

Ojibwe's Deep Ties to Their Ancestral Lands: Karen Louise Erdrich's *Four Souls*

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Abstract

Native American author Karen Louise Erdrich is interested in the Ojibwe people's hardships. Her books examine the Ojibwe people's history, the diversity of their language, and their ongoing fight for survival. The tragic evolution of the Ojibwe people and their tenacious spirit of survival on the North Dakota Reservation are depicted in her novels. Ojibwa and Western characteristics are both absorbed into America. The traditional beliefs of the Ojibwa do not align with those of the Westerners. The Ojibwe's existence was rooted out of their nativeness by the Whites' idea of a civilization. By imposing new rules, Christianity, and individualism, the white people exploited their dominance over the natives to eradicate the Ojibwe people's native identity. Presenting Native Americans' struggles to survive in a Western-encroaching world, it examines the fallout from the introduction of agriculture, the Ojibwe people's relocation, and the loss of their land. It also issues a warning to the Natives who have lost their ties to their land, families, culture, and language. Erdrich gives the Native Americans hope, continuity, and a sense of survival by recounting their hardships.

Key Words: Ojibwe, Indigenous, Natives, Homelands, Customs, and Laws.

With reference to Karen Louise Erdrich's *Four Souls*, this paper examines the Ojibwe people's situation of being deprived in light of the impact that Westerners have had on their land and identity. The tragic evolution of the Ojibwa people and their tenacious spirit of survival on the North Dakota Reservation were both portrayed in Erdrich's *Four Souls*. It discussed the cultural background, familial relationships, land conflicts, and identity crises of Native Americans. Through their representation of mixed-blood culture and identity, the characters unveil the secrets of their family past and center around the North Dakota Reservation.

Native Americans view their homeland as a place where they can determine their identity, goals, and beliefs as well as their cultures, languages, and values. Since it allows them to live safely on Earth, they revere their sacred land, which they refer to as Mother Earth. They prioritize the Earth and all of its components. They consider humans to be a part of the Earth, coexisting alongside plants, animals, and all other inanimate objects. They consider the land not as a place to live, but as a location that evokes human relationships, identity, and deep, sacred emotional ties to the land. Vine Deloria Jr. in *American Indian Policy in the Twentieth Century* states, "American Indians hold their lands, places, as having the highest possible meaning, and all their statements are made with this reference point in mind" (85).

Ojibwe's consider all the creations of the Earth with equality and insist to live in harmony. They are conscious to lead their life with harmony rather than to end their life with chaos. When the human's act

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against nature, they are warned by their elders to tune back their lives in harmony. They never wish to use their lands to earn profits. In turn, they use to accept what nature provided them and planned their lives by considering the cycles of nature. Its seasonal changes shaped their lives to carry out their work. They are found to be dependent with nature for their needs, and nature too nourished them and guided them to live an easeful and meaningful life. Kenneth Lincoln in *Native American Renaissance* states, "Tribal life centers in a common blood, a shared and inherited body of tradition, a communal place, a mutual past, and present: the key concept is integrated relationship, as an individual within a family in the circle of life" (86).

In *Four Souls*, Erdrich's protagonists look for a place to call home where they can feel safe, protected, and happy with the other members. According to Nanapush, one of Erdrich's significant characters brings out his idea as, "We call the earth grandmother, we ask her help when times are difficult when we are lonely, or harrowed by death, we throw ourselves upon her and weep onto her breast. All that we are and all that we survive upon comes from the Grandmother" (155). The Natives' holistic perspective is reflected in Nanapush's statement. He is deeply devoted to his land, community, and family and lives in accordance with tribal customs. Erdrich has depicted in Nanapush how Native Americans are interconnected with nature and how to lead a meaningful life while maintaining peace and balance in the natural world.

For Americans, individualism fosters a sense of alienation inside the tribe. By taking away their rights, they begin to subjugate the Ojibwe tribe inhabitants for their own advancement. By passing new legislation, they are compelled to end their lives by means of biological and cultural assimilation, military brutality, and genocide. Foucault opines, "Domination is in fact a general structure of power whose ramifications and consequences can sometimes be found descending to the most recalcitrant fibers of society..." (795). Relocation is typically encouraged for Native Americans in this termination era. For ages, the Whites have forced them to relocate against their will, and their families struggle to keep their homes safe from the Whites' clever snare. In the words of Girard in *No Escape from Discrimination: Minorities, Indigenous Peoples and the Crisis of Displacement*, "Minorities and indigenous peoples can be particularly vulnerable during times of conflict or crisis, stemming from their distinct identities... it is often their minority or indigenous status that singles them out as targets of violence, forcing them into displacement..." (12). Native Americans believe that their culture, customs, and people are being undermined by the loss of their land. They put a lot of effort into figuring out how to preserve their culture and land and survive. Without any ties to their people, society, or history, they are compelled to establish a new home in unfamiliar regions.

The creation of Indigenous Homelands, which was necessary for their existence, does not, however, imply that they are legally theirs under Western law. Instead, the influence and power of western ideas forces the Ojibwe to make decisions that harm their communities and lands, which in turn shapes their identity as mixed-blood people. They leave their native lands in the hopes of finding better chances, but instead of that, they get estranged from their families, communities, and traditions and suffer the severe consequences of this change. Following their relocation, they discover information about their own country that makes them feel both enamored and hostile. Conflicting Native and Western ideas about land, community, and people are the cause of it. They are forced to understand that they lack security, identity, and a home at one point. Their notion of home is ultimately met with the total denial of their community and ancestry. Since they have never fit in or been a part of that community or family, they struggle with a sense of belonging in a strange environment. In their new location, they are unable to discover their identity.

Fleur Pillager is the character in *Four Souls* who has fled her homeland. The disastrous outcomes of Margaret leaving her home to exact revenge on John James Mauser, the man who stole her land, are shown in the novel. The Mauser home in Minneapolis and the North Dakota Reservation are the locations of the incident. Fleur takes her mother's name Four Souls as she thought that, "the name would build her up, protect her, and it was true, the original Four Souls was a powerful woman" (46). She attains new strength to face her enemies by the name, "When she took the Four Souls name, she brought down on herself not only the great strength, but the sorrow and complexity of the woman who come before" (48). She must make amends for her error of abandoning her family, daughter,

and home in order to exact retribution. It turns out that her choice to exact retribution is what caused her entire life to shift. Native people suffer more harm from leaving their homes.

Gizem in his work, "Land, Identity, and Community in Louise Erdrich's *Four Souls*" brings out Jepson's argument as, "in homing stores, the characters do not find themselves through independence but rather discover value and meaning by returning to their homes, pasts and people" (25). The terrible outcome of Fleur leaving home is that her daughter despises her. Margaret states, "I knew of Lulu's hatred of her mother. The story was not hard to assemble" (Erdrich 183). Mauser quotes her alienation from her family as, "she has not any family. She's the last of them" (130). Her alcoholism is the other terrible outcome of leaving home. Polly discloses her drinking habit to others despite her best efforts to conceal it. Her addictive nature to alcohol is depicted as, "At first, it has started in order not to let the child out too soon; but then the liquor seeped up and grabbed her, got into her mind and talked to her; the whisky thinking, whiskey thoughts" (75).

Fleur is the last Pillager to speak on behalf of her family. However, Nanapush explains that, "to see her as a common drunk would take something out of every one of us" (Erdrich 194). Fleur has realized that she needs to go back home to gather and defend her family and property in light of Mauser's financial difficulties. However, the issue with her reappearance is that she is a different person when she returns. Fleur is no longer considered to be in control of her own fate. Rather people in her community wonder and try to understand "whether the slim woman in the white car, and the whiter suit fitted to the lean contours of her body was the ghost of the girl we knew of Fleur herself" (182). She has transformed into a wealthy, white woman, so they are unable to identify her. She changes into the kind of woman she would have detested if she had been one herself. For this reason, "change is chaos and pain" (210). Erdrich highlights that people do not do well when they are isolated from their family and communities. These facts demonstrated the significance of the home and its critical role in people's well-being.

By enforcing new rules, the American assimilation endeavor brought individual ownership and agriculture. They consider the Earth as something that can be owned, used, sold, or exploited. They view the planet as a resource from which they can use its soil and natural resources to advance in life. In 1887, they introduced the Dawes Allotment Act, which aimed to make Native Americans productive capitalists. This act's individual allocation policy encouraged people to become farmers. Since they view plowing on their sacred land as a form of murder, the Ojibwe are opposed to agriculture. They hold their land in the highest regard and think it connects humans to the universe. As a result, the indigenous oppose the agricultural experiments and reaffirm their traditional Ojibwe values. They took the Indian farmers' food and supplies and brutally murder them along with their cattle.

Erdrich uses this framework to further develop her character, Fleur Pillager. She was a member of the bear clan, which is known for its warriors and chiefs. In contrast to the city authorities who attempted to reclaim their territory, Erdrich portrays Fleur as a fighter. However, instead of establishing Native Americans as farmers, this act established a new market-oriented economy that is focused on money and ownership.

Native Americans participate in the market economy to trade, meet their needs for alcohol, and purchase other goods. Individualism is instilled in them without their knowledge. They have shown to be helpful to the Whites. This brings up the fundamental distinction between the indigenous people's adaptation to the American capitalist economy and their adaptation to their Native identity. It highlights the identity issue and division between full-blood Indians and mixed-blood Indians, as well as between traditionalists and non-traditionalists. Conflicts within the community came from the destruction of the Native Americans' relationship with the land. The adoption of an economic system that is foreign to them is the cause of this discordant community. As a result, the new economy had to adapt, deal with survival concerns, and cause conflict with the traditional locals. Trauma is an emotional reaction brought on by traumatic experiences. It is defined as, "...what disrupts these particular human lives, but no other. War and genocide, which are the work of men and male-dominated culture, are agreed-upon traumata" (Brown 121).

Inseparable from their geographical locations, the Ojibwa clan is linked to their area, item, culture,

and customs. They live close to nature and have a deeper understanding of mankind because they have their own identities on their land. Because their relationship to the land evokes their culture, identity, heritage, and religion, American Indians place a higher importance on space than anything else. It is impossible to undervalue their spatial worldview because of this committed bond between their people and land. Erdrich highlights that people fail to thrive well when they are isolated from their communities. She does, however, leave her readers with the optimism that Native Americans must rediscover their lost nativeness in areas of identification, culture, and family.

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