

Native American Historicity: Social and Cultural Embedment in Erdrich's Tracks

Abstract

What characterizes the nature of Native American literature and history produced in the last several decades is their being guided by Native American mythology. The mythical stories in Native American fiction are the embedment of social and cultural aspects of the indigenous society. Hence, the study demits Louise Erdrich's Tracks (1988) to demonstrate the Native American historicity – the social and cultural embedment – in which the mythical stories of the text were (re)produced. To explain the historicity of Tracks (1988) the study applies Louise Montrose's 'historicity of text' that argues the role of literature to locate the historicity – social and cultural embedment – in which it was written. To follow arguments of the 'historicity of text', the study traces the historicity – social and cultural embedment – of Chippewa Anishinaabe in Tracks (1988). The analysis of the study explains Native American truths of the beginning of life, multicultural aspects of native life, the empirical stance of magical realities, cosmopolitan ideologies, and profound changes in the Native American demographics, culture, epistemologies and politics. To explain them the study discusses Native American culture of ceremonies, vision quests, spiritual powers of medicine men and women, interspecies communication and transformation in Tracks (1988).

Keywords: *Historicity, Native American fiction, Vision quests, Medicine man, Interspecies communication, Ceremony.*

INTRODUCTION

The post-1960 is considered the beginning of Native American literary and political achievements. The period is publicized as Native American Renaissance that is defined as “a written renewal of oral traditions translated into Western literary forms” (Lincoln, 1985, p. 8). N. Scott Momaday's novel *House Made of Dawn* (1968) is

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usually perceived the first breakthrough of Native American struggle regarding their cultural regarding their cultural sovereignty. But there are many Native American works of pre- sovereignty. But there are many Native American works of pre-1960 that also promote Indian culture. *A Son of the Forest* (1829) by William Apes, *The Life of Black Hawk* (1833) by the Sauk leader Black Hawk, *Life Among the Piutes: Their Wrongs and Claims* (1883) by Sarah Winnemucca, a Paiute. *The Life and Adventures of Joaquin Murieta* (1854) by John Rollin Ridge and *The Surrounded* (1936) by McNickle are some of them. This exposes the long struggle of Native Americans to convince the Euro-Americans to accept them. This continuous struggle provides Native American writers like Sherman Alexie, Leslie Marmon Silko, James Welch, Joy Harjo, Simon J. Ortiz, Thomas King, Louise Erdrich and Gerald Vizenor **strength** to talk on Indians issues. Given Native American Enlightenment (1960s) the Euro-American literary cannons agreed on the sovereignty of Native American literature and, unconsciously, the culture as well which it was the literature of. The literary movement of the enlightened phase reflects Indians self-determination because it raises the issues against the suppression and displacement (Krupat, 1992, p. 5) and proves Indian literature a key source of the agency Indian. Thus, Native American literature, followed by its oral tradition, survives its cultural norms that define the tribal history – social and cultural values. Native American writers not only interpret the tribal realities but also point out their misrepresentation because they know that struggling against the imperial authority means to challenge the ‘transcendental signified’ of the western cultural sovereignty around which the whole western truth is constructed.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature in all its forms is the reflection of contemporary social order and, therefore, offers a significant knowledge of the past in which it was produced. Regarding the cultural presentation of Native American literature, the writers like David Treuer, Ojibwa, does not acknowledge the approach of Native American writers. He is not satisfied even with his own identity as Native American writer, “therefore, asking that his own work be judged not on the grounds of any supposed recovery of traditional Ojibwe culture but on how his writing meets the standards of excellence regularly applied to all fiction” (qtd. in Kroeber, 2008, p. 388). Treuer admits Native American writers as literary figures and acknowledges the excellency of their works but does not okay their identity as Native American writers. In his book *Native American Fiction: A User's Manual* (2006) he argues that Native American writers are talking about the culture that is not present today and that is perceived through the oral tradition and storytelling which are not believable because of their mythical tales (Treuer, p. 39). Treuer argues that the literary works of Native American writers should not be welcomed as the true representatives of native culture. He explains that these writers who claim to be Native Americans should be treated like other modern

writers because their literary works are also embedded in modern techniques and ways of expressions. He justifies his arguments with his criticism on the notable Native American figures like Louise Erdrich, Leslie Marmon Silko and James Welch. He argues that in Erdrich's *Love Medicine* the traditional norms of Ojibwe society were not effectively presented. He declares that the novel is successful for its fine structure which is modern and not for the cultural presentation of Indian society. According to him, the story of Erdrich's novel does not express any cultural mode rather it only expresses the Erdrich's "longing for traditional Ojibwe culture" that has been declined for a long time ago (Treuer, 2006, p. 39). He also passes comments on Silko's *Ceremony* (1977) and James Welch's *Fools Crow* (1986) and argues that "they tell us little about traditional Pueblo or Blackfoot cultures but they strongly evoke nostalgia for these vanished life ways" (Treuer 2006, p. 137). For Treuer, the current scenario of Native American culture is quite different from the ancient Native American world. The only witnesses of these cultural norms are the stories that, for Treuer, are not valid or logical. For him, Native American writers do not live in those stories, therefore, their protagonists are like them, **mixed** blood and show the contamination of true Native American cultural presentation. Treuer claims that Native American writers do not belong to what they call Native American culture, therefore, cannot enhance the true sense of Native American cultural norms in their writings. He argues that the gloomy settings of Native American literary stories describe that Native American writers themselves know about the decline of Native American culture.

Karl Kroeber (2008) argues that the criticism on Native American fiction regarding their culture ultimately acknowledges Native American literary "authenticity – the accuracy with which they represent the authors' traditional cultures" (p. 388). John Kalb (2008) appreciates Treuer's criticism on the modern critics for their focus on the term 'Native' rather than 'fiction'. He, however, criticizes Treuer for his approach that there is no Native American literature. He argues that Treuer "overlooks [the point] that such literature is sometimes best served when studied within the context of other works that reflect similar worldviews and thematic concerns" (Kalb, 2008, p. 114). Therefore, he rejects Treuer's stance about the works of Silko, Welch and other Native American writers. For instance, he does not accept Treuer's criticism on Welch's *Fools Crow* (1986) as the novel is **historically** inscribed by an inside point of view. Kalb argues that "Treuer reduces the historical novel to a quaint descendant of the 19th century literary imagination" (Kalb, 2008, p. 115). On the other hand, Treuer, according to Kalb, confines the true meanings of Silko's *Ceremony* (1977) and reduces the whole description of ceremony only in a reflection of Freudian talk (Kalb, 2008, p. 116). Kalb's argument about Treuer's scholarship reveals the fact that scholars like Treuer criticize the Native American cultural literary works only for the

sake of criticism and do not know the true facts about the mythical and historical significance of Native American stories.

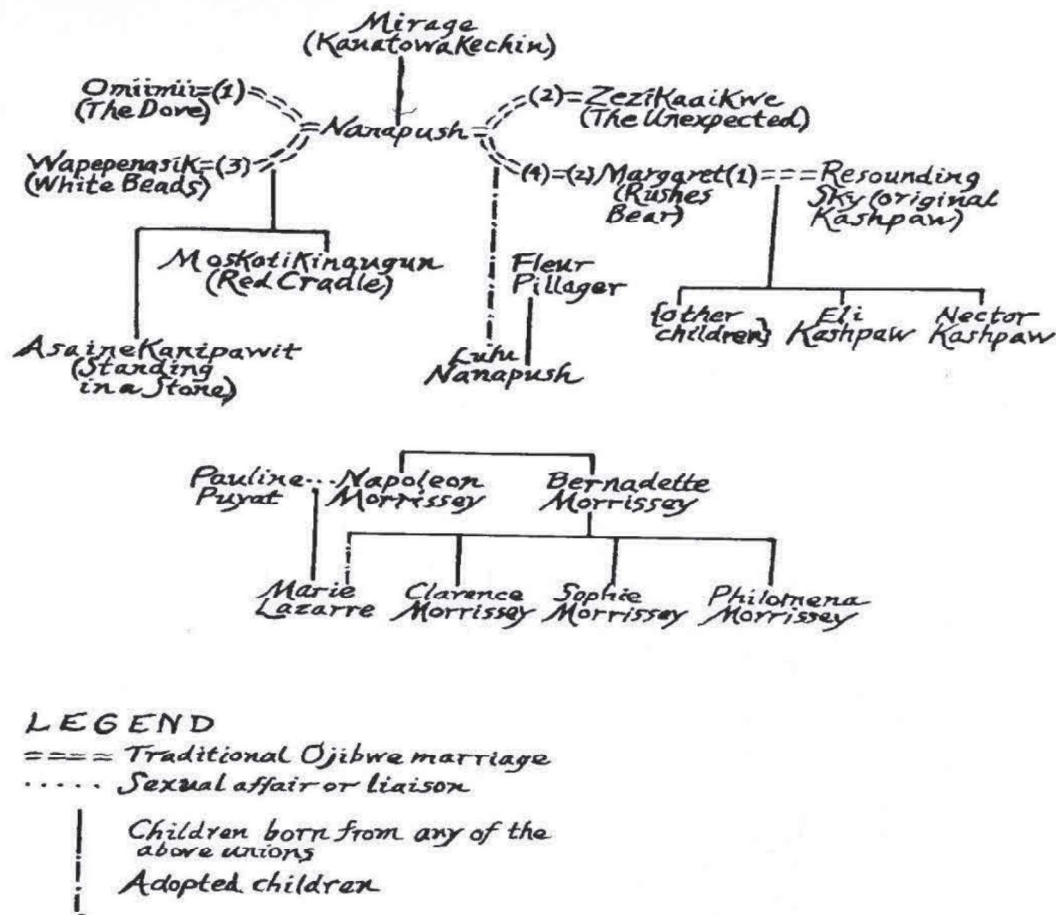
Thomas Mails and Dan Evehema question the criticism that Native American writers are talking about the culture once existed. They argue that the scholars who claim that Native American cultural norms are only in their stories never visited North America where native people of America can “be found who in many ways live as their ancestors did a thousand and more years ago” (Mails and Evehema, 1996, p. 131). They point out the ways of living of Hopi tribe that are very much similar to Native American old ways of living. They claim that the Hopi people are still practicing their own religion and by 1955 the numbers of convertor are less than two percent. For **them**, no doubt there is a change, with the passage of time, in Hopi religion but it is still decidedly Hopi and the old ways and the traditional religion are alive and thriving and the people have been living for, perhaps, a thousand years: they still speak their own language, still preserve traditional subsistence activities, traditional authority systems, and traditional moral values (Mails and Evehema, 1996, p. 131). The arguments of Mails and Evehema also point out the ignorance of those scholars (like Treuer) who talk about the vanished or declined Native American culture.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This qualitative-cum-descriptive and analytical research is related with Louise Montrose’s theorization of new historicism. Montrose argues that all the literary and non-literary texts are the production and producer of their histories or historicity – social and cultural embedment – therefore, literature like history is also a source of history of the time in which it was produced. He argues that the author thinks and creates in social environment, thus, his imagination and creation is social rather than individual. The negotiations and contests of his imagination are social because they do not build up in his mind in his private chamber but in the presence of materials and sources and aspirations that are already constructed by a society (Greenblatt, 1988, p. viii). “A literary text”, according to Montrose, therefore, “cannot be considered apart from the society that produced it: a literary text is another form of social significance which is produced by the society and in return is active in reshaping the culture of that society” (Montrose, 1989, p. 24).

Native American Social and Cultural Tracks in *Tracks* (1988)

Tracks (1988) is the third loop of the quartet: *Love Medicine* (1984 – revised edition 1993), *The Beet Queen* (1986), *Tracks* (1988) and *Bingo Palace* (1994) but given the chronological happenings it comes first in the tetralogy. The novel is an (in-)dependent unit regarding its characterization and plot. The story encompasses the culture of Chippewa reservation from 1912 to 1924 but the family-tree in the introduction of the story describes the culture beyond the time range of twelve years.



(Erdrich, 1988, p. iv)

This family-tree, like Native American culture and stories gradually grows in the other novels of the tetralogy. The twigs of the family-tree and the stories in the tetralogy "[a]re all attached, and ... hooked from one side to the other, mouth to tail" (Erdrich, 1988, p. 46) and continue the ancient cultural norms. The native and mixed blood characters of the family-tree classify the individuality and the hybridity of Chippewa community. Erdrich adapts modern technique of magic realism to express the cultural hybridity. Regarding magic realism, the multifaceted description of the acculturation underlines the cohesion of the natural and spiritual happenings. Euro-American scholars relate the term 'magical realism' with the presentation of the supernatural elements by the writer's imagination whereas what is imagination for Euro-American intellectuals is reality for Native American writers. Therefore, Erdrich argues that the magical episodes of *Tracks* (1988) are not the imagination of her mind: "the events people pick out as magical don't seem unreal to me. Unusual, yes" (Chavkin and Chavkin, 1994, p. 221). This is the main argument of this study that what is mythical or magical for the European scholars is the truth for the Native Americans as the spiritual culture in *Tracks* (1988) are the facts of Erdrich's inheritance.

Erdrich uses magic realism as a tool to define the coexistence of the natural and supernatural elements in Native American spiritual world. Both the narrators Nanapush and Pauline define the fusion of the natural and supernatural elements on similar levels (Genette, 1988, p. 8) that validate the reality of (super-) natural world. The beginning of the novel unfolds Nanapush's Anishinaabe memories about his deceased family. Most of them died of sickness caused by consumption that they received from intruders during the 1912 wintertime. The realistic details of the ailment and its results are merged with Chippewa three-day death road and mythical stories of the ghosts that reside in the clumps of the trees. The narrator's discourse reveals that native people of Chippewa equally talk to living creature or dead and no one asks any rationality of this way of communication. Similarly, the dead follow the livings for their bad behavior during their lives. For instance, the death of Pukwan, the policeman, according to Nanapush, was the result of his misbehaving with the dead bodies of the Pillager family. Incinerating Pillager's property was not his own decision, the government Agency made the police burn down the properties of all who died of consumption. But he went down because he ignored the traditional ways of dealing with the burial ceremonies of the dead bodies especially of those who belonged to the powerful clans of holy person: "He carefully nailed up the official quarantine sign, and then, without removing the bodies, he tried to burn down the house" (Erdrich, 1988, p. 3). The unhappy spirits saved the house from fire. There is no Nanapush's credible clarification of how Pillager's shack was saved from fire because the belief of native community that did not need a clarification of Nanapush about the power of the Pillagers. So, he, instead of explaining the incident, just informs about the Pukwan's miserable death that seems to be the ultimate result of the healers' curse. Pukwan "came home, crawled into bed, and took no food from that moment until his last breath passed" (Erdrich, 1988, p. 4). Erdrich presents the incident in a causative way that the death of the policeman leads to the power of healers' curse. The mode of narration is spontaneous and the assimilation of natural and supernatural worlds are described with such perfection that there is no choice except to believe.

The best example of *spiritual powers* in Chippewa community is Fleur Pillager, the medicine woman and one of the last two Pillager survivors. She is the metaphor of Native American waning culture; she had to sell off her lands but did not quit the place. Her presence in Chippewa made the people afraid and satisfied, simultaneously: they were afraid of her magical powers against them and satisfied at her presence against the lumber company that gradually grabbed their lands. Chippewa and Pillagers influence each other as the absence of one weakens the other. For instance, when Fleur came back from Argues, "[t]he dust on the reservation stirred. Things hidden were free to walk" (Erdrich, 1988, pp. 34, 35); and when the lumber company cleared the land she left the place. "After [the people] knew Fleur

was gone, and there was no telling when and if she would ever return" (Erdrich, 1988, p. 225), they accepted their decline because the community believed that the lumber company could only be stopped by her. The people related the company's heavy loss of the mysterious deaths of its employees with Fleur: "One was killed that way when two oxen lurched eagerly in their traces, and the wood fell from the unsecured hatch. A white man lost an eye when a splinter of wood spun off his axe. Two others perished, fallen from lake barge" (Erdrich, 1988, p. 217). The nature of the employees' deaths or sufferings is causative, but the timing of the incidents strengthens their beliefs in the Pillagers.

In *Tracks* (1988), Fleur's involvement in various mythical matters refers to *the ancient belief system* of the Anishinaabe community. For instance, the community believed that whenever Fleur took a bath in the lake, she became the bride of Misshepesu who took her into deep water. When Fleur was fifteen, she was found unconscious on the lakeshore. No one dared to touch her "dull dead gray [body] but when George Many Woman bent to look closer, he saw her chest move. Then her eyes spun open, clear black agate, and she looked at him. 'You take my place,' she hissed" (Erdrich, 1988, p. 11). The community believed that George Many Woman, a local man, was chosen to replace her on the death road and he would die instead of Fleur. The concept is hard to believe in however Many Woman's immediate death validates the truth of the prophecy: in the "tin bathtub ... he slipped, got knocked out, and breathed water while his wife stood in the other room frying breakfast" (Erdrich, 1988, p. 11). Similarly, whenever she was saved from drowning in the lake of Matchimanito the savors became the victim of Misshepesu's wrath. The two men who saved her from drowning, when she was a child, "disappeared. The first wandered off and the other, Jean Hat, got himself run over by his own surveyor's cart" (Erdrich, 1988, p. 10). Here, Fleur's magical powers – her affiliation with natural and supernatural world, with water and with its monster, Misshepesu – are defined in a realistic way as the incidents of the disappearance or death of various characters is realistic in nature, however, the connection and occurrence of these happenings according to the Chippewa beliefs make them magical and explain the primitive belief system of American aboriginal community.

To make Fleur more mysterious, Erdrich does not make her a narrator and unfolds her character by the narratives of Nanapush and Pauline. Her character is built up in the traditional belief system of the Anishinaabe community. She stays silent or hardly talks to other characters thus increasing the mysteriousness of her nature. In Chippewa community medicine men and women do not speak about their powers; it is the community that tells their involvement in the spiritual happenings. Hence, it is Chippewa that talk about Fleur's powers to bless or harm someone, her filiations with the lake monster, her power to make Boy Lazarre mentally sick for spying her. The

community “imagined that Fleur had caught Lazarre watching and tied him up, cut his tongue and, then sewn it in reversed” as a penalty (Erdrich, 1988, p. 49). The community beliefs were so strong that Fleur’s husband, Eli Kashpaw, was also afraid of her relationship with Misshepeshu and was expecting a child with “strange and fearful, bulging eyes, maybe with a split back tail” (Erdrich, 1988, p. 108). The maturity in spiritual belief system leads the idea that the hurricane which blows down Argus, the place where Fleur works, was the result of her curse on the three male colleagues who raped her for disruption of their card-game. The curse became the tornado that raged the city: it turned the color of the sky, cluttered a herd of cattle that were into the air like gigantic birds without dung with opened mouths. The air was heavy with so many things: a lighted candle, tables, and napkins, jackets on hangers, eyeglasses, garden tools, hams, a lampshade, a checkerboard, “everything in Argus fell apart and got turned upside down, smashed, and thoroughly wrecked”. (Erdrich, 1988, p. 28) Such hurricanes are frequent routine matter in different parts of America but Fleur’s involvement in producing the tornado becomes the belief when the whole community remains safe from the havoc of the tornado except the two who were involved in Fleur’s rape. Even the butcher’s place, where they got shelter in the meat storeroom, was not severely wrecked “for the back rooms where Fritzie and Pete lived were undisturbed. Fritzie said the dust still coated her china figures” (Erdrich, 1988, p. 29).

Erdrich presents the supernatural incidents realistically. One did not need the justification of the death of the men frozen in the meat freezer. The community related it with the tornado as the outer lock of the freezer was locked, wedged down, and assumed to be the result of the “tornado's freak whim” (Erdrich, 1988, p. 30). On the other side, the misery of Dutch James, the third who unfortunately survived the wrath of the hurricane, confirmed the magical powers of Fleur: “Dutch James rotted in the bedroom, sawed away, piece by piece. First the doctor took one leg mostly off, then the other foot, an arm up to the elbow. His ears wilted off his head” (Erdrich, 1988, p. 62). Hence, the involvement of spiritual powers in the incidents seems to be real regarding the Anishinaabe belief system.

Fleur collected many *medicine plants* for the cure of various diseases. Pauline, while finding a medicine plant on Fleur’s request, described her medicine collection: “Plant after plant! Some were shaped like man’s forked legs and some were rolled in balls. Some were wrapped tight in reeds and some were strewn about, careless, gathered from the woods or shore or the bottom of the lake” (Erdrich, 1988, p. 156). Being the custodians of their natural world, the native people know the healing power of various plants and animals. The Pillagers in *Tracks* (1988) were well-known medicine family “who knew the secrete ways to cure” (Erdrich, p. 2). Defining the role of medicine men and women in Chippewa community, Erdrich describes the

nature of the Native American ways of being. The people in Chippewa visit the medicine men and women in their ailments and do “not want the off-reservation doctor whom [they] could not trust” (Erdrich, 1988, p. 168). However, the medicine men and women do not always use their medicines for good purposes. Fleur, for instance, used the medicine for taking revenge from those whom she dislikes the most. No doubt the death of Lazarre boy was for his mother Morrissey's bite, but “[f]or days after, Lazarre babbled and wept. Fleur was murdering him by use of bad medicine” (Erdrich, 1988, p. 120) as revenge for spying on her meetings with the water monster. Similarly, Moses Pillager, Fleur's cousin, also gave Pauline a love medicine which she used against Sophie to get sexual pleasures. The medicine men in Chippewa are more open than medicine women: Fleur, unlike Moses, was not a community doctor. She made these medicines only for herself as during her second pregnancy, “[s]he cooled some of the medicine in her mouth and tried to give it to the baby” (Erdrich, 1988, p. 158).

The use of traditional medicines is a customary practice in Native American world but the knowledge of the plants as medicine is not common among the people. In *Tracks* (1988), Pauline, many times, felt helpless to cure the common diseases: “If I had known [plants] I would have purged my own body ... I could not remember the plant's configuration, even though its use was common enough for bleeding problems” (Erdrich, pp. 132, 156). The plants or animals opened their medicines to those who respected nature and in return the medicine men or women enjoyed respect in their community. It does not mean that they also enjoy good health all the time as, despite being a medicine woman, Fleur herself was severely sick and needed a *ceremony* — a ritual conducted to cure a severe disease or for the retrieval of lost valuable things. Nanapush was worried about her health and requested Moses, the only trusted medicine man after Fleur, to perform a ceremony for her cure. Hence, Moses built a traditional tent “*cut willows and shaped them into a frame for [the] tent of blankets and skins*” (Erdrich, 1988, p. 189, emphasis added). The practice is real as all its objects are natural and found in the market but the nature of the ceremony is spiritual for its call to a spirit who can cure or tell the medicine for the cure of Fleur. Erdrich does not describe the presence of the ceremony-spirit but Fleur is better now that hints the power of the ceremony.

Most of the magical or spiritual powers medicine men and women achieve through the *vision quests* — a practice of calling spirits through fasting. In *Tracks* (1988), Moses, even in his childhood, struggled to call the holy spirits. He “took the charcoal from his mother's hand too often. He blackened his face and *fasted for visions* until he grew gaunt, but he found no answer” (Erdrich, 1988, p. 36, emphasis added). It shows the nature of the vision quest that even the powerful clan like Pillagers could not get the node of spirits so easily. Nanapush also describes his experience of the

vision quests that shows that the common people also experience the vision quest to become the medicine men or women. It makes them respectful in the community. Nanapush got a call from the spirit that told him the secrets of the plants and, hence, his family was one of the sacred clans of Chippewa. But he did not get the call immediately: "When I first dreamed the method of doing this, I got rude laughter. I got jokes about little boys playing with fire. But *the person who visited my dreams told me what plants to spread*" (Erdrich, 1988, p. 188, emphasis added). His clan was not as powerful as the pillagers hence he asked the help of Moses who told him how to follow the instruction of the spirit to burn the sickness. In the practice of the vision quest Fleur was the strongest medicine woman. The destruction of the land, however, weakened her and she, with the natural creatures, left the industrial land: when Nanapush was disappointed to get their lands back from the lumber company he urged Fleur to save the lands but her cold response made him upset: "Fleur had not saved us with her dream, and it now seemed what was happening was so ordinary that it fell beyond her abilities" (Erdrich, 1988, pp. 176, 177). It shows that the bond of medicine men or women with their natural world makes them natural too. The western scholars do not understand the nature of Native American social order therefore negates the reality of this type of relationship between man and nature.

Besides plants, the medicine men and women have the associations with birds and animals who offer their friendship to the persons who love them most. According to Chippewa traditional beliefs, the medicine clans can talk to birds and animals and acquire their shape to get healing powers. In *Tracks* (1988), Erdrich reveals the *interspecies communication or transformation* to validate Anishinaabe traditional belief system. She describes the assimilation of (wo)man and animal in a sequence: 1) describes the characters' love for natural creatures; 2) presents them through animal imagery; 3) and reveals their power of interspecies communication; 4) and transformation. The step by step demonstration from natural to supernatural is to make sense of the mythical beliefs of Chippewa society. The first glimpse of Fleur in Argus, while she was boiling animals' heads at butcher's shop, was that of a water goddess as she wore a green dress "drenched, wrapped her like a transparent sheet. A skin of lake weed. Black snarls of veining clung to her arms. Her braids were loose, half unraveled, tied behind her neck in a thick loop" (Erdrich, 1988, p. 22).

The next fight scene between Fleur and Lily, one of the four persons who raped Fleur, turned the goddess image to an animal image. Lily treated her as a butcher treated to an animal that showed that animal and woman dissolved in one body. Lily grabbed her kinked tail with all his force. "Then his arms swung and flailed. She sank her black fangs into his shoulder, clasp him, dancing him forward and backward through the pen. Their steps picked up pace, went wild" (Erdrich, 1988, p. 25). The

animal imagery described in the rape scene leads to Fleur's factual relationship with bears or wolves.

The Chippewa community claimed her power of transformation into a bear at night. However, the mythical transformation is realistic in description as nobody saw her in the phase of transformation. The people just reported the tracks of her bare feet in the dust or snow as they "saw where they changed, where the claws sprang out the pad broadened and pressed into the dirt. By night [they] heard her chuffing cough, the bear cough" (Erdrich, 1988, p. 12). These proofs were enough to satisfy the natives who did not need any explanation of their beliefs. However, the birth of Lulu clearly defines Fleur's bear-power as "*the bear heard Fleur calling, and answered ... She sniffed the ground, rolled over in an odor that pleased her, drew up and sat on her haunches like a dog*" (Erdrich, 1988, p. 59, emphasis added). It created tension for the other characters present at that time: Margaret thought of Fleur's gun but she could not reach it, she shouted at Nanapush to shoot the bear but he was empty-handed. The magical appearance of bear creates a real situation of tension as the bear could be dangerous for all of them and especially for the child. But it did not harm anyone and disappeared after Fleur gave birth to a baby girl. Hence, Nanapush thought, it could have been a spirit bear. Similarly, Erdrich reveals Moses' love for animals as he lived with them. It was Father Damien who first informed that "Fleur's cousin Moses was alive in the woods. Numb, stupid as bears in a winter den" (Erdrich, 1988, p. 7). Living in the forest made him fit as he felt happy among the natural creatures especially with cats. In Native American society, the association with animals becomes the identity of medicine men and women. The people can identify the nature of their medicine with their association with specific plants and animals. People get the stink of animals and come to know of their presence: "Fleur was standing by the front door. [Nanapush] smelled the sharp, sour warmth of cats, and knew Moses had walked behind [him] and was hiding" (Erdrich, 1988, p. 221). This association of medicine men and women with natural creature is the locus of Native American society.

CONCLUSION

The critical analysis of the mythical elements in *Tracks* (1988) explains the Native American historicity – social and cultural embedment. Erdrich uses modern techniques to blur the boundaries of microcosmic and macrocosmic rituals to explain the reality of Native American society. The concept of magical realism in *Tracks* (1988) is used differently from Euro-American scholarship to make the unbelievable believable thus validating Anishinaabe social and cultural history. The stories of supernatural elements – the ghosts, spirits, dead ones, and magical powers of medicine clans, healing powers of medicine wo/men, vision quests, ceremonies, interspecies communication and transformation – as the embodiments of the Native

American past are linked with its memory and cultural history. The study discusses some of these supernatural entities to retrieve the historicity – social and cultural embedment – of the mythical stories of *Tracks* (1988) in which these stories were (re)produced. Therefore, it retrieves that Indians' traditional life defines the traditional belief system that was based on the spiritual and healing powers of medicine wo/men, vision quests, ceremonies, interspecies communication and transformation. Through his storytelling, Nanapush hands the cultural history of supernatural beings and unusual visions to his granddaughter and the readers and, in that way, keeps Chippewa history alive.

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