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## Reservations Chronicle: The Interplay of Real and Imaginary Places in Louise Erdrich's Tracks

Fasih ur Rehman<sup>\*</sup>

Rao Aisha Sadiq<sup>†</sup>

Atta-ul-Mustafa<sup>‡</sup>

### Abstract

*Spatiality occupies pivotal status in the thematic orientation of Native American literature. Native American male writers in general and female writers, in particular consider the issues of space and place with reference to issues of identity, separation and conflict with Euro-Americans. The present paper aims to study the portrayal of real and imaginary places in Louise Erdrich's Tracks. The study maintains that Erdrich infuses energy into the places portrayed in the novel. Hence, places do not remain static or flat rather; they assume dynamic characteristics that not only trigger action but also become a character in the development of the plot. The present study concludes that textual and imagined places should not be taken as mere portrayals of topographic structures; rather, they explain the socio-cultural paradigm of a given social order.*

**Key Words:** Louise Erdrich, Native American Topography, Place, Space, Spatiality

### Introduction

The issues of space and place are central to the thematic orientation of Native American literature. Native American writers have exploited the theme of spatiality to present the centuries-long spatial occupation of Native America. The issues of identity, separation and conflict with Euro-Americans are central to the theme of spatiality. The current study investigates the representation of real and imagined spaces in Louise Erdrich's *Tracks*. The study maintains that Erdrich's portrayed spaces and places are infused with energy that makes them dynamic. Hence, places do not remain static or flat; rather, they assume dynamic characteristics that not only move the plot but also assume characters in the novel. The present study concludes that textual and imagined places should not be taken as mere portrayals of topographic structures; rather they should be studied

within the socio-cultural paradigm to understand the spatial semiotics.

Issues related to "space, place and individual" (Stirrup, 2010, p.34) form the basis of Erdrich's geocultural poetics. Delineating the geocultural influences on Erdrich's writings, Stirrup (2010) maintains that these multifaceted influences "inform rather than confuses her cultural identity" (p.35). According to Stirrup, it is the "literal and spiritual geographies of the Great Plains" (p.37) through which Erdrich endeavors to demonstrate "the double paradox of freedom in the enclosure, and entrapment in the open spaces of the plains and the imagination" (p.36). Erdrich's works exhibit an inadvertent fusion of the "sacred and secular" (p.37) spaces. Besides, the juxtaposition is the consequence of Erdrich's adroit use of the Turtle Mountain reservation setting in her

<sup>\*</sup>Lecturer, Department of English, Khushal Khan Khattak University, Karak, KP, Pakistan.

Email: [fasihurrehman@gmail.com](mailto:fasihurrehman@gmail.com)

<sup>†</sup> Lecturer, Department of English, Institute of Southern Punjab, Multan, Punjab, Pakistan.

<sup>‡</sup> Assistant Professor, Department of Humanities & Linguistics, University of Agriculture, Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan.

novels. Erdrich reinforces the notion of "openness and enclosure" (p.37) through the manipulation of the sacred and secular spaces. Therefore, Erdrich's geocultural poetics bear not only the nuances of the cultural encounters but also the metaphysics of her situatedness in indigenous spaces. Stirrup argues that Erdrich's works exhibit an intricate interplay of temporal and spatial metaphors. He further argues that the out-of-placeness and in-placeness of Erdrich's characters evolve from her connecting the "locally specific to the Universal" (p.41). In other words, Erdrich not only retreats to native cultural identity but also explores the assumed boundaries.

### Literature Review

Erdrich views spatial dislocation as the *raison d'être* of "tribal dissolution and familial dysfunction" (Stirrup, 2010, p.70), which in *Tracks* comes in the wake of the Dawes Severalty Act. The symbiosis of symbolism and spatiality in Erdrich's novel is best exemplified in the homecoming episodes of her novels, where homecoming serves as "instances of negative and unreconstructed representation: the first is a return to center, the second a suggestive legacy of one old-time healer to a new" (Stirrup, 2010, p.72). Erdrich uses symbols to demonstrate the "brutalization" of territories, which is represented through subversive politics of symbolism.

Erdrich's writing is more of a performance than simply a retelling of Ojibwe's stories. Flavin's (1991) notion of the novel as performance rests on his assumptions that the Anishnabeg tribes hesitate to utter their names. However, in *Tracks*, Nanapush, one of the narrators, frequently utters his name. According to Flavin, such gestures do not come directly from the narrator himself; rather, it is the writer who, through such artistic methods, "threatens to subvert character" and subsequently "robs the character of power" (p.1). Equating Erdrich's narrative style with that of James Faulkner's, Victoria Walker (1991) describes Erdrich's narrative technique in *Tracks* as "distinctive" (p.37) than her preceding novels in the sense that here she employs "two participatory narrators" (p.37). Walker asserts that not only Erdrich employs a distinctive narrative technique in *Tracks*, rather the two narrators have "distinct styles" (p.38) of narration, which is visible in

the "comparison of their versions of the same incidents" (p.39).

Annette Van Dyke (1992), in her essay, *Questions of the Spirit: Bloodlines in Louise Erdrich's Chippewa Landscape* study the "spiritual legacies" of the Chippewa community, which is arduously resisting "the encroachment of Euro-American society" (p.15) in *Tracks* and *Love Medicine*. According to Dyke, Erdrich portrays Fleur as the epitome of Chippewa's spiritual authority; however, it is the Misshepesu, the "guardian" (p.15) spirit, to whom Fleur Pillager owes her powers. Dyke further claims that Fleur inherited the guarding spirit after her father's death. Since the water monster has a "mixed reputation" in Chippewa folklore, therefore, Fleur's association with the Monster is described both "negatively" and "positively" (p.16). Dyke establishes that Erdrich's portrayal of the Misshepesu is an amalgamation of multiple folk traditions and exhibits the "antagonism between thunder and the water spirit" (p.17). On the one hand, the lake monster is associated with "evil visions", eroticism, sorcery, and "death by drowning", while on the other hand, it is associated with "luck", and "vision of great power" (pp.17-9). Therefore, on the one hand, the water monster "lure people to their death by drowning", on the other hand, it is through the spiritual powers of the Misshepesu that Fleur can "pay taxes on her land" and protect her "land" (p.19) from the whites. The spiritual legacy of the Misshepesu "continues" (p.20) from one generation to the other, where Lulu inherits spiritual powers from her mother.

Gloria Bird (1992), in her essay, searching for *Evidence of Colonialism at Work: A Reading of Louise Erdrich's "Tracks"*, contests Helen Tiffin's notion of "dismissal of "felt marginality" (p.41). Bird considers the issue of "marginality" of the Native Americans a poignant issue for the reason that premise Bird's social margin is situated on the periphery society" (p.41). The underlying premises of Bird's argument is that Native Americans have a "longer intimate history and relationship with a land base that predates any invasive people's living memories"; therefore, the "margin/place is the center/source" when it comes to Native American marginality. The undercurrents of Bird's argument are that to "come from an Indian reservation is to

have lived difference, not 'marginality' (author's italics p.41). Furthermore, Bird argues that the Native American literature is at the "center/source" although "continually maintained both politically and social as separate" (p.41).

In his essay, titled *Beyond the Iconic Subject: Re-visioning Louise Erdrich's Tracks*, Nicholas Sloboda (1996) revisits Erdrich's fiction and portrayal of Native Americans. Sloboda identifies two-fold criticism of Native American writings. According to Sloboda, on the one hand, critics refute the "western interpretive frameworks" being applied to Native American writings, while on the other hand, critics approve of "promoting alternative and indigenous readings" (p.63). Sloboda, on the one hand, commends these dichotomous critical evaluations for the reason that they invite attention "to the nature of the Native American voice and its own rich tradition", while on the other hand, he argues that such contestations "runs the risk of appropriating the individual text to fit the proposed theoretical paradigm" (p.63).

### Analysis

[Louise Erdrich \(1987\)](#) sets the plot of the *Tracks* in the backdrop of the Dawes Act of 1887. The novel narrates the story of an Anishinabe family residing at the Turtle Mountain Reservation in the early decades of the twentieth century. Turtle Mountains Reservation is predominantly hosting to Ojibwe, but Cree and Metis Native Americans also share some parts of the reservation. The timeline of the story begins at the start of the second decade, which roughly constitutes the ending of the twenty-five-year period of the Act. By the time the plot reaches its climax, the Act has caused the liquidation of forests to the government and private companies; land grabbing has culminated into a trade and displacement of Native Americans due to socio-economic reasons. Apart from the natural calamities like the winter storms and summer droughts and diseases like smallpox and consumption, the reservation also suffered the atrocious consequences of the Dawes Act of 1887. In 1884 the reservation ceded ten million acres of land to the Federal government for the establishment of White settlements. The allotment Act caused an acute shortage of sustenance and extreme poverty. The

tribal conflict at the end of the nineteenth century further escalated the troubles of the Native Americans of the Turtle Mountain Reservation.

Historically, the Anishinaabegs were guided by seven prophecies from the Atlantic to the St. Lawrence River and the Great Lakes, and each prophecy was validated by the revelation of the sacred miigis shell, or cowrie ([Stirrup, 2010](#), p.9). In the latter half of the eighteenth century, these tribes migrated and settled near present-day Ontario and Michigan. Traditionally, Ojibwa people are hunters, and they migrate from one place to another in search of hunting throughout the year ([Luebering, 2011](#), p.38). Some tribes picked wild rice; however, Ojibwas were not agrarian cultures as a whole. The socio-cultural structure accords the Ojibwa men a spatially superior position as they indulged in hunting expeditions, and for that, they travelled to distant places. The Ojibwa women, on the other hand, stayed at home because women were considered weak and thus restricted to domestic work. In later centuries, when the Ojibwa people indulged in the fur trade with the Euro-Americans, these trading spaces were reserved for Ojibwa men, and women were not encouraged to enter the fur trade. Thus the public space was redefined in a way that barred the Ojibwa woman from entering into this space. In addition, Ojibwa society was established on a patrilineal social setup, which further reified the marginalization of the Ojibwa woman. The chieftainship was hereditary, and men from a chief's family would ascend to the chieftainship, whereas women were not entitled to any such prestige. The consequent normative geography accorded a privileged space to the Ojibwa men, whereas Ojibwa women are restricted to marginalized spaces.

[Louise Erdrich's \(1987\)](#) *Tracks* is a commentary upon the repercussions of the United States government's policies related to the land allotment in the last decades of the nineteenth century. The story of the novel is written in the backdrop of the United States government 1887's Dawes Act. Erdrich, through her narrative, comments upon the roles of United States government policies in general, and the Dawes Act in particular, in furthering the ambivalence in the Native American normative geography. She is vocal in giving vent to her thoughts about the Native Americans' resentment and refusal

to sign the treaty and also vociferously expresses the predicament that the Act has caused. Nanapush, one of the narrators and characters in *Tracks*, informs the reader that he “refused to sign the settlement papers that would take away” their woods and lake (p.2). At another point, Nanapush is grieved to inform the reader about how the people “stumbled toward the government bait, never looking down, never noticing how the land was snatched from under” by the implementation of the Dawes Act (p.3). The narrative underlines the change in the Anishinabe gender roles and spatio-cultural changes after the implementation of the Dawes Act of 1887. In *Tracks*, Nanapush tells her granddaughter Lulu that he is the man who guided the last buffalo hunt, the last bear shot, and trapped the last beaver (p.2). Nanapush’s claims suggest that the Act ushered in the end of traditional Native American gender roles and means of sustenance. United States government policies, which aimed at assimilating the Native Americans within the socio-cultural and socio-political structure, further destabilized the normative geographic constitution of the Native American society. Consequently, the spatio-cultural structures of the Native Americans became more suppressive for the Native American woman. Erdrich in *Tracks* aims to identify the struggle of the Native American woman to challenge the imbalanced normative geography within the Native American space and documents her phenomenological experience of space and place in the backdrop of the Dawes Act of 1887. Indeed, the narrative is an imaginative work of fiction; however, Erdrich has used real spaces and places in this narrative in order to make the narrative more assertive and meaningful.

[Sanja Runtic \(2013\)](#), in her postcolonial study in, *Reimagining the Frontier in Louise Erdrich's Tracks*, identifies the “frontier zone” (p.117) in Erdrich’s *Tracks*. Erdrich employs magic realism to construct a “hybridized textual space” in order to contest and subvert “the consistency of colonial symbols and identity constructs” (p.117). Erdrich’s construction of “narrative geography” (p.117) through the portrayal of different characters addresses the “destabilized” and “grotesque” (p.117) character of colonial rule. Runtic claims that through the amalgamation of the “realistic” and “fantastic” in

*Tracks*, Erdrich creates a “fluid and transmutable” fictional space (p.118). Furthermore, Erdrich exploits the “counter-hegemonic” potentials of magic realism, which “embrace disparate conceptual and political geometries and stage dialectical combat of discursive systems” (p.18). Runtic asserts that the magic realism technique assists Erdrich in moderating the “fixity of binaries and create a dual space” (p.118). These dual spaces are the location where Erdrich dissects “colonial doctrine and practices” and re-inscribes the traditional Ojibwe cultural practices (p.119). Runtic argues that the Ojibwe and Christian worlds overlap in *Tracks*; however, they never merge into each other; nevertheless, in doing so, Erdrich exposes the ambivalence in her characters.

*Tracks* delineate the story of an Anishinabe girl, Fleur Pillager, who, although she survives the consumption, however, is confronted with yet another dilemma, i.e. saving her ancestral lands from being taken by the government. The idea of losing land puts her into spatial anxiety, and she decides to earn money to pay the allotment fee on her lands. However, she is challenged with both the existential experience of space and efforts to destabilize the normative geographic structure of the Ojibwa society. In *Tracks*, Louise Erdrich has portrayed Fleur’s out-of-place actions that culminate in her transgression of the Ojibwe normative geography. In order to save her lands, Fleur herself takes the responsibility to raise money to pay the annual allotment fee. Fleur takes a job at the Kozaka’s Meat and thus revolts against the predefined Ojibwa woman role. Nanapush, the epitome of Ojibwa patriarchy, coerces Fleur to think that she is not able to defend her lands, and the lands will eventually go, but Fleur shuns all such warnings and threats and successfully collects money to pay the annual allotment fee. At the end of the novel, Fleur fails to deposit the allotment fee on her lands. Nonetheless, it is not because she is unable; rather, she is cheated by the Ojibwa patriarchy. Erdrich, through the narrative, establishes how Ojibwa patriarchy tries to maintain the normative geographic structure of the society and limits opportunities for the Ojibwa woman for any possible transgression. However, Fleur, through her out-of-place actions, challenges the already existing Ojibwe normative geography,

and through her transgression, establishes new space and place for her.

The reservation in *Tracks*, modelled upon Erdrich's own Turtle Mountain Indian Reservation (Beidler & Barton, 1999, p.10), is a unique choice for setting the stage for the plot movement. Firstly, the author invests her imagination to map the reservation in its totality as to bring to the surface the kind of natural and man-made disasters these reservations received over the period. Secondly, the geographical locations and physical characteristics of the places are enriched with firsthand details from the original location of the reservation. For instance, the Turtle Mountain Indian Reservation of *Tracks* is an Indian reservation; for Anishinabe families, who have their own culture, they populate it, and the socio-cultural and socio-political threads weaved around the reservation depict the post-Dawes era in true essence. The protagonist in *Tracks* is confronted with the dilemma as to whether save her lands from the settlers or succumb to the monetary temptations offered by the lumbering company. Fleur, the protagonist's character, is also drawn upon the actual Pillagers of the reservation, and her drowning in the Matchimanito Lake is also related to real-life events. Therefore, the study claims that the selected fiction espouses an organic and real connection between time and space on the one hand and the real and textual world on the other hand. The notion can be further explained in the light of the localization of the narrative that means the strengthening of ties between space and characters.

In *Tracks*, places like Fleur's ancestral cabin, Matchimanito Lake, Argus, Kozka's Meats exert certain powers over the character that can be explained in a character's existential experience of a place. *Tracks* delineate the story of a people who "stumbled toward the government bait, never looking down, never noticing how the land was snatched" from under their steps; subsequently, the loss of land brought "unrest and curse of trouble" (Erdrich, 1987, p.4). However, Fleur realizes that "the land will go. The land will be sold and measured", nonetheless, she is desperate to hold on to her lands and to raise enough money to buy back her land, or "at least pay a tax and refuse the lumbering money that would sweep the marks" of her existence (Erdrich, 1987, p.8). Therefore, when the protagonist

leaves her place and inhibits at any other place, she is confronted with an existential crisis triggered by the unseen forces of spatiality. The existential crisis exerts a sense of out-of-placeness that overwhelms the character, which ultimately influences her actions. Cresswell (2004) identifies a sense of out-of-placeness as the lack of a sense of belonging to a certain place (p.6). The protagonists develop this sense of out-of-placeness when they are confronted with the phenomenological "otherness" of the place. In the selected fiction, the authors deliberately emphasize the 'otherness' of the places, hence, justifies the ambivalent attitude of the character. We see Fleur visits Argus and stays there for a few months; however, she fails to develop any sort of emotional attachment to the place. In addition, she develops skills, which are considered unbecoming of an Anishinabe woman. She plays cards with men, and when they rape her, she brings a tornado at the Kozka's Meats. In her rage, she builds a cry "faint at first, a whistle and then a shrill scream that tore through the walls and gathered around", and then through her magical prowess makes Pauline and Russell slide the thick iron bar "along the wall and fall across the hasp and lock" the three men in the locker (Erdrich, 1987, p.28).

The textual world portrayed in the selected fiction is constituted of real-world spaces and places. The plot of the novel expands over close and distant spaces. The story unfolds in geographically distinctive spaces since the events that constitute the actions of the plot occur at locations that are constituted upon real-world places and locations. The link between the textual world of these narratives and their real-world counterpart is obvious and explicit in these narratives. The reader comfortably identifies the spaces mentioned in these works. For instance, the spaces portrayed in Louise Erdrich's *Tracks* are familiar. Louise Erdrich's textual world in *Tracks* is a juxtaposition of real and imagined spaces. However, the imagined spaces are also constructed upon models taken from the real Native American world. *Tracks* are the third novel in a series of four novels. Chronologically the novel constitutes the beginning of the story of Four Anishinabe families. The novel is set in North Dakota. Erdrich never names the reservation mentioned in the novel. The reservation is located in

the “North-central part” ([Beidler & Burton, 1999](#), p.10) of the state. Although, *Tracks* does not offer any information about the exact location of the reservation, however, the analysis of different directions given in other novels of the series reveals that the reservation in *Tracks* is modelled upon Erdrich’s Turtle Mountain Indian Reservation. Beidler and Burton claim that in later novels, Erdrich consciously changes the location of the fictional reservation (p.11).

Furthermore, there are two fictional towns mentioned in *Tracks*. These fictional towns are located near the reservation, but Erdrich does not mention the location of these towns either. Argus is a fictional town mentioned in the novel. Beidler and Burton (1999) call Argus “the most problematic town” (p.11) for its confusing geographical location. The fictional town is extensively mentioned in *Tracks* (1987), and Erdrich situates Argus on the southern side of the reservation (p.12). The town is not located too far from the reservation as different characters visit the town on a regular basis. Fleur Pillager also walks back to the reservation from Argus. The references in *The Beat Queen* and *Tales of Burning Love* suggest that the town is located on the northern side of the reservation and constituted upon the real town of Argusville (p.12). However, in *Tracks*, the town is geographically located on the southern side of the reservation. Erdrich’s later novels create confusion about the actual location of the fictional town of Argus. According to Beidler and Burton, Erdrich purposely remains indeterminate about the location of the reservation and Argus so that readers do not identify them with the Turtle Mountain Indian reservation. Beidler and Burton do not offer any justification for the inconsistent geographical location of the reservation except for calling the textual world of the novel a mere fictional world and claiming that it needs not be “expected to coincide exactly with real locations in real states” (p.13). [David Stirrup \(2010\)](#), on the other hand, thinks that Erdrich’s representation of the reservation is not a unified/maiden representation of several North Dakota and Minnesotan reservations (p.5). Stirrup claims that the reservation mentioned in *Tracks* is White Earth Reservation. The reason for his claims is that Erdrich models the protagonist Fleur Pillager’s character upon the real Pillagers, who

were tribal guards and settled on the edge of the reservation (p.87). Stirrup agrees with Beidler and Burton that Erdrich models the spaces in *Tracks* upon the landscapes of North Dakota and Minnesota. Nevertheless, Stirrup fails to give any suitable reason for Erdrich’s non-disclosure of the identity of the reservation. However, Erdrich, in *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*, shuns all the speculations about the exact geographical location of the imagined and unnamed reservation. Erdrich states, “the reservation depicted in this (*Tracks*) and all of my novels is an imagined place consisting of landscapes and features similar to much Ojibwe reservation” (qtd in [Hollrah, 2004](#), p.83). Erdrich further states that the places she portrays are “emotional collections of places dear to me, as is the town called Argus” (qtd in [Hollrah, 2004](#), p.83). Erdrich emphatically denounces the identity of the unnamed reservation and asserts, “it is not the turtle mountain reservation of course, although that is where I am proud to be enrolled” (qtd in [Hollrah, 2004](#), p.83). Erdrich’s clarifications about the identity of the reservation make it clear that her construction of the textual space is purely imaginative; however, she does use actual and real Native American space of North Dakota to model the textual space in her fiction.

In addition, Erdrich’s portrayal of the towns of Theobald, Hoopdance, and Argus is a representation of the white spaces. There are no details about Theobald and Hoopdance in *Tracks*; however, we see a complete section dedicated to the town of Argus. Beidler and Barton call Argus geographically confusing because she does not inform the reader about the location of the said town (Beidler & Barton, 2010, p.11). David Stirrup calls Argus “the most complex, luminous place” and points to its location in North Dakota; however, he also fails to give a precise location of Argus. Erdrich offers varying locations of the fictional town that make it difficult to map; however, the town is “always depicted as being fairly close to the reservation, but like the site of the reservation itself, its location shifts” (Beidler & Barton, 2010, p.11). In *Tracks*, we are told about the direction of the town on the “south” (Erdrich, 1987, p.12), but we are not informed about the distance between the reservation and Argus. A few instances are present in the novel, but they are insufficient to

comprehend the actual distance of the town. The supposed nearness of the town can be deduced from the fact that after the incident in Argus, Fleur walks from Argus to the reservation (Erdrich, 1987, p.34), and Bernadette and Napoleon Morrissey come “down to Argus one day in a fine green wagon” (Erdrich, 1987, p.63). Argus is also mentioned in *The Beat Queen*, and it is depicted as “up north, near the site of the Turtle Mountain Reservation” (Beidler & Barton, 2010, p.11). However, the issue becomes complicated when we come to know about yet another location of Argus “to the north of Fargo along I-29” (Beidler & Barton, 2010, p.11) in *The Beat Queen*. This location is further reinforced in *Tales of Burning Love*, which suggests that the town of Argus is modelled “after the real town of Argusville, just fifteen miles or so due north of Fargo. Like the fictional Argus, Argusville is on a railway line and is connected by a short link with I-29” (Beidler & Barton, 2010, p.11). According to Beidler and Barton (2010), Argus’s presumed location in *The Beat Queen* and *Tales of Burning Love* “reinforces the idea of an alternate location for the reservation” (p.11). However, it is not the “indeterminate location” (p.11) of Argus that makes the plot move, rather the force and charge in the place that furthers the plot movement and brings dramatic changes in the lives of different characters. Argus is the *other* to Fleur where she does not feel a sense of belonging, and this sense of not belonging is further augmented by the events that take place at Kozka’s Meats. Erdrich emphasizes the “alien quality” (Bakhtin, 2008, p.101) of Argus by situating it in contrast to the geography, people, and culture of Fleur’s ancestral home.

Erdrich invests a certain type of energy in the places portrayed in *Tracks*. Therefore, the places do not remain backgrounds to the development of the action in the plot; rather they become charged and acquire specific characters in the movement of the plot. The notion of the portrayal of space as a character is indeed innovative and intriguing because it makes the plot move forward and actions take place simultaneously by the covert and overt forces of space and place, where events are sequentialized by their spatial dynamics and where initiative belongs to space and place. Erdrich emphasizes these ‘initiative’ powers of space in her novel *Tracks* by making action subservient to the power of place and by making

spatial forces trigger plot movements. At the very outset of the novel, we come to know about the powers that Matchimanito Lake holds and where people like Edgar Pukwan of the tribal police fear to go (Erdrich, 1987, p.2). Later, when Pukwan tries to burn down Fleur’s family cabin, he throws kerosene oil repeatedly against the logs and even starts ablaze with birch bark and chips of woods; however, the flames go out in a puff of smoke and being afraid of the powers that reside the place he leaves the cabin unharmed (Erdrich, 1987, p.4). The Matchimanito Lake and Fleur’s family cabin initiate the movement of the plot and force Nanapush to take Fleur to his cabin and the subsequent death of Edgar Pukwan. As [Ralph \(1976\)](#) asserts, “to be human is to live in a world that is filled with significant places” (p.3); at Nanapush’s cabin, and away from her family cabin, Fleur leaves her humanness and becomes “half windigo” (Erdrich, 1987, p.6). Therefore, she returns to her family cabin to encounter the existential experience of place, which Nanapush’s cabin fails to provide her. It is pertinent to mention here that Fleur’s departure from Nanapush’s cabin is spatially triggered since it is the very idea of losing her ancestral lands that compels her to avoid Nanapush’s warnings; “the land will go. The land will be sold and measured” (Erdrich, 1987, p.8).

The portrayal of the imagined or textual spaces is founded upon real places and real events. This is evident in Erdrich’s presentation of the spatial conflicts that lead to a personal crisis in *Tracks*. The constant insinuations regarding the lands that Fleur receives from her ancestors compel her to take some action to avoid the confiscation of her lands. Fleur’s subsequent visit to Argus may be helpful to evaluate the degree of existential pressure exerted by spatial forces on individual character. Fleur leaves her family cabin, the place where she experiences a genuine sense of belonging, under the immense psychological pressure, which comes from her realization of her duty towards her lands. Fleur’s stay at Argus, her attempted rape, and much disdainful return to the reservation all these plot movements are initiated by the spatial powers of space and place. The biographical events that take place between Fleur’s return from Argus to the occupation of Fleur’s land by the lumbering company reveal a complex and intriguing interplay of the politics of space and place.

## **Conclusion**

A careful reading of the major events reveals that Erdrich invests immense energy in describing the geography of all those places, which initiates the plot movements; this description is aimed at highlighting the eminence of space over character. For instance, Kozak's Meats is described with minute details to set the tone for the space to become active and further the plot movement. The episode portrays Fleur and the three men, mere subservient actors acting under the great force of place were compelled to perform as they were dictated. The essence of the selected fiction lies in the character's submissiveness to action under the enormous power of space. In other words, it is the extent of human subordination to the immense spatial energy of these places, which subsequently provides essential indices to measure the role of space in literary works. Nonetheless, characters in the story move through spaces, documenting the spatial experiences of existential outsidership and insidership. The interplay of the submissive and passive attitude

of space makes the character endure these different forms of spatial existence. Every time the protagonist enters a space or place, the identity of the character changes with respect to the place. In other words, identity does not remain intact; rather, it changes according to the spatial structure where the individual exists. Therefore, when Fleur reaches Argus, we observe a multitude of changes in her attitude, and she wears a new identity. The "feverish" and "wild as a filthy wolf, a big bony girl whose sudden bursts of strength and snarling cries" (Erdrich, 1987, p.3) terrify people at her family cabin, becomes silent and refuses to talk to people at Argus (Erdrich, 1987, p.15). Even Fleur's magical powers lose their strength at Argus, the medicinal powers through which she avoids the Agents who visit her cabin to demand an allotment fee on her family allotments, she makes them lost in the forests and eat roots and gamble with the ghosts (Erdrich, 1987, p.9). Being out of her place, Fleur is unable to use her magic to have a "freak deal or even anything above a straight" (Erdrich, 1987, p.21).



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