

**Re-imagining the Native Americans in the Wake of 'Black Lives Matter' Movement
through Louise Erdrich's *The Round House***

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Abstract

This paper intends to examine the Native American socio-cultural-juridical reality embodied in Louise Erdrich's *The Round House* (2013). In the wake of Black Lives Matter movement in the USA and across the globe around the tragic death of George Floyd, there engenders waves of protest against racial injustice. Discrimination on the basis of one's skin colour or other racial specificities received a big 'no' from the people belonging to different walks of life globally. In such a scenario how do the indigenous Indians in the USA and in the pan-American context live? Do they not undergo the racial, cultural, social, juridical and economic injustice? The black lives matter and they should matter. The Africans have significantly contributed to the growth and development of America. But the Native American lives do matter too. They are the ones who also have equally, and may be more, undergone the brutal episodes of history. With the Europeanization of the Americas, the indigenous Native Americans were reduced to an invisible minority. The variant of racism they were subjected to was dissipated in the seemingly multicultural bandwagon of contemporary America. This paper, therefore, specifies its focus on the discrimination against the indigenous Indians shared by Erdrich. In such a discriminatory atmosphere native women become easy victims of racism. By narrating an act of violence she puts spotlight on the underlying Native American reality against the much-hyped eclectic structure of American society.

Keywords: Native Americans, Louise Erdrich, juridical indifference, violence, victimhood, racism, American grand narrative

Introduction

Commenting on the systemic racism that prevails in the contemporary USA, Toluse Olorunnipa and Griff Witte (2020) write in the context of the tragic death of George Floyd: 'The picture that emerges is one that underscores how systemic racism has calcified within many of America's institutions...'. Racism seems not a reality that was buried in the past. It resurfaces. Floyd became a victim of that resurfacing. Black lives matter. Inarguably they do. What about the Native Americans? They do matter too. This paper does not go deep into the details of racism against the Afro-Americans. It describes the nature of racism that prevails in the USA manifest in Louise Erdrich's *The Round House* (2013). Looking into what happened to Floyd and whose death could enrage the Afro-Americans, who are a significant community in the USA having decisive political clout and electoral impact, to the proportion of a global movement, the Native Americans may have been subjected to such treatment.

Erdrich addresses the issues of racism that affects the lives of the Native Americans and primarily of native women. The story of *The Round House* revolves around the rape of a native woman named Geraldine. Erdrich emphasises on the indifferent judiciary going dismissive' deploying deceptively sleek legality, to an act of rape perpetrated on a native woman. The era of colonisation and forced slavery is over. To live with dignity is the most fundamental assurance that democracy ensures today. But it seems just a fairy tale reality for the Native Americans as discussed in Louise Erdrich's *The Round House*. Erdrich herself is partly indigenous. She explores the hard reality of existence in the American reservation territory federally sanctioned to the residual communities of the indigenous Indians. Her narrative demonstrates the bleak social picture that stands contrary to the most celebrated American grand narrative. The American constitutional advocacy of 'life, liberty and pursuit of happiness', however promising and most emphatic in the American social ethos, hardly extend to the American Indians. The image of the modern rich America and its professed doctrines of democracy, liberalism, humanism, multiculturalism, individualism, secularism and opulence conceal in the basement of its history the facts of domination, discrimination and forceful occupation of the land of the indigenous Americans.

From Erdrich it becomes apparent that the trail of discriminatory past still continues. It seems in the age of inclusive America, the native residue still feels legally unprotected. Erdrich (2013a) brings to light the untold story of violence against native women: 'More than 80 percent of sex crimes on reservations are committed by non-Indian men, who are immune from prosecution by tribal courts'. To add to this, the recent discovery of the remains of 215 children at the former Kamloops Indian Residential School, Canada is an indication of what the Native Indians irrespective of their age may have gone through (CBC, 2021). This paper therefore discusses American exceptionalism, racism, cultural digestion, justice, bureaucracy and boarding school reality. These areas which the paper includes are determined by reading of Erdrich's *The Round House* and the scope of her work demands such engagement.

American Exceptionalism

At the helm of Erdrich's narrative stands the story of Joe's mother Geraldine who was raped. Joe being the son of a tribal judge shares his father's investigative ingenuity and tact and traces the rapist. Between the event of assault and tracing the perpetrator of the sexual violence, the narrative of Erdrich covers the socio-political-juridical reality of native Indians. This paper therefore addresses the immanent contradiction between the proposed and professed American grand narrative of exceptionalism and its inherent hollowness. Do the indigenous people of America share the same vision of exceptionalism? The image painted over a shaky and unforgivably dark historical foundation does not display perfection. Louis Althusser (2012:131) brings out the shifting and extremely malleable nature of ideology: 'Those who are in ideology believe themselves by definition outside ideology: one of the effects of ideology is the practical denegation of the ideological character of ideology by ideology: ideology never says, 'I am ideological''. Erdrich exposes in her narrative the ideological essence of the American grand narrative and the attempts to smoothen up the post-discovery American history. Dorothy Ross (1995:652) explains the precise nature of American grand narrative:

The grand narrative that structured American historiography in the nineteenth century was composed of two closely intertwined strands. One was the story of Western progress, a liberal story of growing commercial development, representative political institutions based on democratic consent, and the advance and diffusion of knowledge... The second was the liberal/ republican story of American exceptionalism which seated world progress in the American nation.

The remaking of the New World fundamentally antithetical to its Anglo-Saxon heritage invigorated by the protestant 'call' hides the ills of Europeans. Her definition of American grand narrative is also illustrative of its mythic and political orientation. Moreover, since the authorship of history of America was largely taken over by the Euro-American historians, the native reality was distorted. This has been quite well-articulated by Wilcomb E. Washburn and Bruce G. Trigger (1996:61): '... history derive largely from the non-Native side and are subject to the distortions, misconceptions, biases, and ignorance...'.

The bottom-up approach of American historiography seems to coincide with the American Civil Rights Movement, popularity of post-modern discourse and cold-war revisionism and Native American Renaissance. The incredulity towards meta-narrative and historiographical grand projections finds the most direct critique in Jean-Francois Lyotard's definition of postmodernism as 'incredulity toward metanarratives. This incredulity is undoubtedly a product of progress in the sciences ...' (Lyotard, 1985:xxiv). The scientific approach to history exposes the narrative content of America exceptionalism. Post-modernism as an intellectual discourse seems to have given enough intellectual impetus for the promotion

of bottom-up approach to history. It unleashes the disenchantment effects against those enchanted forms of history which narrated the exceptional aspects tactically sidelining the non-amplified dimensions of human reality. The exceptionalist historiography of America puts the reality of American Indians in sidelines as insignificant aspects. Such sidelining serves the purpose of centralising the grand narrative. The lens of incredulity taken from the postmodern intellectual heritage helps the American Indian writers to expose the mythic makeover of American historiography.

The narrative formation which gradually took its shape as American meta-narrative seems to have had its anchorage in power centres. In this context Michel Foucault (1995: 27) seems to be right when he establishes the knowledge-power nexus: '... power produces knowledge ... there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does presuppose or constitute at the same time power relations'. But the same Foucault raises the alarm concerning the side effects of power: 'Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power' (1978, 95). By resisting power the rebel becomes powerful and there is no escaping from power. In the same fashion, by resisting the settlers' narrative Erdrich's explanation of native reality receives force. She also shows the obvious parody embodied in the rhetorical flourish of the Declaration of Independence, 1776 - the 'inalienable rights' - 'life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness'. Sherman Alexie (2013: 49) writes: 'They're all gone, my tribe is gone. Those blankets they gave us, infected with smallpox, have killed us. I'm the last, the very last, and I'm sick, too'. The Protestant mission of conquest and Christianization of the native digested the native Indian cultures. The compulsory Christianization of Native Indians by successful persuasion against the prevailing paganism or coercion against the obstinates unleashed the process of cultural digestion. Nicholas P. Cushner (2006: 9) explains:

Coercion was not new to western proselytization. Biblical passages and stories were partly at the source of Western religious and cultural aggression. "Go, make disciples of all nations," ... "force them to come in," gave Westerners a religious rationale to use forceful means in the name of God.

Coercion was divinely legitimised. Therefore, violence was militaristically adopted without moral compunction. Those who defied the cultural digestion got strategically neutralised. Treaties were made to acquire access to the faultlines of the fighting groups in order to be conveniently broken. Richard Mace (2013: 162-163) in his review of *The Round House* applauds her impressive research in the area of Federal Indian Law to demonstrate the injustice institutionally committed against the Native Americans:

... 21 U.S. 543, *Johnson v McIntosh*, which argued who were the rightful owners of the land—the Illinois and Piankeshaw nation or the Euroamericans who "discovered" the land—with Supreme Court Chief Justice John Mitchell deciding that the Indigenous nations had nothing more than the rights of occupancy, which stripped them of their land rights; and 435 U.S. 191, *Oliphant v Suquamish*, which states that tribal courts do not have the criminal jurisdiction to prosecute non-Indians unless authorized by Congress to do so. Erdrich utilizes these Supreme Court cases to show that Indians have historically had a tumultuous relationship with the U.S. justice system, which makes the quest for justice all the more difficult.

Racism

Richard J Perry (2007: 02) defines racism: ‘... racism—the grouping of people on the basis of physical appearance for the purpose of social discrimination—is deeply rooted in many societies, particularly in Western Europe and North America’. Gabrielle Berman and Yin Paradies (2008: 217) call ‘racism as that which maintains or exacerbates inequality of opportunity among ethnoracial groups’. On racism against the Native Americans Dwanna L. Robertson (2015: 113-114) writes:

Like other marginalized groups, Natives certainly experience the same covert mechanisms of color-blind racism that limit life opportunities. However, Natives still routinely experience overt racism in the form of racial epithets like “redskin,” “injun,” and “squaw” and horribly distorted depictions of Natives as mascots, reminiscent of the propaganda used against black, Irish, and Jewish people in the nineteenth and twentieth century’s. And this overt racism is not confined to hate groups but is visible in everyday discourse and throughout the media.

In *The Round House* the racial slur against the native becomes evident in Joe’s experience of the same in the hospital where her mother was admitted for emergency treatment. A woman shows her discontent over the fact of the Indian presence in the hospital as she intends not to have any congestion caused by the native communities. Her uncensored reaction seeing the Indians in the hospital speaks substantively of the public permissiveness of the spiteful racial remarks against native minorities: ‘Don’t you Indians have your hospital over there? Aren’t you building a new one?’ (Erdrich 2013b: 8) These racially abusive remarks interpellate Joe to the subject of a subaltern. Louis Althusser (2001:174) defines ‘interpellation’: ‘... ideology ‘acts’ or ‘functions’ in such a way that it ‘recruits’ subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all), or ‘transforms’ the individuals into subjects...’.

Moreover, to be recognized as Indians, they have to keep their records right. They go through several complicated bureaucratic procedures to obtain a certificate which guarantees their claim to the reservation territory. They traverse endless red tape. The process

involves an archival investigation into the concerned person's ancestors signing some treaty or documents with the US government or having been recorded by the US government's census or some other administrative process. The blood quantum that one possesses over the centuries of racial admixture also acts as a decisive determinant to be recognised as a member of some tribe. The claimant is bound to have at least one quarter of Indian blood. Their claim to their land rests on the federal approval. Erdrich (2013b:30) writes:

From the government's point of view, the only way you can tell an Indian as an Indian is to look at that person's history. There must be ancestors from way back who signed some document or were recorded as Indians by the US government, someone identified as a member of a tribe. And then after that you have to look at that person's blood quantum, how much Indian blood they've got that belongs to one tribe.

Coming to the sexual assault on Geraldine in North Dakota, for Bazil, Joe's father, it was hell lot of efforts and hard work to trace the offender. Despite being a prominent member of the legal fraternity it was extremely difficult for Bazil to seek proper legal aid to identify and punish the assaulter. Their tribal identity hindered the very process of reaching the offender. The US attorney gave variety of reasons to escape the application of the legal and procedural rigour to unleash the punitive procedure against the culprit. The Indian rape case seems very normal which hardly triggers outrage. Erdrich suggests here that the legal merit of a case depends on one's racial identity. Bazil left no stone unturned to seek justice for his wife but the deafness of the judicial apparatus frustrated him by its quintessential silence. The tribal police and the federal agent who were assigned the case chose procrastination over decisive action. His travel to Bismark and his meeting with the US attorney who happened to be his friend bred no effective result: 'The problem with most Indian rape cases was that even after there was an indictment the US attorney often declined to take case to trial for one reason or another'(Erdrich, 2013b: 40-41).

While narrating Joe's juvenile reaction to the brutal assault on her mother, Erdrich highlights the most biased juridical history of the USA against the Native Americans. She refers to Cohen Handbook to underline the historical suffering of the Indian tribes. She mentions its 1958 edition. The year 1958 marked ominously the congressional hideous design to terminate the Indian tribes: '... old Cohen *Handbook* at home. There was the 1958 edition, issued during the era when Congress was intent on terminating Indian tribes ...' (Erdrich, 2013b: 41). Moreover, any crime against the non-Indians was normally assumed to have been perpetrated by the Indians. Mob justice was taken to be the immediate response. Erdrich (2008:297) writes: 'In 1911, five members of a family ... were murdered. In the heat of things, a group of men ran down a party of Indians and what occurred was a shameful piece of what was called at the time "rough justice"'. Julie Tharp (2014:26) also agrees with Erdrich of the persistence of racism against native women:

The Round House testifies to the loss of tribal jurisdiction, which has directly affected the ability to protect Native women from sexual and domestic violence. Indeed the legislation makes it difficult to protect all Native people from crimes committed against them by non- Indians, but the complications arising from combined sexism and racism make it even less likely that crimes against Native women will be tried.

Cultural Digestion

The Christian missionary interest in the Americas aided by the protestant enthusiasm over the doctrine of manifest destiny accelerated cultural digestion. The round house exemplifies pagan symbolism. It has been Christianised. It serves merely as a social function hall under direct supervisorship of the church. The pagan cultural institution is reduced to the social gathering hub for community Bible reading and furthering of the Christian ethos. The fear of Christian priests and the BIA superintendent makes the native self-censor their indigenous cultural propensities towards perpetuation of their inherited cultural practices. They hide the water drums, eagle feathers, medicine bags, birch bark scrolls and sacred pipes. These objects signify native culture. They connect the native with their cultural roots. But the cultural urge to retrieve the lost by re-enacting the cultural motifs and modes gets constantly aborted by the vigilant police and religious agencies. Their traditional ways of living and believing were declared retrogressive. The monotheistic cultural architecture of Christianity hardly accommodated the cultural diversity and complex ritualism of the native. The presence of the church father and the BIA superintendent ensured the disintegration of native cultural paradigm: 'By the time the priest or the BIA superintendent arrived, the water drums and eagle feathers and the medicine bags and birchbark scrolls and sacred pipes were in a couple of motorboats halfway across the lake' (Erdrich, 2013b: 60).

Joe being restless to identify the assaulter appeared to be more curious about everything. He listened to the discussions that happened at home about the priest who joined the church in his locality. Being an ex-marine, the priest was assumed to be a trained -killer. The choice of sending the likes of this church father speaks enough of certain design. It was to convert and to ensure the non-revival of old practices. It was to stamp Christianity to the extent of its permanent irreversibility. He had guns in his possession which was extremely unlikely to have had on the part of a Benedictine. He seemed to be more of a control freak than a figure belonging to the church order and having pious religious sensibilities. The one whom he replaced seems to have had the similar sensibility. He wrote scorching letters to the newspapers about the deadly charms of the Metis women. The priest expressed his determination to razor the old ways and habits: 'But the round house. Symbol of the old pagan ways. The Metis women. Setting it all on fire together – the temptation and the crime all burned up as in a fire offering ... oh god' (Erdrich, 2013b: 77). The processes of systematic erasure of Native Indian culture are communicated through the succeeding generations through the form of stories as oral tradition remains prominent among the indigenous

communities. Therefore, stories hold a special significance among the native. For them, the stores are the histories of their people. Their connectedness with the past, however brutal it may be, is established through the stories. Emphasising on the need of telling story for the Native Indians, Erdrich says in an interview:

When both of us look backward we see not only the happiness of immigrants coming to this country, which is part of our background, but we see and are devoted to telling about the lines of people that we see stretching back, breaking, surviving, somehow, somehow, and incredibly, culminating in somebody who can tell a story. (Bonetti, 1988: 98)

Boarding School Reality

The infamous boarding school history of the native children was terrible. They were the Christian correction centres. Coercion was the only recipe. Ignatia Thunder who went to a Catholic boarding school in her early teens found herself completely hardened by the time she completed her schooling. She realised that she had been completely transformed in a negative way: 'She had been to Catholic boarding school but it just hardened her, she said, the way it hardened the priests'(Erdrich, 2013b: 65). A rigid system bred rigid characters. It promoted abrasive and pathological hatred towards the indigenous heritage and culture. It facilitated the colonisation of native mind. It developed a culture of despise. It produced confused pass-outs who found themselves precariously in a limbo of indecision and unnecessarily self-deprecating. They could neither become white by learning the white ways nor remained natives. David Treuer also highlights the dangerous and damaging effects of boarding schools on native Indians: 'Despite the good intentions of progressives (and because of those intentions) significant portions of three entire generations of Indians died in the boarding schools, and countless more were damaged by them'(2019: 157). Moreover, to facilitate cultural digestion the boarding schools seemed to be more effective:

... an educational experiment intended to demonstrate that separating members of the younger generation from their home environment and intensively schooling them in white ways offered a means of obliterating tribal cultures and acculturating a whole race. (Fear- Segal, 2009:26)

In an interview Basil Johnston explains the nature of abuse,

Abuse is too mild a word. It's a violation of the worst kind. It violates not only the body— the flesh— but also the spirit. And you live with this fear of death and fear of being dispatched to Hell. And I thought, and many of us thought, that we were the only victims. (McKegney, 2009: 266)

Such cases of abuse and violence were silently absorbed. There was literally none to run to for safety and escape but consume with pain the abuse and to harden the self. Miriam Schacht (2015: 69) writes: 'The issue of sexual abuse in the schools is a difficult one, surrounded by a great deal of silence'. The recent discovery of the remains of 210 children in an indigenous residential school in Canada entails an episode of horror. This is just one case that came to light. It leaves enough room for speculation as to what may have happened to several others who were part of this boarding school madness.

Justice

The frail demography of the American native entails the history of colonization. To Europeanise the continents the suitable strategy seemed to be the systematic erasure of the native culture, civilisation and people. David E Stannard (1993: 146) calls this tragedy American holocaust:

The worst human holocaust the world had ever witnessed, roaring across two continents non-stop for four centuries and consuming the lives of countless tens of millions of people, finally had levelled off. There was, at last, almost no one left to kill.

Killing by hanging was a recurrent phenomenon. To combat the native resistance, this brutal deterrent was perceived to precipitate fear among the native. Joe while riding bicycle along with his friends reaches the hanging tree. It's a huge oak tree which still stands at the same place to speak the history of killing by hanging. It is infamously called a hanging tree as its branches were the props to kill the native. These killings were done with impunity. The killers never reached the gallows. Joe being a teenager realises the judicial apathy against the native. Joe therefore takes up the task of finding the culprit all by himself without the aid of the police or legal functionaries. History forbids him to rely on the American legal remedy. The colourful prayer flags that the native Anishinnabe community ties around the branches of the oak tree in order to commemorate the dead seem to be a suggestive ritual to protect their collective memory:

We turned down a dirt road and drove until we came to the tree that people call the hanging tree, a huge oak...There were prayer flags, strips of cloth. Red, blue, green, white, the old-time Anishinaabe colors of the directions, according to Randall. Some clothes were faded, some new. This was the tree where those ancestors were hanged. None of the killers ever went on trial. (Erdrich, 2013b:140)

On one hand the USA federal administration, as Erdrich writes, declares the autonomy of the tribes and their territorial sovereignty of the reservation areas but on the other it restricts their autonomy. The tribal reserved territory was a kind of prison. Their religious

rights were shrunk as the evangelists started infesting. They were culturally handcuffed. The department of tribal police scarcely showed any seriousness on crime committed against the native. The callousness from the law enforcing functionaries immunised the sociopaths and racist psychopaths to unleash their criminal instinct.

Soren Bjerke, agent for the FBI, came to interrogate Geraldine to trace the criminal but she decided to remain silent as she knew the ritualism of such investigation. The federal takeover of the civil and criminal matter of tribes, Major Crime Act of 1885, legally debilitated the native to exercise their right to justice. In the absence of tribal self-autonomy, the cases of rape and other criminal activities were normally neglected or legally prolonged. The Public Law 280 exacerbated the Indian reservation life. Bjerke's presence in the Indian land suggests their 'toothless sovereignty'. Here Erdrich (2013b:142) tries to present the cunning of the states which judicially controlled the Indians and their land,

The reason for Bjerke's presence continued on through that rotten year for Indians, 1953, when Congress not only decided to try Termination out on us but passed Public Law 280, which gave certain states criminal and civil jurisdiction over Indian lands within their borders. If there was one law that could be repealed or amended for Indians to this day, that would be Public Law 280.

When the original census was enforced in 1879 for Indians and the Indian lands were declared reserved territories, the census taxonomy along clan, tribe, relationship, native name and language was found to be in a declining state. Many Indians adopted the French and English names and started mimicking the settlers. Many had already adopted Christian names by virtue of conversion. The complex and tangled branching and inter-branching of each bloodline was made easy by choosing Christian names. To cut the bloodlines short the Christian way seemed easy and involved prestige. In the phase of cultural assimilation the native cultural practices were either digested or reduced to mere cultural tokenism. In the absence of an indigenous cultural orbit or magnetism, the Indians accepted the cultural variants made available to them. The census also surfaced many more surprises. It found many children and the names of their parent remained unsuffixed. If those identities were disclosed, the crime committed upon the Indians would be staggering. Children of molestation, rape, adultery, fornication with white farmers, bankers, nun, police, BIA superintendent and priests resurfaced:

Through the generations, we have become an impenetrable undergrowth of names and liaisons. At the tip of each branch of course the children are found, those newly enrolled by their parents, or often a single mother or father, with a named parent on the blank whose identity if known might shake the branches of the other trees. (Erdrich, 2013b: 149)

Bureaucracy

Joe found high profile figures involved in the case. Geraldine knew a file which contained the criminal offences of a few socially recognised personalities. Before she was attacked she received a telephone call and was manifestly worried. Joe just remembered an excerpt of the telephonic conversation. She discussed over phone some file. After that slightly tensed and extremely worried telephonic conversation she drove to her office and on the same day she was taken to the hospital for being sexually assaulted. Erdrich mentions the name of Curtis Yeltow, the governor of South Dakota. By mentioning his name and his dramatic change of heart on the matter of adopting an Indian child she presents certain clues to penetrate the obscurity around assault on Geraldine. But the standing reservation law, Indian Child Welfare Act, restricts him to adopt. Looking at what happened to the Indian children during the boarding school era and devastation of Indian family structure by Christian charity centres and the federal government's uncanny ambition to destroy the socio-cultural fabric of the indigenous Indians, certain laws were legislated to check the rampant adoption drive. Promotion of alcoholism, drug addiction and prostitution was undertaken to implode and self-annihilate the indigenous Indian communities. Geraldine understood this move or charity posturing by the governor as having certain ulterior motive. The same governor who was known for his 'bigoted treatment of Indians' (Erdrich, 2013b) and his dramatic change of heart and his obvious philanthropy put her in serious doubt.

Her suspicion was not without grounds because the same governor was infamous for the public relation stunts by virtue of granting sponsorships, aids and other financial incentives to the Indian school children. His attempt to gain judicial favour for his adoption scheme by placing the case in the court seems to have been proven contrary. In the court of law many questions were arisen on the matter of the child's tribal identity and parental history. Such legal investigation brought to light many issues and out of which some indicated the possibility of rape. As the family ethos stands deplorably low and as indigenous Indians have not come out of the cultural and historical trauma, and as alcoholism and drug- addiction and gambling are exceptionally high as dangerous curatives for forgetting their past and their identity, the Indian women therefore are extremely vulnerable to any exploitation. The identity of mother of the child was gradually established. The caller named Malya, supposedly the mother of the child, pledged to reveal the identity of the child's father if Geraldine met her at the round house. When Geraldine drove fast to reach her, the already planted assailant pounced upon her and demanded some file. Her resistance was responded with sexual assault. From the assailant's abusive expletive it was established that he was indubitably a sadistic sociopath who derived strange delight from inflicting injury upon Indians: 'I suppose I am one of those people who just hates Indians generally and especially for they were at odds with my folks way back...' (Erdrich, 2013b:161)

Joe in his attempt to reach the assailant found it important to know Yeltow. Through Whitey he got to know Yeltow's racial hatred towards the native. The governor's past was extremely sinister. A habitual violator of law was given the highest office to control the activities of the reservation bound Indians. His hatred was not veiled but open. He supported the cause of Christian evangelism and declared the Indian sun dance a form of devil worship. He instituted that special employment drive for the beautiful girls. The Indian girls were preferentially taken and were sexually exploited. Malya Wolfskin belonging to the Ojibwe crow creek clan became a victim. Bribery, threat and murder were the stock options employed to bury the bureaucratic sexual predatorship: 'Malya went to boarding school in South Dakota... There was this program where they took the smartest ones to have a special jobs in the government... She worked for that one governor, you know. He did all those bad things' (Erdrich, 2013b:173).

It was later found that Lark committed the crime. It was indecisive whether the crime was committed in the federal territory or in the reservation, whether the tribal law would prevail or the federal in terms of punishing the criminal. The legal nitty-gritty deferred the matter for indefinite period. The issue of legal jurisdiction and the tribal- federal arithmetic diluted the gravity of criminality. The spot of crime became the bone of legal contention: 'Lark committed the crime. On what land? Was it tribal land? fee land? white property? state? We can't persecute if we don't know which laws apply' (Erdrich, 2013:196-97).

Conclusion

Yeltow's involvement in the case complicated the matter. The legal rigmarole was deliberately put into play to give the governor necessary legal immunity. The crime of a high profile white was successfully sidelined in the melodrama of judicial paperwork. Justice for native Indians is a textbook story. The violence inflicted upon Indian women stands outside statistics and official records. Justice was never served nor even any apology rendered for the judicial deafness:

... the recorded screams of dying Indian women, may even be a taxidermied torso, a collection of Indian women's heads, there's probably some floating in tanks with blue lights behind them in a secret office on the top floor of an office building in midtown Manhattan. (Orange, 2019: 203)

The Native Americans are victims of racism. This fact has been made amply clear by Erdrich. The popular American narrative of assimilation seems to have received a strong counter from Erdrich. Through Erdrich's narrative, it is evident that the Native women have been subjected to severe forms of violence and there prevails unfortunately a culture of silence –judicial,

bureaucratic and social - around the violence and trauma that they have consistently experienced. Erdrich breaks that silence.

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