocritics generally tie their cultural analyses explicitly to a 'green' moral and political agenda. In this respect, ecocriticism is closely related to environmentally oriented developments in philosophy and political theory"(Garrard 4). This highlights the inherently activist nature of ecocriticism. Unlike traditional literary criticism, which often focuses solely on textual analysis, ecocriticism actively engages with environmental issues, advocating for a "green" moral and political agenda such as promoting clean energy, protects natural resources, supports Indigenous land rights, and combats climate change. Ecocritics do not merely interpret literature but also examine how texts represent and influence environmental consciousness.

By linking Ecocriticism to environmentally oriented developments in philosophy and political theory, Garrard suggests that ecocritics draw upon broader ecological thought, such as *Deep ecology*, *ecofeminism*, and *environmental justice*, to frame their analyses. These philosophical and political movements critique anthropocentrism and promote sustainable, ethical relationships between humans and nature. Thus, ecocriticism extends beyond literary studies,

contributing to broader discussions on environmental responsibility, sustainability, and activism. Garrard took an analytical approach, identified recurring modes of representing nature, and provided a framework for analyzing how different texts constructed and critiqued human relationships with the natural world.

One significant branch within ecocriticism is Deep Ecology, a philosophical movement first introduced by Arne Naess in his 1973 essay *The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement*. Naess argues that nature possesses inherent value beyond human use, emphasizing the interconnectedness of all life forms within what he calls a "total-field" model. Deep Ecology rejects anthropocentrism and promotes biospherical egalitarianism, the view that all species have an equal right to exist and thrive. Central to this philosophy is the concept of *self-realization*, a transformative process where individuals transcend narrow egoistic identities to recognize themselves as part of the broader ecological whole—what Naess terms the *ecological self*. This expanded sense of identity fosters profound empathy and ethical responsibility toward nonhuman life and ecosystems. A key example of this is, the Chipko Movement, which emerged in 1970s India, stands as a powerful example of Deep Ecology in action. Through nonviolent resistance, local villagers, especially women, defended forests by physically embracing trees to prevent their felling. Their protest was rooted in an embodied realization of the ecological self, recognizing the forest as a vital, interconnected web of life that sustains biodiversity, regulates water cycles, and maintains climatic stability. The Chipko Movement thus reflected Deep Ecology's principles by affirming nature's inherent value and rejecting human-centered exploitation, while also exemplifying how *self-realization* can inspire collective ecocentric activism.

Unlike shallow ecological approaches, which focus on environmental problems through human-centered technical fixes, Deep Ecology calls for a fundamental shift in consciousness. It

challenges anthropocentrism by advocating biocentrism—the intrinsic value of all beings—and urges systemic transformations in human values, economies, and lifestyles. This includes the pursuit of *self-realization* as a means to dismantle the illusion of human separateness from nature, thereby motivating actions like reduced consumption and population stabilization to restore ecological balance.

Scholars increasingly turned their attention toward Indigenous and local forms of environmental understanding, particularly through the concept of *Traditional Ecological Knowledge* (TEK). Also referred to as Indigenous Local Knowledge or Indigenous Traditional Knowledge, this concept refers to the evolving knowledge acquired by indigenous and local peoples over hundreds or thousands of years through direct contact with the environment. This knowledge is specific to a location and includes the relationships between plants, animals, natural phenomena, landscapes and timing of events that are used for lifeways, including but not limited to hunting, fishing, trapping, agriculture, and forestry. Fikret Berkes, in his book *Sacred Ecology* , built his definition of TEK on existing scholarly work. He defined it as "a cumulative body of knowledge, practice, and belief, evolving by adaptive processes and handed down through generations by cultural transmission, about the relationship of living beings (including humans) with one another and with their environment" (Berkes 8).

A compelling local example of TEK can be found in the work of Dr. Hamdi Bendif, from the Natural and Life Sciences Department at Mohamed Boudiaf University in M'Sila, Algeria. In the co-authored article *"Herbal Remedies and Traditional Knowledge of the Tuareg Community in the Region of Illizi (Algerian Sahara)",* Bendif et al. document the intricate ethnobotanical knowledge of the Tuareg people, a traditionally nomadic Indigenous group. The Tuareg's use of medicinal plants, identified through field interviews and surveys of 120 Tuareg individuals, reveals

a Significant, place-based understanding of the desert ecosystem. As the authors explain, “This is only possible with a fine-tuned understanding of their surroundings and environment, including plant diversity and ecology, which is a resource that they use as food, fodder and also as medication” (Bendif et al. 68). This example shows how the Tuareg apply inherited ecological knowledge to treat illnesses using native desert plants like *Salvadora persica*, *Peganum harmala*, and *Anvillea garcinii*. Their practices reflect a strong cultural connection to the land, making Dr. Bendif’s study a valuable Algerian illustration of TEK within the broader literary and ecological context.

Following this, *Sacred Ecology*, as developed by Fikret Berkes, expands the understanding of Traditional Ecological Knowledge by emphasizing the spiritual and cultural dimensions that shape human-environment relationships. Sacred Ecology describes the traditional ecological knowledge systems of Indigenous and local communities, where nature is viewed as spiritually alive, morally significant, and interconnected with human life through relationships of respect, reciprocity, and ethical responsibility. The concept of Sacred Ecology is further elaborated by Berkes in his work *Sacred Ecology*, where he explores the ethical and spiritual dimensions of these knowledge systems, highlighting the relationship between Indigenous peoples and nature as one of respect, reciprocity, and sacred responsibility rather than control or exploitation. The Black Hills (*Paha Sapa*) in South Dakota, USA, are a powerful example of sacred ecology. For the Lakota Sioux, this land is not merely a physical place but a sacred, living presence deeply woven into their spiritual and cultural identity. It is the site of origin stories, vision quests, and ceremonies such as the Sun Dance as they believe. Their relationship with the Black Hills is based on respect, reciprocity, and spiritual responsibility. This worldview sees nature as a relative rather than a resource—alive, morally significant, and deserving of care. The Lakota's continued resistance to

mining and development in the area reflects this sacred connection and their commitment to protecting the land.

These concepts have shifted ecocriticism from a general call for environmental awareness to a critical examination of how narratives construct, challenge, or reinforce ideas about nature. Such a framework provides a more coherent and interdisciplinary method for analyzing literature's role in shaping human relationships with the environment, making ecocriticism not only more theoretically grounded but also more relevant across various literary and cultural contexts.

3.2 Eco colonialism

As postcolonial studies continued to evolve, scholars began to recognize that the consequences of imperialism extended beyond human societies to the environment itself. Early discussions on colonial environmental exploitation laid the foundation for *Eco-colonialism*, also known as green imperialism or eco-imperialism, a critical term referring to the perceived Western practice of imposing environmental policies on developing nations, often influencing their internal affairs under the guise of environmental protection. These discussions analyzed how colonization reshaped ecosystems, introduced invasive species, and disrupted Indigenous land management. Later critiques emphasized that environmental policies, often framed as conservation efforts, served as extensions of colonial control over Indigenous lands. This perspective highlights how colonial exploitation not only subjugated people but also fundamentally altered landscapes and disrupted Indigenous ecologies.

Resource exploitation, a core aspect of Eco-colonialism, has been extensively examined by scholars who highlight how colonial powers reshaped ecosystems for economic gain and critique the long-term environmental degradation caused by extractive industries in postcolonial

regions. Colonizers extracted natural resources for economic gain, often leading to environmental degradation and depletion of local resources. Scholars such as Alfred Crosby, in his book *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900–1900* (1986), provided a crucial ecological perspective on colonization. His work gained significant attention in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Crosby argues that European colonization was not merely an exercise in cultural and political domination but also a form of environmental disruption. He emphasizes that the ecological impact of colonization was perhaps its most significant aspect, as European settlers introduced diseases, invasive species, and agricultural practices that devastated Indigenous populations, both human and non-human. He asserts:

> Western Europe did just that by means of its brutality and guns and, more important, by geographical and ecological luck. The Europeans made the oceans into highways, arrived in America with guns for conquest and with infectious diseases for decimating indigenous populations, and opened whole regions for immigrant settlement and exploitation, i.e., for making the New World into an enormous and varied adjunct to European societies and economies. (xviii)

These ecological changes often led to the displacement or extinction of local plant and animal species, significantly altering the natural environment of colonized areas. The ecological issues resulting from colonial and corporate exploitation pose serious harm to ecosystems, contributing to environmental degradation and the disruption of communities.

The introduction of monocultures in North America, particularly through colonization and industrial agriculture, has led to significant ecological and cultural disruptions for Native American communities. The large-scale cultivation of single crops, such as wheat, tobacco, and cotton, replaced Indigenous polyculture methods, resulting in soil depletion and increased vulnerability to

pests. This shift not only disrupted ecosystems but also marginalized Indigenous agricultural practices and knowledge systems. Recent scholarship has linked postcolonialism with ecological destruction, emphasizing how literature critiques colonial land exploitation and Ecocolonialism. In *Monocultures of the Mind*, Vandana Shiva critiques industrial agriculture, biotechnology, and globalization for undermining Indigenous ecological knowledge and local sustainability. She argues that prioritizing monocultures over diverse ecosystems benefits commercial interests, leading to soil degradation, biodiversity loss, economic dependency, and the erosion of traditional farming systems. This shift marginalizes local communities, devalues their knowledge, and turns their land into a resource for industry (Shiva 29-30).

An important dimension in understanding the relationship between environmental degradation and colonial oppression lay in recognizing how systems of domination extended beyond land appropriation to the marginalization of specific groups, particularly women. Scholars such as Vandana Shiva critiqued the destructive impacts of industrial and colonial systems, which not only harmed ecosystems but also undermined local knowledge systems, especially those related to sustainable land use. This perspective aligned with ecofeminism, a framework that explored the intersection between environmental destruction and the subjugation of women. Emerging from the feminist movement of the 1970s, ecofeminism was coined by Françoise d'Eaubonne in her 1974 book *Le Féminisme ou la Mort*, in which she called for a feminist revolution as a condition for ecological survival. Noël Sturgeon, a scholar of feminist theory and environmental politics, defined ecofeminism in *Ecofeminist Natures: Race, Gender, Feminist Theory, and Political Action* as "a movement that makes connections between environmentalisms and feminisms; more precisely, it articulates the theory that the ideologies that authorize injustices based on gender, race, and class are related to the ideologies that sanction the exploitation and

degradation of the environment" (Sturgeon 23). Alicia H. Puleo, a Spanish-Argentine feminist philosopher, in her article "What is Ecofeminism?", argued that from a constructivist perspective of gender subjectivity, women's interest in caring for nature was not inherently tied to their gender. Rather, it arose from historically assigned social roles—such as caregiving and domestic management—which fostered a relational subjectivity attentive to others. When this disposition was paired with critical awareness and ecological knowledge, it created favorable conditions for women to engage in the defense of nature and other living beings (Puleo 27).

Rob Nixon's concept of *"Slow Violence"* further explains how postcolonial societies suffer long-term environmental harm, as the effects of colonial land use continue to degrade ecosystems and marginalize Indigenous communities over time. It refers to the harm that is not always immediate or spectacular but unfolds gradually, often remaining invisible and overlooked. Unlike conventional violence, which is explosive and newsworthy, it is incremental and dispersed across time and space, making it harder to recognize and respond to. Environmental issues such as climate change, pollution, and deforestation exemplify this type of violence, as their destructive consequences accumulate over generations, disproportionately affecting marginalized communities who lack the resources to mitigate or adapt to these changes. Nixon states, "The post is never fully post: industrial particulates and effluents live on in the environmental elements we inhabit and in our very bodies, which epidemiologically and ecologically are never our simple contemporaries."(Nixon 8), This connects the idea of eco-colonialism to how colonial-era environmental degradation continues to affect postcolonial societies long after political independence.

While Rob Nixon's concept of slow violence reveals how environmental harm unfolds gradually and often invisibly, Indigenous scholar and activist Kyle Powys Whyte expanded this

idea by showing that for Indigenous communities, such violence began with colonization and continues today through conservation practices that often ignore Indigenous sovereignty making environmentalism itself a new form of colonial control. Although environmental activists and scholars raised awareness about the catastrophic consequences of environmental degradation often called "global warming" indigenous communities had already lived through a dystopian reality caused by the colonial destruction of nature and the environment. Colonization disrupted traditional ways of life, extracted resources from indigenous lands, displaced people from their ancestral territories, and dismissed their deep knowledge of sustainable living. Kyle Powys Whyte, in his article *"Our Ancestors' Dystopia Now: Indigenous Conservation and the Anthropocene,"* noted that "in the Anthropocene, then, some Indigenous peoples already inhabit what our ancestors would have likely characterized as a dystopian future" (Whyte 2). He acknowledges that this may appear *"strange"* to some readers, especially considering the deep and enduring relationship Indigenous communities maintain with nature. However, it is precisely this closeness to the land and ecosystems that allows them to perceive the full extent of environmental decline. In *"Is it Colonial Déjà Vu? Indigenous Peoples and Climate Injustice,"* Whyte further explains that climate injustice is not a new experience but a continuation of past colonial harms, what he calls a "colonial déjà vu" and a "cyclical history of harm."

Furthermore, eco-colonialism appeared in *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment* 2010 by Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin as a critical concept that exposes the environmental dimensions of colonialism and its enduring consequences. The authors discuss how colonial expansion was not only a political and economic endeavor but also an ecological conquest, transforming landscapes, displacing indigenous peoples, and imposing Western environmental practices. as they stated "the environmental impacts of Western attitudes to human

being-in-the-world were facilitated or reinforced by the deliberate (or accidental) transport of animals, plants and peoples throughout the European empires, instigating widespread ecosystem change under conspicuously unequal power regimes." (Huggan and Tiffin 6). The spread of European empires involved the deliberate or accidental transport of animals, plants, and people, leading to significant ecological shifts under systems of unequal power relations. An illustrative example of this occurred in the 19th century when the U.S. government and settlers systematically exterminated millions of bison, a keystone species for Plains tribes such as the Lakota and Cheyenne. In the early 1870s, approximately eight million bison roamed North America; however, by the 1890s, fewer than 500 remained. This deliberate decimation aimed to undermine the autonomy of these tribes, forcing them onto reservations and into reliance on government aid. The bison's extinction disrupted the ecosystem, altering grazing patterns, plant growth, and soil health.

Furthermore, there concept *Environmental racism* refers to the interconnectedness of racial and environmental oppression, where the marginalization of certain racial groups is tied to the exploitation or degradation of their environments. Huggan and Tiffin examine environmental racism, where marginalized communities in the Global South bear the brunt of ecological destruction, reinforcing historical patterns of colonial exploitation. They assert, “Environmental racism is best understood as a sociological phenomenon, exemplified in the environmentally discriminatory treatment of socially marginalised or economically disadvantaged peoples, and in the transference of ecological problems from their ‘home’ source to a ‘foreign’ outlet... Above all else, though, environmental racism is an extreme form of what Plumwood calls ‘hegemonic centrism’—the self-privileging view that underlies racism, sexism and colonialism alike” (Huggan and Tiffin 4).

Ultimately, the role of Native Americans in fighting, resisting, and surviving became more pronounced, reflecting their enduring struggle against colonization, displacement, and cultural erasure. Their resilience extended beyond physical endurance to encompass the preservation of identity, traditions, and ways of life in the face of ongoing pressures of assimilation and external dominance. Accordingly, this narrative of survival led to the Native American author and scholar Gerald Vizenor's concept of *Survivance* a neologism that fuses "survival" and "resistance", The term originated in Gerald Vizenor's 1994 book *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance as "*Survivance is an active sense of presence, the continuance of native stories, not a mere reaction, or a survivable name. Native survivance stories are renunciations of dominance, tragedy, and victimry. Survivance means the right of succession or reversion of an estate, and in that sense, the estate of native survivancy." (Vizenor). Survivance emphasizes that Indigenous peoples are not merely surviving but actively continuing their stories, identities, and cultures. Unlike narratives that focus on loss or victimhood, survivance reflects strength, creativity, and the refusal to be silenced or erased.

According to Vizenor, *survivance* operates through storytelling, imagination, irony, and humor. Tools that allow Native voices to challenge stereotypes and assert cultural presence. It is expressed through various forms, including literature, oral traditions, visual art, and performance. This is exemplified in Vizenor's short story *"Custer on the Slipstream,"* where he satirically resurrects General Custer as a petty bureaucrat, stripping him of his mythic status and exposing the absurdity of colonial violence. In real life, General George Armstrong Custer died on June 25, 1876, during the Battle of the Little Bighorn, an event often mythologized by white American society as a moment of epic, heroic martyrdom, particularly in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. However, in Vizenor's narrative, "white people said he was teaching at a college for

women, but tribal rumors held that his vision crossed coming around a curve at high speed on his motorcycle and he died in the wind space behind a grain truck ... slipping from grace in a slipstream" (Vizenor 25). In contrast, Crazy Horse, a legendary Lakota warrior, is portrayed as a symbol of survivance, an enduring presence that refuses erasure and embodies the strength of Indigenous resistance. "Remember me. Remember me talking here. My face is here before you. My name is Crazy Horse and when I talk the earth talks through me in a vision. I am Crazy Horse" (21).

Through the use of slipstream surrealism, Vizenor contrasts Custer's legendary status with an absurd and humiliating death, portraying colonial violence as both tragic and laughably futile. Thus, *Survivance* narratives were crucial as they highlighted the resilience, agency, and resistance of marginalized groups, particularly in the context of colonization and oppression. These stories countered colonial narratives that depicted these communities as passive victims, focusing instead on their active survival and cultural preservation. In "*Survivance Narratives of Native Presence*, edited by Gerald Vizenor" Vizenor stated "survivance as resistance is achieved by countering the dominant history by words of remembrance that are different in form and content." (Vizenor 49). Consequently, by emphasizing strength, empowerment, and cultural continuity, survivance narratives ensured the histories of these communities were remembered, promoting healing and fostering a broader, more inclusive understanding of history and identity.

As environmental degradation escalated, its impact on communities extended beyond the physical destruction of land, reaching into the emotional and psychological realms. For Indigenous peoples, whose identities and cultures are intricately linked to the land, the loss of this connection was deeply disruptive. In this context, the concept of *Solastalgia* emerged to describe the emotional and psychological distress caused by the alteration or destruction of the environment, an

environment that is central to one's sense of self and community. Solastalgia, therefore, underscores how the erosion of the land parallels the erosion of the very soul of the people who depend on it. Introduced by Australian environmental philosopher Glenn Albrecht in 2003, *solastalgia* is described in his article *"Solastalgia: A New Concept in Health and Identity"* as the distress or emotional pain experienced when one's home environment undergoes unwanted change, leading to a loss of comfort, solace, and identity, even though the person has not physically left that place. It represents a form of homesickness felt while still being at home, caused by the transformation or degradation of one's familiar surroundings (Albrecht 17).

Solastalgia is not merely a term of emotional resonance but a critical framework for understanding how ecological devastation fractures the relationship between people and place. For Indigenous peoples, this rupture is not just environmental but ontological, dismantling systems of meaning, memory, and belonging. As landscapes are stripped of their vitality, so too are the cultural narratives and identities rooted within them. Solastalgia thus articulates a collective grief that is spatially situated yet profoundly existential, calling for an environmental ethics that honors not just ecosystems, but the lived and inherited worlds they sustain.

Conclusion

The scholars and concepts explored in this study have shaped the analytical foundation of ecocriticism and ecocolonialism, offering powerful frameworks for examining the intertwined forces of environmental and colonial oppression in Indigenous literature. These critical lenses enable a deeper understanding of how colonial legacies continue to impact both land and culture, while also highlighting Indigenous narratives of resistance, resilience, and reclamation. Through

storytelling, Indigenous authors assert the inseparability of land, identity, and community, using literature as a space to challenge dominant ecological discourses and reassert traditional knowledge systems. By engaging with ecocritical and ecocolonial perspectives, this study emphasizes how Indigenous literature not only critiques environmental injustices but also envisions pathways toward healing and sovereignty, reaffirming the enduring strength and relevance of Indigenous worldviews in the face of ongoing ecological and cultural challenges.

Chapter Two: Land, Resistance, and the Colonial Gaze – An Ecocritical and Ecocolonial Reading of The Night Watchman

> the ecocritic wants to track environmental ideas and representations wherever they appear, to see more clearly a debate which seems to be taking place, often part-concealed, in a great many cultural spaces. Most of all, ecocriticism seeks to evaluate texts and ideas in terms of their coherence and usefulness as responses to environmental crisis. (5)
>
> —Richard Kerridge, *Introduction to Writing the Environment: Ecocriticism and Literature.*

1.1 Introduction

In an era marked by environmental crises and renewed calls for Indigenous land rights, Louise Erdrich's *The Night Watchman* resonates as a literary intervention into ongoing struggles over land, identity, and ecological justice. This chapter engages with the novel through the dual lenses of ecocriticism and ecocolonialism, offering a theoretical exploration of how environmental relationships are entangled with histories of colonial violence and cultural resilience. Far from presenting nature as a passive backdrop, the novel foregrounds Indigenous cosmology and lived experience to highlight the land as a site of memory, survival, and resistance.

The first section approaches the novel ecocritically, examining how nature is embedded in Indigenous worldviews and spiritual practices, as well as the characters' interdependent relationships with the non-human world. Here, we explore the land not merely as setting, but as an active participant in cultural identity and narrative meaning. Through ecological frameworks, this section highlights how the environment in *The Night Watchman* reflects both the physical and metaphysical dimensions of Indigenous life.

The second section adopts an ecocolonial perspective to interrogate the environmental consequences of settler colonialism as depicted in the novel. Drawing on concepts from ecocolonial theory, it examines how government-imposed termination policies, land dispossession, and extractive industries contribute to environmental degradation that is inseparable from structures of political domination. The novel's portrayal of land as both sacred and contested highlights how environmental violence operates as a mechanism of colonial control, while also illuminating the ongoing resistance enacted by Indigenous communities in defense of their lands and lifeways. Ultimately, this chapter demonstrates how *The Night Watchman* challenges colonial narratives by reclaiming the land as a space of cultural continuity and resistance. It concludes by reflecting on the novel's contribution to ecocritical and ecocolonial discourse, offering a literary vision where land, memory, and justice remain profoundly interconnected.

1.2 The author Louis Erdrich

Karen Louise Erdrich, born on June 7, 1954, in Little Falls, Minnesota, is an acclaimed Native American author and member of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians. As one of the most influential literary voices of her generation, Erdrich has written extensively across genres, including novels, poetry, short stories, and children's literature. Her writing is deeply rooted in Native American traditions and experiences, with much of her work centered on the Ojibwe people and the historical and contemporary challenges they face. Erdrich rose to national prominence during the 1980s, a period known as the Second Wave of the Native American Renaissance. Her debut novel *Love Medicine* (1984), which won the National Book Critics Circle Award, introduced readers to a multi-generational Ojibwe family living on a North Dakota reservation. Through a non-linear narrative and interwoven voices, the novel broke new ground in the representation of Indigenous life in American literature. It marked the beginning of what would become an

expansive fictional universe chronicling Native communities with empathy, humor, and political insight.

A recurring theme in Erdrich's work is the relationship between Native identity and the land. Her novels often explore how colonial policies, such as forced relocation, termination, and assimilation, have shaped the cultural and environmental landscapes of Indigenous peoples. One such policy, the U.S. government's Termination Policy of the 1940s and 1960s, serves as the historical foundation of her 2020 Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *The Night Watchman*. Inspired by her grandfather Patrick Gourneau, who led efforts to resist termination legislation, Erdrich blends personal history with fiction to tell the story of Thomas Wazhashk, a night watchman and tribal leader fighting to protect the sovereignty of the Turtle Mountain Band.

In addition to Thomas, the novel also follows Patrice, a young Ojibwe woman whose journey reflects the struggles and resilience of Native women. Through these characters, *The Night Watchman* portrays the interconnectedness of spiritual life, environmental stewardship, and political resistance, offering a powerful commentary on Native survival and dignity in the face of systemic oppression. Erdrich's broader literary corpus, including novels such as *The Round House* (2012), *LaRose* (2016), and *Future Home of the Living God* (2017), demonstrates her commitment to storytelling as a form of cultural preservation and political engagement. Her work often critiques colonial systems while celebrating the enduring strength of Indigenous communities. Beyond fiction, she is also the founder of Birchbark Books, an independent bookstore in Minneapolis dedicated to Native literature and community education. Louise Erdrich's legacy lies not only in her literary achievements but also in her role as a cultural advocate and chronicler of Native experience. Her writing continues to resonate with readers for its lyrical power, historical depth, and exploration of justice, land, and identity.

2. Land as Identity through Deep Ecology

From the very first pages of the novel, Erdrich wove a powerful thread between Indigenous identity and the natural world, grounding her story in a deep, ancestral connection to land and animal life. This bond was not incidental; it was foundational. In the opening chapter, *Turtle Mountain Jewel Bearing Plant*, she introduced Thomas Wazhashk, the night watchman, a character shaped in the likeness of her own grandfather. It was here that Erdrich signaled to the reader that the earth was not just setting, it was spirit, memory, and resistance. Through Thomas, she began to map the quiet heroism rooted in Indigenous lifeways, where land was not owned but lived with, and where even the smallest creatures carried the weight of sacred meaning. She wrote:

> water-loving rodent. Muskrats were everywhere on the slough-dotted reservation. Their small supple forms slipped busily through water at dusk, continually perfecting their burrows, and eating (how they loved to eat) practically anything growing or moving in a slough. Although the wazhashkag were numerous and ordinary, they were also crucial. In the beginning, after the great flood, it was a muskrat who had helped remake the earth. In that way, as it turned out, Thomas was perfectly named (4).

Thomas Wazhashk carried the name of a creature often overlooked, the *wazhashkag*, or muskrat, in the Ojibwe language. In Louise Erdrich's narrative world, this humble animal was far more than it seemed. Though small and unassuming, the muskrat held mythic weight. It was the unlikely hero of the Ojibwe Great Flood story, a tale of destruction, rebirth, and resilience shared across many Indigenous cultures. In that mythical story as they believe, when the world was drowned and chaos reigned, it was not the powerful or the strong ones who saved what remained of life. Instead, after the stronger animals failed, it was the muskrat, a fragile, quiet, and

disregarded, who dove into the abyss, reached the bottom, and returned with a handful of soil. That earth, placed on the back of a turtle, became the foundation of a new world. In this act, the muskrat defied expectations and became the architect of survival. So too did Thomas. His name was no accident; it was a literature prophecy. Erdrich drew a deliberate line between the muskrat's quiet courage and Thomas's role in the narrative. He was an ordinary man in a remote tribal office, filing papers and answering phones, but beneath this modest surface lay the spirit of resistance. The flood was coming, not of water, but of policy: the federal government's plan to erase Native identity through termination.

Erdrich's portrayal of the land as spirit, memory, and resistance closely aligns with Arne Naess's concept of deep ecology, which calls for a radical rethinking of humanity's relationship to the natural world. According to Naess, humans must abandon the illusion of separation and recognize our deep interconnection with all living beings, animals, plants, and the Earth itself. Through her characters' intimate relationships with the land, Erdrich illustrates a worldview that embodies these deep ecological principles, making *The Night Watchman* a nuanced literary expression of ecological consciousness. While Erdrich's portrayal of the land resonates with deep ecological values, it is important to recognize that these beliefs emerge from Ojibwe cosmology and lived experience, rather than Western environmental theory. By examining how characters like Thomas Wazhashk, Zhaanat and other characters embody an important connection to nature, not as something separate, but as kin. this study explores how Indigenous ways of knowing align with, yet also challenge, the principles of deep ecology.

One aspect of deep ecology is Intrinsic Value of Nature. The character Zhaanat for example, Patrice's mother, is one of the knowledge keepers of her people and is well known for her deep understanding of their traditions and values. She possesses a unique and powerful way of

interpreting the world, distinct from teachers, priests, and other authority figures. While some may view her as simple or stubborn, her intelligence is Significant, spiritual, and rooted in mystery. Zhaanat shows deep respect for animals and the land, treating them not as resources but as kin. She believes that "everything was alive, responsive in its own way, capable of being hurt in its own way, capable of punishment in its own way,"(Erdrich 190). emphasizing the intrinsic value of all living beings, regardless of their usefulness to humans.

Erdrich said: "Things started going wrong, as far as Zhaanat was concerned, when places everywhere were named for people, political figures, priests, explorers, and not for the real things that happened in these places, the dreaming, the eating, the death, the appearance of animals" (346). This shows Zhaanat's belief that nature and place names should reflect the spirit and life of the land, not just human impositions. When humans name places after other humans, they strip the land of its deeper meaning and connection to the natural world neglecting the others and seeing the human as the center of the world.

2.1 Interconnectedness

> we are connected to the way-back people, here, in so many ways. Maybe a way-back person touched these shells. Maybe the little creatures in them disintegrated into the dirt. Maybe some tiny piece from that creature is inside us now. We can't know these things." "Us being connected here so far back gives me a peaceful feeling," said Wood Mountain. (Erdrich 322-323)

This scene is from chapter entitled *Cradle to Grave*. Thomas Wazhashk is building the grave house while Wood Mountain works on the cradle board for Vera's baby. Erdrich places birth and death side by side, positioning Paranteau's death right next to the birth of his grandson. In that

moment of reflection, Thomas and Wood Mountain question their existence, linking their beings to the people and creatures of the past, those who became part of the land and are now part of them. Wood Mountain finds peace in this connection, and Thomas believes that the shells and other materials they use might carry traces of those who lived long ago. They sense that the land itself holds memories and connections to past lives, leading them to a sense of peace. This illustrates the deep interconnectedness between indigenous people, the land, and nature. These reflections suggest a spiritual and biological continuity between past and present, human and non-human, echoing the principles of deep ecology, which emphasize the interdependence of all life forms across time and space. This supports the view that "Humans and other living things are all knots in a larger web of life." Said Arne Næss. This metaphor is central to deep ecology, with Naess employing the concept of 'knots in a web' to emphasize the intrinsic interconnectedness of all living beings within the biosphere. Erdrich's characters intuitively understand this. They don't see themselves as separate from nature or history, but as expressions of it. Their peace comes from recognizing their place within this larger pattern.

Similarly, the article *Approaching Nonhuman Ontologies: Trees, Communication, and Qualitative Inquiry* by Sarah Abbott (2021) supports this view of interconnectedness as expressed by Arne Næss. Abbott emphasizes that trees, like humans, are not merely passive, inert matter but sentient, intelligent beings embedded in complex lifeways and relationships. Drawing upon Indigenous epistemologies, Abbott explains that in many Indigenous traditions, "everything in nature, including humans, enjoys equal status" (3), and that the Earth is seen as a greater family of life where "stones, trees, animals, or plants may be venerated as expressions of the sacred" (3). Furthermore, Abbott argues that nonhuman beings, like trees, possess their own life force, purpose, and intricate interconnections with the environment. This reflects how Erdrich's characters

understand themselves not as detached individuals but as integral parts of a larger, living system. Both Abbott and Næss emphasize that peace and balance emerge when beings recognize their embeddedness within these broader natural and spiritual networks.

2.2 Critique of Human-Centered Views

Deep ecology challenges anthropocentrism, the belief that humans are the center of moral concern, by asserting the intrinsic value of all life and rejecting the idea that nature exists solely for human use. In *The Night Watchman*, Louise Erdrich illustrates this critique through the resistance of Indigenous characters to U.S. government policies that treat both land and indigenous people as disposable resources. In the narrative, Biboon, Patrice's grandfather, poignantly captures this dispossession when he says: "First they gave us this scrap, then they tried to push us off this scrap. Then they took away most of the scrap. Now, what you are saying is they want to push us off the edge of the scrap" (79). The repeated use of the word "scrap" underscores how federal policies reduce Indigenous land and identity to mere remnants, something insignificant and discardable. Yet, for the Turtle Mountain people, this so-called "scrap" is anything but trivial; it represents their survival, ancestral memory, spiritual connection, and cultural continuity . Biboon further emphasizes the emotional weight of this struggle when he states: "We did hold on. By our fingernails. And toenails. And teeth," (118). highlighting the fierce determination to preserve what little remains in the face of systemic erasure. This bureaucratic attempt to eliminate tribal recognition.

The narrative voices a concern about the erasure of Indigenous identity and existence, suggesting that colonial forces aim to render Native individuals and communities "his children, his people, all of us invisible" (Erdrich 79). As though they had never occupied or belonged to the

land in the first place. exemplifying the violence of anthropocentric systems that deny not only the rights but the very existence of Indigenous peoples and their ecological knowledge. Louise Erdrich presented the U.S. government's termination policy and its harmful impact on Indigenous communities, particularly in how it reinforced a human-centered (anthropocentric) worldview. However, she challenged this perspective through biocentric thought in her narrative. Biocentrism, which valued all forms of life rather than privileging humans, appeared throughout the novel. Erdrich gave voice and agency to nonhuman beings as a direct challenge to anthropocentrism. For instance, when the character Patrice searched for her missing sister, she asked a dog for help. The dog replied, “She died on the end of a chain, like me”(Erdrich 147). This moment illustrated the connection between human and nonhuman suffering and underlined Erdrich’s rejection of hierarchical thinking that placed humans above other forms of life. A scene in which a human character seeks help from a non-human being serves as nothing but direct evidence of anthropocentrism being challenged rather than reinforced.

Ultimately, the U.S. government’s termination policy embodies an anthropocentric worldview that prioritizes control, assimilation, and resource extraction over coexistence, cultural preservation, and respect for both people and land. Arne Naess, describes the relationship between humans and nature as a "master-slave" dynamic, where humans treat nature as if they are the masters with dominion over the natural world, and nature is a passive servant or slave, existing solely for human use and benefit. He highlights how humans have historically regarded nature as something separate from themselves, a resource to be controlled, dominated, and exploited. This perspective establishes a hierarchical relationship in which humans view themselves as superior, reducing nature to a subordinate role.

Speaking on the hierarchical relationship, the Turtle Mountain Jewel Bearing Plant was a central setting in The Night Watchman. The Jewel Bearing Plant stood as a central provider of steady, relatively well-paying work on the Turtle Mountain Reservation in the 1950s, a time when few such opportunities were available, especially to women. To show that an anthropocentric position aligned with ecofeminist perspectives, only if we accepted the premise that women and nature were equated or conflated, Noël Sturgeon stated, "In a political economy dependent on the freedom to exploit the environment, a moral and ethical relation to nature is suspect. If women are equated with nature, their struggle for freedom represents a challenge to the idea of a passive, disembodied, and objectified nature" (Sturgeon 28). Sturgeon highlighted how systems of power benefited from seeing both women and nature as resources to be controlled. In an economy built on environmental exploitation, any ethical stance toward nature was seen as a threat. But when women fought for their own freedom, they undermined the very ideology that supported this exploitation, because they rejected the idea of being passive, controlled, or subordinate. In doing so, they opened up space for a new way of relating, not only to gender, but to the environment itself.

In The Night Watchman, Erdrich illustrated systemic oppression through the character of Patrice Paranteau, who had to plead with her boss, Mr. Vold, for a day off to search for her missing sister, Vera. Patrice had been saving her limited sick days for this very moment. "I just have three days... Three days of sick time... With half pay," said Patrice (61). Yet Mr. Vold hesitated, scrutinizing her request as though it were a bureaucratic matter rather than a personal emergency. This dynamic reflected broader pattern of power imbalance, particularly between Indigenous communities and the U.S. government. Ecofeminist theory helped illuminate this interaction. If we interpreted Patrice as symbolic of the land or nature itself, then Mr. Vold represented the

colonial system that controlled, restricted, and exploited Indigenous resources and autonomy. Her body, labor, and time were regulated by an external authority, mirroring how nature was often treated as property to be managed rather than a living entity deserving of respect and agency. Patrice's sexual abuse and her sister Vera's kidnapping and trafficking reflected how Indigenous women, like the land they were rooted in, were exposed to exploitation and violence through the intertwined forces of patriarchy, colonialism, and environmental degradation.

This claim is further supported by Patrick D. Murphy in *Literature, Nature, and Other: Ecofeminist Critiques*, where he points out that although many ecologists are deeply committed to protecting nature, they often overlook the importance of supporting women's rights. He argues that one of the reasons women have been historically oppressed is because of their close association with nature, an association that has been devalued and dominated in patriarchal societies. As a result, the oppression of women and the exploitation of nature are closely linked and tend to reinforce one another (7). This perspective helps us better understand how characters like Patrice in *The Night Watchman* represent more than individual struggles, they reflect broader systems of control where gender, land, and Indigenous identity are tightly woven together. By viewing women and nature as interconnected victims of the same colonial and patriarchal forces, Murphy's ecofeminist lens reveals the urgency of addressing both environmental and social injustices together.

2.3 The Land Within

On the NPR radio show aired on March 4, 2020, Louise Erdrich was a guest on the program hosted by Dave Davies, titled *Louise Erdrich On Her Personal Connection To Native Peoples' Fight For Survival*. During the radio conversation she shared that she had often been asked why

the Indigenous people of Turtle Mountain did not simply leave their reservation and assimilate and become like everyone else. Her response was, “It’s because Native people aren’t like everybody else, and Native people want to stay who we are” (Erdrich). She made this point very clear, that the land and the Native people are tied together through a sacred, spiritual connection. In in *The Night Watchman*, if the Indigenous spirit were to be embodied in a single character, it would be Zhaanat. She is portrayed as an authentically Indigenous figure, deeply rooted in ancestral knowledge and cultural traditions. As a strong, traditional Ojibwe woman and medicine woman, Zhaanat represents cultural continuity and spiritual insight. She is a source of guidance within the community, and people seek her out to learn from her. As Erdrich notes, “Zhaanat’s real job was passing on what she knew” (21). In this way, Zhaanat functions as a vital bridge between the younger generation and their ancestral heritage.

> things started going wrong, as far as Zhaanat was concerned, when places everywhere were named for people, political figures, priests, explorers and not for the real things that happened in these places, the dreaming, the eating, the death, the appearance of animals. [...] The animals didn’t come around to these locations stained by the names of humans. Plants, also, had begun to grow fitfully. The most delicate of her plant medicines were even dying out altogether… (Erdrich 346)

Here, Zhaanat expressed deep spiritual grief over how places were no longer named for their true meaning, such as the dreaming, eating, death, or appearance of animals, but instead for people like politicians and priests. She believed this shift had caused animals to disappear and plants to wither, showing how disrespecting the spirit of the land disrupted the natural world. This reflected a spiritual connection to the land, where nature was not just a resource but a living, sacred presence. According to Arne Naess, those who work closely with nature, they belief that all living

beings have an equal right to exist and thrive is a fundamental and self-evident truth (96). Both perspectives emphasized that harming the land meant harming life itself, including ourselves.

This spiritual connection to the land is not unique to the Ojibwe. As Keith Basso explains in *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache*, for many Native communities, place-names encode historical events, moral teachings, and ancestral wisdom. The land serves as a living record of cultural memory, where "wisdom sits in places" (129). Like Zhaanat, who grieves the loss of place-names that once carried meaning and memory, the Apache view the renaming of places as a form of cultural erasure and spiritual disruption. Similarly, Robin Wall Kimmerer*'s Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants* (2013) emphasizes that treating land as a commodity rather than a relative leads to ecological degradation—a concern mirrored in Zhaanat's observation that medicinal plants are dying.

2.4 Knowing the Land, Knowing the Self

Most of the Indigenous characters in *The Night Watchman* have a strong sense of place and a deep connection to the land, nature, and their surroundings. This bond reflects their cultural and spiritual ties to the environment. However, some individuals who struggle with mental health issues, often linked to colonial trauma or substance abuse such as alcoholism, appear to have experienced a kind of psychological disconnection that distances them from this sense of belonging. Erdrich said "The most delicate of her plant medicines were even dying out altogether, or perhaps they had torn themselves up by the roots to drag their fruits and leaves to secret spots where even Zhaanat couldn't find them." (345). Zhaanat, who relied on plants for healing and spiritual practices, noticed that some of the most sensitive medicinal plants were no longer growing

where she used to find them. She speculated that maybe these plants had literally pulled themselves up from the ground (uprooted) and moved elsewhere, hiding their fruits and leaves in hidden places. Logically speaking, plants do not move like animals do, but in this scene, Louise Erdrich used magical realism to show that plants have agency, spirit, and even intelligence or a will of their own. Therefore, this showed Zhaanat's ecological self-state, where she could feel and even interpret the absence of certain plants from their point of view, recognizing that harm done to the environment or to other beings is, in essence, harm done to herself, because her identity and spirit were rooted in the land.

Shruti Soni notes that Naess's idea of the ecological self suggests that the boundaries of the self extend far beyond the individual ego to encompass the natural world, communities, ancestors, and future generations, so that harm done to the environment or to others is essentially harm done to oneself. "A great challenge of today is to save the planet from further devastation that violates both the enlightened self-interest of humans and nonhumans, and decreases the potential of joyful existence for all"(Naess qtd. in Soni 79). This deeply resonant understanding of identity as interconnected and relational permeates every layer of *The Night Watchman,* where the characters sense of self is inseparable from their people, their history, and the land they inhabit.

In addition, Thomas Washashk, who leads the fight against the U.S. government's Termination policy, embodies this expanded sense of self, not only fighting for his tribe's legal recognition but also for their very existence as a people rooted in place and tradition. His actions are not driven by personal gain or abstract moral duty, but by a deep awareness that the survival of his community and the health of the land are inseparable from his own being. A central theme in Arne Naess's philosophy is Self-Realization, which explores the relationship between the self (the human, individual self) and the Self (the universal, ecological self). In Western thought, Naess

explains, people typically develop from the ego-self to the social self, and eventually, in rare cases, to the metaphysical self. Deep ecology encourages individuals to move beyond even this, by expanding their understanding of the Self to include all living beings and the natural world. This expanded sense of self, Naess argues, emerges through identification, not just intellectually, but emotionally and spiritually, with other forms of life. When people realize they are not separate from nature but deeply connected to it, they begin to see themselves as part of a larger living whole. Simply put, self-realization is a process of self-examination in which people come to understand themselves as part of a greater whole.

That's how Thomas develops, or expands, from an ego-centered human self to a broader ecological self. At first, Thomas, the protagonist, appears firmly rooted in his ego-centered state. In the opening scenes, Thomas is shown as an ordinary man working the night shift at the jewel-bearing plant, focused on personal responsibility, his family, and fulfilling his duties. His attention is limited to doing his job well and supporting those close to him. Alone at night, Thomas moves through the silent factory: "he checked the drilling room, tested every lock… did a short fancy dance, then threw in a Red River jig" (4). This solitude reflects the ego stage, a self-defined by habit, routine, and inward focus. Even as he takes breaks to "read, write, cogitate," his awareness stays confined within his immediate world, his job, his thoughts, and the lamp he "rescued and repaired for himself" (4). However, after learning about the Termination policy, the ecological self begins to emerge in Thomas. This emergence reflects the idea that every Indigenous individual possesses an ecological self; it simply needs to be developed, cultivated, or awakened over time.

As Warwick Fox explains in his book *Toward a Transpersonal Ecology* (1990), "when solidarity and loyalty are solidly anchored in identification, they are not experienced as moral demands; they come of themselves" (231). To illustrate this, Fox gives the example of the human

joy felt when identifying with the salmon on its journey to its spawning grounds (places where fish go to lay their eggs and reproduce), and the grief experienced when this natural process is obstructed or destroyed. This example demonstrates how identification with nonhuman beings fosters an emotional bond, whereby their well-being becomes naturally and intimately connected to the self. This process of identification, previously observed in Zhaanat's relationship with the plants, where environmental harm was internalized as personal harm, similarly manifests in Thomas's experience. As he becomes increasingly aware of his community's deep-rooted connection to the land and the existential threat posed by the Termination policy, his ecological self emerges. His fight for the preservation of his people and their land arises not from external moral duty but from an internalized sense of unity, wherein the well-being of the land and his community is inseparable from his own.

unlike the overwhelming majority of people in Western societies, who often live in environments where nature is distant and human control dominates. In cities filled with artificial lights, concrete buildings, and the continuous background noise from traffic, where the air carries the smell of fuel and fast food, the presence of the ecological self is often weak, if not nearly absent.

It is crucial to recognize that Arne Naess's concept of deep ecology shares several key features with Lawrence Buell's concept of the *Environmental Imagination*, as developed in *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture*. Both frameworks converge on principles such as non-anthropocentrism, interconnectedness with land and nature, and a critique of modernity. However, they diverge in their primary aims: Buell focuses on how literature shapes and reflects environmental awareness, while Naess advocates for radical ecological reform and a fundamental transformation in human lifestyle and values.

Importantly, Buell's *Environmental Imagination* is largely secular and humanistic, emphasizing cultural and ethical aspects of environmental awareness, whereas deep ecology embraces spiritual and mystical dimensions, including biocentric equality and a sacred connection to nature. This spiritual grounding distinguishes deep ecology's call for profound personal and societal change from Buell's literary-critical approach.

Following that, *The Night Watchman*, Louise Erdrich portrays land not simply as a Scenic background or resource, but as a sacred, living entity deeply intertwined with Native identity, spirituality, and survival. The novel reflects an Indigenous worldview where the relationship to land is spiritual and relational, encompassing ancestral ties, cultural memory, and collective resilience. Using Buell's secular framework alone risks overlooking this spiritual dimension, as it primarily addresses how literature raises environmental awareness through cultural and ethical critique but does not fully account for the sacred connection to land that shapes Native experience. By contrast, deep ecology's spiritual and mystical elements resonate more significantly with the worldview expressed in *The Night Watchman*, recognizing the intrinsic value of all life and calling for a fundamental shift in how humans relate to nature, not just intellectually, but through spiritual and ethical transformation.

Therefore, Erdrich's novel did more than reflect the ideas of deep ecology and the ecological self, it brought them to life. It showed a way of seeing the world where land was not just property, but a living being; where community was not based on convenience, but on lasting connections; and where resistance was not rebellion, but a way to protect identity and survival. Although Arne Naess's ideas helped explain these themes from a Western perspective, the novel spoke from an Indigenous worldview, that always saw the self as connected, responsible, and alive in relation to all living things.

3. Long Knives and the Shadows of Ecocolonialism

3.1 Imperialism: Mindset and Ecology

In the chapter *Metal Blinds*, a pivotal meeting was held in Fargo on October 19, 1953, where Thomas and other tribal members met with U.S. government representatives to hear the reading of the Termination Bill. The meeting, which was led by Area Director John Cooper and included a formal reading by government lawyer Gary Holmes, marked a significant moment in the federal push for tribal termination. During the session, Mr. Hail clarified that the decision to include the Turtle Mountain Chippewa in the termination plan did not originate from the Indian Department but rather from Congress itself. He further noted that some members of Congress believed the tribe was so "advanced" that continued government support was no longer necessary. Consequently, under House Concurrent Resolution 108, the U.S. government used the notion of "advancement" as a rationale to end federal recognition of tribes. In this context, being "advanced" meant that Native people were expected to assimilate into white American society, owning property, working wage jobs, and adopting Western ways of living. As a result, this mindset led to broken treaties, the withdrawal of federal services, forced assimilation, and ultimately, the selling of tribal lands. A conversation during the meeting reflects conflicting views on the meaning of "advancement" and its impact on Indigenous identity:

> THOMAS: I am not sure what study the information about our advancement, financially speaking, was based on. But I will tell you it was faulty. Most of our people live on dirt floors, no electricity, no plumbing. I haul my own water like most Indians in this room. I consider myself advanced only because I read and write. Should I not be an Indian person because I read and write?
>
> MR. COOPER: There is no move to take away your identity as an Indian.

JOYCE ASIGNAK: That is exactly what is happening. (199)

The government uses "being advanced" meaning reading, writing, or having jobs, as an excuse to say Native people no longer need help or recognition. But Thomas is saying that logic is wrong and insulting. Just because someone is educated or has skills doesn't mean they stop being Native or no longer face poverty and injustice. The government acted like being "advanced" meant being less Indian, which was a way to erase identity and remove support. Thomas is rejecting that idea. Ideally, Indigenous peoples could be able to be "advanced" in their own ways while still maintaining their identity, land, and rights. However, during the Termination Era, the government used the idea of being "advanced" to claim that Native communities were ready to give up their tribal sovereignty and special status. They believed Indigenous people should fully assimilate into mainstream American society, losing their distinct cultures and self-governance. This narrow definition ignored Indigenous perspectives and forced a false choice: either assimilate and be seen as "progressive" by settler standards, or keep traditions and be labeled "backward." The government's idea of advancement did not respect Indigenous ways of life, making it impossible for Native peoples to thrive on their own terms while preserving their cultural and political identities.

This is clear evidence of the colonizer mindset and settler colonial ideology, seeking to erase an entire population from their homes, while neglecting their people, culture, and way of life as Eddy Mink said "dumps us here and there" (Erdrich 200). The intention was to seize control of the land to exploit its natural resources for economic gain, including forests, oil, minerals, and other valuable assets but in a way that looks like caring for them and act of kindness. "How could Indians hold themselves apart, when the vanquishers sometimes held their arms out, to crush them

to their hearts, with something like love?" (Erdrich 98). This description by Erdrich shows the ironic way the United States sees itself in relation to the Native Americans. It wants to appear kind and caring, even though it plans to defeat and control them, like saying it will "crush" them with something that seems like love. Such actions disregarded the deep spiritual and cultural connections Indigenous peoples have with their lands. The *chimookomaanag*, or the white Americans in Ojibwe, embody a worldview shaped by both Eurocentrism and Anthropocentrism. This dual perspective places them above non-white peoples and the natural world, legitimizing domination through a hierarchy that centers white, human experience as superior. In this framework, land becomes a commodity rather than a living entity, and Indigenous communities are viewed as obstacles to expansion rather than as stewards of ecological balance. Such a mindset underpins settler colonial policies that marginalize Native voices, degrade the environment, and erase relational ways of being with the land.

This approach aligns with Alfred W. Crosby's concept of ecological imperialism, which describes how colonial powers not only displaced Indigenous communities but also disrupted and damaged ecosystems. The consequences were twofold: Indigenous peoples suffered loss of identity, autonomy, and survival, while the environment would face degradation through unsustainable resource extraction and ecological imbalance. He stated that a hundred years ago, the dominant narrative among historians, mostly Europeans or Euro-Americans, regarding modern imperialism and the industrial revolution was quite straightforward. They believed that Europeans had managed to dominate or intimidate most of the world because they were inherently superior. This view was particularly evident in regions the author refers to as the "Neo-Europes" such as the United States, Argentina, and Australia, where historians assumed there had been very few

Indigenous inhabitants, and those who remained were seen as outdated or on the verge of disappearing (xv).

Indigenous people were long subjected to various forms of harm, especially during the wars between European settlers and Native nations. At first, the violence was direct, bloody, face-to-face battles that involved war machines and military troops. Yet, even these brutal confrontations did not destroy Indigenous identity. Later, the war took on a different shape. Although there were no longer open battles, not all wars were fought with weapons. Some were fought with laws and paperwork. This shift was exactly what Thomas realized when he read the termination bill. As he examined its dry, technical language, he reflected on something powerful and said: “We have survived smallpox, the Winchester repeating rifle, the Hotchkiss gun, and tuberculosis. We have survived the flu epidemic of 1918, and fought in four or five deadly United States wars. But at last we will be destroyed by a collection of tedious words” (Erdrich 93).

Louise Erdrich illustrated how colonial oppression evolved from physical extermination to administrative and linguistic control. Through Thomas's words, Erdrich described how Indigenous peoples were slowly dispossessed and subjected to long-term structural harm. This transition aligns with Rob Nixon’s concept of slow violence a gradual, often invisible form of harm that unfolds over time and disproportionately affects marginalized communities.

3.2 Slow yet Devastating

Although *The Night Watchman* do not portray large-scale environmental destruction, land and the natural world are central to the tribe’s identity, survival, and cultural continuity. While environmental exploitation is not the novel’s explicit focus, it can be interpreted through the lens of slow violence, where harm unfolds gradually and is often unseen. Rob Nixon noted “a violence

of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space."(Nixon 2). The U.S. government's termination policy threatens not only political recognition but also ecological connection, as it risks severing the tribe from their ancestral land and their relationship to it. "First they gave us this scrap, then they tried to push us off this scrap. Then they took away most of the scrap. Now, what you are saying is they want to push us off the edge of the scrap" (Erdrich 118). This quote illustrates the slow and persistent process of land dispossession a form of violence that accumulates over generations and undermines not only physical territory but also cultural survival. Although Nixon's examples primarily address the environmental effects of pollution, war, and climate change, the idea of slow violence extends beyond these issues. In our context, it helps illuminate how colonialism and racial capitalism manifest through both structural and daily forms of violence. These are not isolated, dramatic incidents, but rather ongoing, gradual processes of discrimination and dispossession that intersect with factors such as gender, class, race, and location.

Similarly, Slavoj Žižek's *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (2008) splits violence between its subjective and objective manifestations. The subjective violence, such as terrorist attacks and crimes, and objective violence, such as the hidden systems that support things like capitalism. Žižek sees society's attention as overly focused on the subjective violence because it is visible, dramatic, and easy to condemn, such as acts of terrorism or riots. This focus distracts attention from the deeper, hidden objective violence—like poverty, inequality, and systemic injustice—that exists within the normal functioning of society. Žižek compares this to "dark matter" in physics—we can't see it, but it's there, shaping everything. If we want to understand sudden acts of subjective violence, we have to also consider the hidden objective violence that leads to them.

In *The Night Watchman*, the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa's struggle reflects both slow and objective violence: while the threat may not always be visible or immediate, the constant pressure of dispossession, systemic injustice, and cultural erasure reveals the deep structures of colonial violence operating beneath the surface of daily life. Objective violence appears through legal and economic systems, such as the U.S. termination policy, exploitative labor conditions, and cultural erasure, that silently harm the Turtle Mountain community while hiding behind official language and bureaucratic processes.

Furthermore, Indigenous peoples traditionally survived through hunting, farming, fishing, and gathering wild plants and medicinal herbs, crafting tools and shelter from natural materials, and engaging in trade with neighboring communities. The land was central not only to their economy but also to their spiritual and cultural life, serving as the setting for ceremonies, rituals, and oral traditions. Seasonal migration allowed them to follow animal herds and harvest cycles, reinforcing their deep connection to the environment. However, land dispossession severely limited access to these land-based practices, causing a serious ecological disconnection. Even water became scarce, as Erdrich describes through Patrice: "Most people closer in, near town, or out in prairie land, had lost their water or cattle had ruined their springs. Even the dug wells were drying out."(48). The long journeys and hard labor faced by characters like Patrice highlight the draining effects of poverty rooted in land loss and cultural marginalization. These narrative elements reveal the psychological and environmental toll of settler-colonial agendas, showing that the tribe's fight against termination is also a struggle to preserve their sacred connection to land, language, and collective memory.

The loss of traditional language also reflected this erosion. Because, Erdrich made language itself visible through her use of Chippewa throughout the novel, often without providing

translation. Characters occasionally explained why they chose Chippewa over English because it conveyed certain emotions or ideas more effectively. Names held particular importance; they were not translated, emphasizing their deep cultural significance. For instance, Thomas's last name, Wazhashk, meant "muskrat," and Patrice referred to Vera's baby as Gwiiwizens, meaning "little boy." Older characters, such as Moses Montroose, preferred to speak Chippewa when joking or being ironic. This demonstrated that the use of Chippewa was not merely linguistic. It served as a way to preserve cultural identity and keep their spirit alive. But it was fading in the indigenous context. As Erdrich said "Patrice was one of the only young people who addressed him in Chippewa,"(49). which suggested how assimilation gradually displaced Indigenous knowledge systems and disrupted intergenerational continuity.

The disappearance of a language did not happen suddenly; it happened over generations. A major cause of this decline was the American Indian boarding school system, where children were punished for speaking their native languages and were forced to adopt English and Euro-American values. Some might have wondered how this language loss was connected to ecology, both in the context of the novel and in broader Indigenous experiences. The answer lay in the fact that language held environmental knowledge. Indigenous languages encoded place-based understanding names for plants, animals, ecosystems, weather patterns, and sustainable practices. When a language disappeared, this ecological wisdom was often lost with it. That was why characters like Zhannat, and others like her both inside and outside the novel, saw their main task as not only preserving the language but also attempting to revive it as a way to protect both cultural identity and the ecological knowledge rooted in it. The loss of Indigenous language in this context is like a forest slowly being cut down. Over time, one tree after another disappears, unnoticed, until people realize too late, that the forest is gone. This deforestation of language, as we call it,

mirrors the slow violence described by Rob Nixon: a delayed destruction that quietly erodes culture, memory, and ecological knowledge across generations.

The true tragedy arises when people realize they are no longer living in the world they once knew, when the language around them has changed, the meanings have shifted, and they find themselves speaking into silence. It is not just the loss of words, but the loss of recognition, of belonging. What makes this sorrow even heavier is the feeling of being lost within one's own land, coupled with the helplessness to change the course of that loss. Physical suffering, hunger, poverty, even displacement, can sometimes be endured when one remains within their community, among familiar voices and shared memory. But what of the mind, the psyche, when the world around it begins to forget its language, its meaning, its place? When belonging fades, not through distance but through silence and erasure, the pain reaches deeper than the body. It unsettles the spirits.

The land of the Turtle Mountain community is not physically destroyed, yet its future is deeply uncertain. The U.S. government's termination policy threatens to sever the legal and spiritual ties between the people and their ancestral land. As Thomas and other tribal members recognize, the bill will likely pass regardless of their opposition, revealing the government's disregard for Native voices. Despite the fact that they've all spoken up and voted against the bill, it's clear to Thomas and the other tribal members that the government representatives aren't interested in their opinions or support. Highlighting the powerlessness, despite their resistance, evokes a quiet but persistent grief. The home remains, the trees, rivers, and houses still stand, but the emotional security and sense of rootedness begin to erode. What's at stake is not just territory, but the right to belong to that land in a meaningful, recognized way. This invisible rupture reflects what Glenn Albrecht defines as solastalgia: the distress of remaining in a home that is changing or being threatened, until it no longer feels like home.

Yet despite this looming loss, the Native American identity could never be reduced to or erased by a piece of paper. Their history cannot allow it. They have endured centuries of removal, forced assimilation, broken treaties, and cultural erasure, yet have survived. From the violent removals of the Trail of Tears, to the boarding school system, to the suppression of languages and traditions, Native communities have resisted every attempt to sever them from their land and culture. The termination policy is just another chapter in a long history of colonial disruption, but one met, as always, with quiet strength and refusal. Their relationship with the land is not a legal arrangement, it is ancestral, lived, and spiritual. That bond cannot be signed away.

3.3 Survival Amid Resistance

Poverty was a constant reality on the reservation. Job opportunities were scarce, and the few that existed offered extremely low wages. Patrice's family, for instance, lived in deep poverty; her father did not work and struggled with alcoholism, leaving Patrice to take on the responsibility of supporting the family. Despite her young age, she worked grueling jobs for less than a dollar an hour just to make ends meet a powerful testament to her determination and refusal to give up. For generations, Native communities like hers faced deliberate neglect, with minimal support from the government and policies designed to keep them in poverty and push them toward assimilation. Change came slowly, if at all. Yet, even in the face of such systemic hardship, small acts of care, memory, and resourcefulness became powerful forms of resistance.

> It was a quilt of patches left over from the woolen coats that had passed through the family. Here was his mother's navy blue. It had been made from a trade wool blanket and to a blanket it had returned. Here were the boys' padded plaid wool jackets, ripped and worn. These jackets had surged through fields, down icy hills, wrestled with dogs, and been left behind when they

took city work. Here was Rose's coat from the early days of their marriage, blue-gray and thin now, but still bearing the fateful shape of her as she walked away from him, then stopped, turned, and smiled, looking at him from under the brim of a midnight-blue cloche hat, daring him to lover her (Erdrich 27).

These are powerful words given by the author, powerful to the extent that they could represent the whole narrative of resistance, resilience, and survival. This passage shows how small things carried great meaning and held an entire family history within them. From the navy blue of Thomas's mother's coat to the boys' worn jackets, every piece in the quilt spoke of lived moments, running through fields, sliding down icy hills, wrestling with dogs, everyday acts that together formed a quiet legacy of survival. Even Rose's coat, now thin and faded, carried the scent of love and memory from the early days of their marriage. Although time had passed and their bodies had aged, the coat still bore the shape of that intimate moment when she turned and smiled at him, expressing love without words. The blanket was more than a piece of clothing; it was a repository of time, emotion, and shared experience, an assemblage of Thomas and Rose's journey as a couple and as a family. In a state of relative poverty, nothing was discarded; what might otherwise have been thrown away was reused and transformed, like a coat becoming part of a quilt. These material fragments, stitched together with care and memory, resisted erasure; they preserved identity, affection, and endurance, showing that resistance could live in warmth, memory, and the humble rituals of love and care. The blanket ultimately demonstrated the enduring and resourceful love that bound Thomas, Rose, and their entire family, a love sustained not in spite of scarcity, but through it.

In *The Night Watchman*, the everyday lives of Native characters are shaped by systemic poverty, historical trauma, and cultural erasure. Yet within these conditions, small acts of memory,

care, and resourcefulness emerge not just as survival strategies but as expressions of both resistance and endurance. This reflects what Gerald Vizenor calls *survivance*. As defined earlier in this study, *survivance* is not passive endurance but the active presence and assertion of Indigenous identity in the face of colonial narratives of disappearance. The novel reflects Vizenor's concept of *survivance* through storytelling, cultural continuity, and the refusal of victimhood. In *Survivance*, Vizenor urges Native writers to create characters who resist being seen as victims, use humor and irony, and portray Native life as ongoing and complex. Erdrich does this by writing from within her Turtle Mountain Ojibwe community. In *The Night Watchman*, she shows resistance to the U.S. Termination policy through characters like Thomas and Patrice, challenging outsider narratives that reduce Native people to tragic or vanished figures.

In a moment within the narrative in the novel that represents an element of Vizenor's survivance, specifically cultural continuity through storytelling, is when Biboon, Thomas's father, whom Thomas often turns to for advice, shares a story from his youth. When his family was forced onto the reservation and forbidden to hunt, they endured severe hunger, one winter, the elders starved so that the young could survive. Government-supported farming failed, so they returned to cultivating traditional crops like corn, squash, and beans. Over time, they discovered which plants thrived in certain soils and conditions, drawing on knowledge passed down through generations, what is now known as Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK). As Biboon said, "It took many years of finding what plants grew best in which soil, liked a wet or dry spot, sun in morning or afternoon. Thomas had learned from his father's experiments" (68). and then passed this knowledge on to Thomas. This reflects a deep relationship with nature, rooted in respect, care, and understanding of the environment, which is exactly what TEK represents. Even in old age, Biboon's memories and actions told a story of resilience, cultural memory, and living in harmony

with the land, a true act of survivance. He never forgot the old ways and made sure they were passed on to younger generations, because, as Vizenor wrote, “Native survivance stories are renunciations of dominance, tragedy, and victimry. Survivance means the right of succession or reversion of an estate, and in that sense, the estate of native survivancy.”(Vizenor). Survivance stories are about Native peoples’ strength, creativity, and enduring presence, not just surviving, but thriving and asserting their rightful place in the world. That’s why Biboon and other Native elders like him saw it as a necessity to transmit these stories and knowledge through storytelling.

In fact, *The Night Watchman* as a whole represents survivance. Written by a Native American author, offers a genuine American Indian narrative. It includes traditional Native storytelling methods, uses Native languages, and depicts the sacred relationship between Native people, the land, and nature. Erdrich presents multiple Native perspectives: sometimes we are inside Thomas’s thoughts, other times inside Patrice’s. Each character offers a distinct experience, helping readers—especially non-Native ones—understanding that Native identity is not one-dimensional. Through this, Erdrich deconstructs the harmful stereotypes often spread through media like Hollywood films and cartoons, where Native Americans are shown as savages, uneducated, or mystical figures of the past. This is exactly what Vizenor critiques using Umberto Eco’s concept of hyperreality—a world where fake images are made to seem more real than reality. Vizenor argues that Native people have often been turned into "simulations" or stereotypes by outsiders, leading to what he calls literary annihilation—the erasure or replacement of real Native voices with fictional, false versions (Vizenor 9). Erdrich counters harmful stereotypes by writing from within her own community. As a Turtle Mountain Ojibwe author, she portrays Native characters as real people with emotions, struggles, and agency.

In a passage from the novel, During a boxing match where Indigenous supporters from various tribal communities have gathered to cheer for their fighters. The atmosphere is charged with excitement and loud celebration. However, Erdrich notes that some of the tribal supporters cheered louder and more passionately than what the white farming communities around them were used to. This level of assertiveness unsettled many white spectators, who were accustomed to seeing Native people behave in quiet, submissive ways. As Erdrich explained, “To most of their neighbors, Indians were people who suffered and hid away in shabby dwellings or roamed the streets in flagrant drunkenness and shame. Except the good ones. There was always a ‘good Indian’” (55). These white neighbors held limited, stereotypical views of Indigenous people, as either downtrodden or acceptably passive, and did not expect them to be proud, visible, or victorious. The loud support for the Native boxer defied those expectations, exposing the underlying racial and cultural tensions within the community. Next to that, Erdrich focused on the 1950s fight against the U.S. Termination policy, highlighted Native resistance through this characters and moments. This directly challenges what Gerald Vizenor calls the “literature of dominance”, stories created by outsiders that reduce Native people to tragic or helpless figures. Instead, Erdrich’s work reflects what Vizenor calls *survivance* a narrative of active presence, resistance, and ongoing Native life.

In a separate instance in the text, Thomas remembered traveling with his friend Archille during the 1930s Great Depression. While working on harvest crews in Texas, they are mistaken for Mexican workers and arrested in a mass deportation. Despite their protests that they are Native Americans from North Dakota and Canadian, they are treated as outsiders and forcibly sent away.

“You’ll go back where you came from,” said the sheriff.

“We’re from North Dakota,” said Archille. His easy smile didn’t work on

the sheriff. “We’re not Mexicans. We’re American Indians.”

“Oh really? Well, consider this Custer’s payback.”

“Since my grandfather killed him,” said Archille, “there is a certain

justice to the idea. (Erdrich 58).

This passage from *The Night Watchman* showcases Erdrich’s use of irony to expose racial injustice and challenge historical myths. When Archille sarcastically says, “there is a certain justice” in being deported as “payback” for his grandfather killing Custer, he flips the colonizer’s logic. Rather than accepting victimhood, Archille uses wit to reveal the absurdity of being treated as an outsider in a country where his ancestors fought against U.S. forces. This moment reflects Gerald Vizenor’s concept of survivance, combining survival, resistance, and active presence. Archille does not passively accept the sheriff’s racist assumptions but proudly asserts his identity as a Native American from North Dakota. His calm defiance and clever language resist erasure and reclaim historical memory with confidence, embodying survivance by asserting cultural strength and continuity in the face of prejudice.

In an earlier section, when two government officials were reading the bill in the presence of Native American elders and Thomas, they mentioned the limited—almost nonexistent—aide provided to American Indians. In response, Eddy Mink said, “The services that the government provides to Indians might be likened to rent. The rent for use of the entire country of the United States” (201). Eddy Mink used powerful irony by comparing the inadequate government services provided to Native Americans to “rent” for occupying the entire United States — land originally taken from Indigenous peoples through colonization. The irony lay in the fact that the original inhabitants were dispossessed of their own land, yet the small, often insufficient aid they received

was framed as if it were generous payment. The statement left the government officials speechless and astonished, as such powerful words came from an old and frail Native man, words that challenged their assumptions and lingered in their minds. The scene offers a critique of deep-rooted historical injustices and exposes the absurdity of believing that limited support could ever compensate for the loss of Indigenous homelands.

Conclusion

Ultimately, *The Night Watchman* functioned as a tool of resistance against every narrative that sought to diminish Native American life, culture, and, within the context of the novel, the land. Erdrich portrayed the land not merely as a physical space but as a living presence deeply intertwined with identity, memory, and spiritual meaning. The connection between the characters and their environment reflected a worldview in which land held ecological importance and sacred significance, forming the foundation of cultural continuity and communal strength. At the conclusion of the novel, Erdrich delivered a powerful and unwavering message, stating: “Lastly, if you should ever doubt that a series of dry words in a government document can shatter spirits and demolish lives, let this book erase that doubt. Conversely, if you should be of the conviction that we are powerless to change those dry words, let this book give you heart” (451). Through these words, she left no room for indifference. Her narrative did not yield to loss or silence. It resisted, asserted, and remembered. Whether or not she intentionally followed Vizenor’s path, her work embodied a defiant presence that challenged erasure and insisted on survival with dignity and voice. In this refusal to be diminished, *The Night Watchman* most powerfully aligned with the

spirit of survivance, affirming the enduring bond between land, people, and the sacred traditions that continue to sustain them.

General Conclusion

The Night Watchman stood out as a powerful example of ecocritical and ecocolonial literature, revealing the profound connection between Native Americans and their relationship to the land and ecosystem. The narrative exposed the ongoing exploitation of Indigenous territories and the parallel displacement of both people and nature resulting from settler expansion. Louise Erdrich gave voice to her community by weaving together historical, cultural, and environmental realities in a way that underscored both resistance and resilience.

The first chapter of this study laid the groundwork for understanding contemporary Native American resistance. It began by exploring what it meant to be Indigenous and how Indigenous identity was defined in North America—an essential inquiry to ensure respectful and accurate representation without undermining or misrepresenting these identities. The chapter also briefly highlighted the rich and complex civilizations that existed prior to European colonial encounters, civilizations that were deeply rooted in oral storytelling, belief systems, literature, and social structures. This way of life was disrupted by colonial expansion through various means, including direct military conflict and biological warfare, such as the spread of diseases that devastated Indigenous communities and reshaped their traditional ways of life. Furthermore, the chapter shed light on the emergence of Native American literature as a form of resistance, showing how storytelling and the power of language served as tools to preserve identity, reclaim culture, and challenge dominant colonial narratives. Special attention was given to *The Night Watchman*, providing socio-historical context for the novel during the 1950s termination era.

For the second chapter, it applied the theoretical frameworks of ecocriticism and ecocolonialism to *The Night Watchman*, drawing on selected key concepts from both approaches.

From ecocriticism, the analysis focused on Arne Næss's deep ecology and its philosophical components, including the ecological self and self-realization, alongside ecofeminism and Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), with particular emphasis on deep ecology. From the ecocolonial perspective, the study utilized concepts such as ecological imperialism as theorized by Alfred W. Crosby, Rob Nixon's theory of slow violence, with brief references to solastalgia, and Gerald Vizenor's notion of survivance. These combined frameworks facilitated a nuanced exploration of the novel's ecological and ecocolonial themes.

This analysis highlighted the central role of land as a vital source of knowledge, identity, and survival within the narrative. It also explored how land dispossession and termination policies posed significant threats to the cultural continuity of the Turtle Mountain Chippewa, particularly regarding the transmission of intergenerational knowledge and spiritual ties to the land. Finally, the novel's portrayal of community resilience demonstrated the enduring strength of collective resistance in confronting colonial oppression and preserving Indigenous cultural identity.

This study found that *The Night Watchman* portrayed Indigenous resistance to environmental and cultural erasure through a nuanced interplay of ecocritical and ecocolonial themes. The analysis revealed that the novel depicted land not merely as territory, but as a source of knowledge, memory, and cultural continuity. Louise Erdrich emphasized the spiritual and ancestral connection the Turtle Mountain community maintained with their environment, highlighting how this relationship formed the basis of cultural identity in the face of colonial disruption. The narrative also illustrated environmental injustice through vivid depictions of land exploitation and policy-driven erasure during the 1950s termination era. These policies threatened not only physical displacement but also the erasure of traditional knowledge and sacred relationships with the land. Furthermore, the study found that ecological practices and community-

based stewardship in the novel functioned as acts of survivance. These practices preserved cultural identity, reinforced resistance to assimilation, and affirmed the enduring presence of Indigenous voices. By portraying the land as a living force and storytelling as a method of survival, Erdrich offered a powerful literary resistance to colonial narratives and reaffirmed the resilience of Native life and tradition.

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الملخص

في ظل الأزمات البيئية المتفاقمة واستمرار تهميش الشعوب الأصلية، يُعد الأدب وسيلة فعّالة لاستعادة الأرض والذاكرة والهوية الثقافية. تمثل رواية *الحارس الليلي* للكاتبة لويز إردريتش نموذجًا بارزًا في أدب السكان الأصليين، حيث تُصوّر أشكال المقاومة في مواجهة الاستعمار والقمع. تدور الرواية في خمسينيات القرن العشرين خلال ما يُعرف بـ "حقبة الإنهاء"، وتُبرز كيف أن الارتباط بالأرض والهوية والمعرفة التقليدية يشكّل جوهر النضال من أجل البقاء.

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحليل أشكال المقاومة التي يعبر عنها السكان الأصليون من خلال علاقتهم العميقة بالطبيعة والمعرفة المتوارثة، مع التركيز على الروابط الثقافية والبيئية التي حاول الاستعمار طمسها. وتنطلق الدراسة من مناهج النقد البيئي والنقد البيئي الاستعماري، مستفيدة من مفاهيم مثل "الإيكولوجيا العميقة" لأرن نيس، ونظرية "العنف البطيء" لروب نيكسون، ومفهوم "البقاء الإبداعي" لدى جيرالد فيزينور. وتُبرز نتائج البحث كيف تُمارَس السياسات الاستعمارية على نحو تدريجي يُلحق الضرر بالبيئة والثقافة، بينما تُجسد السرديات الأصلية أفعال مقاومة تؤكد استمرارية العلاقة مع الأرض كمصدر أساسي للثبات والهوية.

الكلمات المفتاحية : البيئة العميقة، الشعوب الأصلية، النقد البيئي، الاستعمار البيئي، المقاومة.