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**Contesting Termination: Biopower and Indigenous Resistance
in Louise Erdrich's *The Night Watchman* (2020)**



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Abstract

The current study examines Louise Erdrich's *The Night Watchman* (2020) through the intersecting frameworks of Michel Foucault's biopower and Indigenous resistance theory. Depolying Patrick Wolfe's account of settler colonialism as a tenacious structure, the study debates that the Termination policy (House Concurrent Resolution 108) functions as a biopolitical tool that governs Indigenous lives through administrative, bureaucratic, and legal mechanisms instead of overt violence. The analysis proves that Erdrich represents Termination across four registers: legislative language, bodily discipline through industrial labor, dissolution of collective land tenure, and blood quantum as racial governance. Simultaneously, the novel depicts Indigenous resistance through political action, cultural continuity, spiritual endurance, and communal solidarity. By drawing on Vizenor's survivance, Simpson's resurgence, Coulthard's grounded normativity, Audra Simpson's refusal and Scott's hidden transcripts, the study also reveals that Erdrich refuses to reduce Indigenous communities to passive victims. Indigenous resistance instead materializes itself as an ongoing practice entrenched in language, storytelling, ceremony, kinship, and everyday care. This article contributes a academically integrated reading that moves beyond historical interpretation to foreground the novel's sustained critique of biopolitical governance and its affirmation of Indigenous resilience, validating that reading Foucault alongside Indigenous resistance theorists can produce future possibilities for understanding federal Indian policy and contemporary Indigenous literature's engagement with sovereignty and cultural survival.

Keywords: biopower, Indigenous resistance, settler colonialism, Termination policy, Louise Erdrich, survivance

Introduction

Indigenous populations of North America have long been the overseers of the environmental landscapes where they live through communal relationships with land, culture, and collective life. Yet, they frequently encounter collective community and cultural traumatization which result from two centuries of internal colonization, neglectful regime actions, destruction of indigenous cultural practices, the displacement of the whole communities and forced separation of children through boarding schools or longstanding hospital services (Kirmayer et al., 1993). Such harms have aggravated prevailing social, cultural, political and economic vulnerabilities as the natives

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remain excluded from mainstream society. This not only threatens the physical welfare of indigenous communities but also their sovereignty and cultural survival.

The Native literature also describes the long-term consequences of settler colonialism involving dispossession and systemic regulation of indigenous communities in North America. Hence, this study proceeds from Patrick Wolfe's assertion that settler colonialism is not a bygone occurrence but a present structure (2006). While scholars like Mark Rifkin (2014) and Jodi A. Byrd (2011) contend that the relationship of U.S. government with Native nations has been quintessentially biopolitical and the basic structure of settler colonialism is not only concerned with the acquisition of territory but also committed at the elimination of the Natives both as cultural and political entities. Over time, we see this elimination shifting from outright slaughter to more insidious, bureaucratic, and legalistic forms of control and this study seeks to identify all this as the biopolitical managing of Indigenous lives.

One such example of legal termination appears when The United States Congress passed House Concurrent Resolution 108 in 1953. The language of this legislation suggested liberation but ultimately delivered dispossession. The Termination policy was cloaked within the verbiage of 'freedom', 'emancipation' and 'equality' and liquefied the federal trust union with Native American tribes. This also deprived Natives of their tribal recognition, their identities and forced them toward forced assimilation into white population. The legislation through HCR 108 did not appear as emancipation or oversight to Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa—one of the tribes facing termination—at the "earliest possible time," was neither. To them, it was the ultimate erasure administered by the settler state. Louise Erdrich's *The Night Watchman* (2020) draws inspiration from historical struggles of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa against termination policies. This historical fiction also appears powerfully connected to Erdrich's own family history. Thomas Wazhashk, the protagonist in the novel, embodies Patrick Gourneau, her maternal grandfather, who was the tribal chairman of the Turtle Mountain Band during the 1950s. So, the novel portrays the state's mechanisms operating through administrative, bureaucratic and legal procedures that seem to jeopardize the Indigenous sovereignty and their affiliation to their land.

Michel Foucault's perception of biopower (2003) denotes the rise of a new form of power in modern societies that not only equates to 'power to take life' but also the power to 'make live and let die' through regulation of biological procedures and populations. Foucault argues that settler states exercise this power through supervision of entire populaces by means of

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discourses, organizations and governments that administer birth rates, healthiness, death etc. While delivering his lectures at the College de France, he examined biopower as complimenting and evolving out of two other modalities of power like sovereignty and discipline. Though sovereignty ultimately mentions a power to take life, and discipline refers to a kind of power concentrated at training the body, biopower focuses at the management of a population through the growth of fresh rationalities and techniques (Means, 2022).

Moreover, Foucault also believes that another difference between biopower and other types of power, like disciplinary or sovereign power is how it works. Biopower does not depend on direct imposition or physical force in the same manner. Instead, it involves internalization of certain norms and values and this internalization makes biopower a more manipulative and deceptive type of control (Foucault, 2003). This alteration in power is foundational for understanding how modern authorities assert control not by direct violence, but by administering life (UBC Press, 2013). Although the modern logic of biopower places the utmost worth on life, it also, paradoxically, encompasses the exceptional power to take it away in an arbitrary fashion. It creates individuals that are reduced to bare life lacking any political shelter (Oksala, 2010). In the context of indigenous lives, the Termination bill precisely promulgates this logic. The state appears to administer life through policies of relocation programs, forced assimilation through boarding schools, surveillance and juridical control over land allotment in the novel. These apparatuses not only control indigenous communities but also redesign their social and cultural existence, making Foucauldian biopower a particularly productive lens for reading struggles of Native Americans against the termination Bill.

However, *The Night Watchman* (2020) is not just about what Biopower looks to do to Indigenous communities. It also focuses on what the people do to resist this modern power. The Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa deploy themselves against the legislation with an unusual perseverance. They look to take every possible measure by writing letters, traveling to Washington, D.C. and testifying before Congress. They endeavor to organize their community against the mechanisms designed to disperse them. Erdrich illuminates this resistance with the attentiveness it deserves by illuminating how it moved across multiple registers simultaneously. There is the formal political struggle—Thomas drafting petitions, pressing envelopes, preparing speeches—but there is also the quieter, deeper resistance of a community that refuses to let its forms of life be legislated away. The assertion of Anishinaabe

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kinship structures as legitimate political identities, the reclamation of storytelling and ceremony as modes of what Gerald Vizenor calls "survivance," constitute a refusal that exceeds any single political act. Erdrich's novel thus situates itself within a longer Indigenous literary tradition in which narrative is itself a form of defiance: to tell the story of survival is already to contest the terms of elimination.

The tension between these two forces—biopolitical regulation and Indigenous refusal—animates the whole of *The Night Watchman* (2020). The novel understands settler-colonial power in the way Patrick Wolfe defined it: not as an event that can be overcome but as a structure that persists, adapting its methods while maintaining its underlying logic of elimination. Termination appears one such adaptation—from the visible violence of dispossession to the administrative violence of paperwork. But Erdrich insists with equal force through her narrative that these mechanisms of elimination do not go uncontested. Survival in *The Night Watchman* (2020) does not appear as merely a biological endurance, it manifests itself as an act of imagination, an insistence on forms of life that the state has declared legally impossible.

Despite the increasing corpus of literary criticism on Louise Erdrich along with Indigenous studies, *The Night Watchman* has not been adequately scrutinized using the lens of Foucault's biopower. Existing primarily scholarship puts focus on the historical aspect of the novel that records the resistance offered by Turtle Mountain Band to the state's Termination agenda, or on the postcolonial version of colonial oppressiveness and Indigenous survival. While these perspectives add significantly, they often fail to account for the unique mechanisms through which settler-colonial power operates in concrete ways. In particular, the administrative, bureaucratic and legal practices to regulate Indigenous populations and dispossess them of land and social political standing have sought insufficient attention. Thereupon, depiction of power as a biopolitical system of regulation remains unexplored in the novel. This study addresses this gap by exploring the ways through which *The Night Watchman* (2020) represents the termination policy as an instrument of biopower that seeks to govern, regulate, and ultimately dissolve Indigenous lives through administrative acts and how *The Night Watchman* (2020) portrays Indigenous resistance to the Termination policy through political action, cultural continuity, spiritual endurance, and communal solidarity. The significance of this study lies in the sustained theoretical reading of *The Night Watchman* that moves beyond historical perspective to analyze the conceptual and formal architecture of the novel. This also shows Erdrich's narrative choices that appear to carry theoretical weight in representing power and resistance.

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Moreover, the significance moves beyond literary criticism when the regulatory logic of Termination keeps on echoing in contemporary struggles over tribal recognition, land, and Indigenous rights. This makes the novel a well-timed lens to interpret ongoing colonial structures.

Literature Review

Lemke (2011) is of the view that Foucault's notion of biopolitics is really a subset of his concept of biopower, which traces the extent of state power over not only the material but also political bodies of a population. Though thematically alluded to only briefly in *Society Must Be Defended*, the following lectures and publications within which he unfolds this notion have earned a prominent position in contemporary social science and humanities scholarship.

The term biopolitics was first mobilized in the history of scholarship in the early part of the 20th century (Lemke, 2011), but it is only from Foucault's essays in the 1970s onwards that he develops it as a constitutive feature of governance in Eurocentric modernity (Foucault, 1978; 1997; 2004). In the Foucauldian framework, biopolitics is seen as the calculus of costs and benefits, by which the biological capacities of a population are judiciously, manipulated subsuming to state or quasi-state needs. The term refers to a synthesis of disciplinary and excitatory practices that are pervasive in every body, in a manner that individuals internalize bodily norms and ideal standards which, in aggregate, serve to regulate the population to which they belong (Stryker, 2014).

Biopolitics, a variant of Foucault's biopower, has looked like a fundamental notion in postcolonial studies. This term from Foucault talks about connection between different facets of power- political, economic, judicial etc. and bodily sovereignty of the individual (Schirato et al., 2012). The postcolonial theorists assert that there are numerous mechanisms of power within colonial settings that help consolidate the administrative power and control of the colonizers. Consequently, biopolitics offers the resources to colonizing forces utilizing political power to regulate and control the bodily autonomy of the colonized that appear oppressed and subaltern.

According to Qiong (2022), some of the novel's formal relationship with the rest of Erdrich's work has attracted discussion but this is still a young field. *The Night Watchman* (2020) is more firmly rooted in a period and place than are many of her novels, and does not have the same insertion into the fictional world. Some have interpreted this as a new direction; a move towards historical fiction per se, while others have emphasised the fundamental continuity in its themes of land, law, kinship and the sacred. The dispute is unresolved, and it is a microcosm of the ambivalence that surrounds a recent

novel, not yet fully evaluated in the author's oeuvre.

Scully (2025) interpreted the novel as a quintessentially political piece, and it would be hard to see how it could be viewed as anything other than political in a book rooted in a documented resistance to a real federal policy. The late fiction thus fulfills a long thread of formal experimentation of the early novels to the explicit historical and political commitment of the recent ones, while maintaining its concern with Native survival.

Millay (2020) maintains that the forces of love and kinship are at work across the novel as survival strategies and intimacy breaks down the political heaviness. The courtship plots, sibling bonds, and kins' obligations are not distractions from the termination narrative but an essential part of it: the community that is under threat from termination is made up of these.

Methodology

This article deploys the method of textual analysis by Catherine Belsey. This method generally insists that the literary text is not only a demonstration of an argument but also a setting which produces meaning through the fundamental interaction of signifiers, intertexts, and the reader's participation. Louise Erdrich's *The Night Watchman* (2020) does not solely reflect the past historical circumstances of the Termination era; rather those circumstances are also subjected to constant intellectual and imaginative weight. This makes the social structures of power and modes of resistance more visible than traditional historical archives alone fail to seize. The analysis through Belsey's textual method therefore treats Erdrich's novel as a deeper reflection of the termination era on one hand and also as a literary text that vigorously theorizes power and Indigenous resistance and survival through its formal choices, voice, narrative architecture, deployment of metaphor and silence.

Belsey's textual analysis is applied in literary dialogue using two theoretical frameworks. The first is Foucault's biopolitical theory and the second is Indigenous resistance theory. Foucault's description of biopower in *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality*, together with Patrick Wolfe's theorization of settler colonialism as a recurrent structure of elimination serves to explain Termination policy as administrative machinery which shapes the regulation of Indigenous lives, dispossession of communities, and erosion of collective sovereignty. While the Indigenous resistance theory embedded in Vizenor's survivance, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's resurgence, Audra Simpson's refusal, Coulthard's grounded normativity and Scott's hidden transcripts looks to address the crucial gap in Foucault's framework by illuminating the patterns of struggle colonized communities have promulgated against biopolitical governance. These concepts allow the

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study to read Indigenous resistance not as a simple reaction to colonial power but as an active and ongoing practice of political, cultural, and ethical persistence.

Discussion

The US Congress legislated House Concurrent Resolution 108 in 1953. This legislation did not appear in itself as a deed of violence. Its language looked procedural and even humanitarian. It promised to "emancipate" the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa from federal intervention and redeem them through the privileges of American citizenship. However, Thomas Wazhashk, an anxious political organizer and night watchman in Erdrich's *The Night Watchman* (2020) is able to abruptly perceive what the bill's rhetoric conceals. He at once reflects that his community has withstood, "smallpox, the Winchester repeating rifle, the Hotchkiss gun, and tuberculosis...But at last we will be destroyed by a collection of tedious words" (Erdrich, 2020. p. 85). This observation appears both ironic and precise theoretically. Hence, the Termination policy appears as a form of biopolitical governance pertaining to Michel Foucault conception of modern power. This power does not reflect spectacular sovereign violence and appears concerned with the administrative regulation of individual bodies, populations and the biological conditions of collective life. It looks to foster specific forms of existence and abandons, or "lets die" those it generally classifies disposable. Erdrich's *The Night Watchman* (2020) unfolds this logic using four interconnected registers that include legislative language, bodily discipline, land dissolution, and racial classification.

The primary instrument of biopower in this bill is language. HCR 108 seems to have passive constructions, "disposition of federally owned property... trust relationship to the affairs of the Band and its members has terminated" (Erdrich, 2020. p. 164) that carry out a quite rigorous rhetorical purpose. As the committee first studies the language of the termination bill, anxiety seeps into the room, "It looks to me like they want it all, finally...Relocate us. Haul us out of here." (Erdrich, 2020 p. 106). Thomas also reads, "For the disposition of, for the intensification of, for the termination of, to provide for, et cetera" (Erdrich 83). These linguistic constructions appear to erase the actor but preserve the action i.e. the agentless terminology moves out the institution or person who is behind and does the action but aptly still describes the action itself. This deep grammatical contrivance looks structural where the state appears to destroy through language. So, in this termination bill, Biopower operates through language that helps to depersonalize violence

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in order to normalize it — the termination poses the administrative dissolution of political existence as a neutral outcome and not a premeditated call. Senator Arthur V. Watkins embodies this logic of biopower in its most dangerous form because this modern power appears the most effective when its agents believe in it. Watkins is not the person who hates the Chippewa, he basically does not accredit their collective existence as something the state is obligated to guard.

Moreover, there appears a racial logic behind the administrative neutrality of this policy revealed by the theological foundations of Watkins's convictions. He is the real architect of the termination bill and Thomas contemplates that he is "the most dangerous sort: a principled enemy who thought what he was doing was for the best" (Erdrich, 2020. p.229). Thomas also goes through *The Book of Mormon* to comprehend thoughts of his adversary. He surprisingly finds a portrayal of the Indians as "led by...evil nature... wild and ferocious, and a blood-thirsty people, full of idolatry and filthiness" (Erdrich, 2020. p. 313). He also considers them 'cursed with dark skin' who therefore cannot have any legitimate claim to land. This appears akin to Foucault's notion of state racism that looks to bisect populations into those who have a right to live and those who must die (Foucault, 2003).

In *The Night Watchman* (2020), biopolitical governance operates through the physical regulation of Indigenous bodies as well and not just through legislative acts. The jewel bearing plant appears as a disciplinary institution where Patrice and her coworkers live their lives exactly in Foucauldian sense (2003). Discipline regulates spaces, postures and movements and manages the bodies into manageable parts. This gives rise to docile bodies—"subjected and practiced bodies"—that can be maneuvered and disciplined to be obedient. At the plant, "Turtle Mountain women spent their days leaning into the hard light of their task lamps." (Erdrich, 2020. p.13). Their fingers cramp and their shoulders blaze. They have to work in coerced silence, "Mr. Vold forbade speech" (Erdrich, 2020. p.19). Their labor is surely valued by the state when it attributes their manual dexterity to "Indian blood and training in Indian beadwork" (Erdrich. 2020. P. 13). This embodies a racialized anatomo-politics that focuses on the regulation of Indigenous bodies. Hence, the same bodies that the state aims to discipline for productive utility in the plant are being prepared at the same time by Congress for dispersal through the termination bill.

The third register that the novel appears to deal with is the adjournment of collective land tenure through termination. It also seems bill's

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structurally consequential ambition. The land and reservation are not merely territory to Native; it represents their material base of Anishinaabe sovereignty and kinship. After the bill, Thomas explains to Barnes, "This thing will break our land up...We keep it in common now. That's the way it works. We can sell to one another but it stays in the tribe that way. So this bill would break up our land and let the BIA sell it off" (Erdrich, 2020. p. 179). Further, The BIA consultation scene in *Fargo* unmasks democratic proceedings as theater and the historical background of discriminating census-taking indicate the state's long used bureaucratic techniques of shrinking Native land and making dispossession look lawful. So, when Holmes loudly reads the bill, "the termination of Federal supervision over the trust...disposition of federally owned property..." (Erdrich, 2020. p. 83). To Thomas, "...words tapped like dry little hammers" (Erdrich 53). The farce appearance of democratic process evicts the prospect of a democratic outcome for the Natives. Hence, the termination policy appears to be the latest iteration of a biopolitical strategy that the state intends to practice in order to regulate Indigenous lands.

Finally, blood quantum appears as the classificatory technology that brings the other instruments in working order as well. Amidst the proceedings of Washington hearings, Indigenous witnesses are necessitated to account for their degree of Indian blood, "The senator had also asked every single Indian person who testified about their degree of Indian blood. " (Erdrich, 2020. P. 337). Thomas observes that nobody can answer precisely because Anishinaabe identity is not numerical. Thomas's rumination about blood quantum exposes the sheer absurdity of this biopolitical classification, "Everyone knew they were Indian or not Indian regardless of what the rolls said or what the government said, it was a given or not a given" (Erdrich, 2020. p. 337). However, the state's insistence on numerical identity is not harmless. It appears as the biopolitical game because numbers can be manipulated and terminated that gives the state a license to decide who is Indian enough to be terminated. Blood quantum transfers the authority to define Indianness from the community to the state. It is biopolitics at its most intimate: the state legislates not only where you may live and what you may own, but what you are.

Further, the relocation program looks like an extension of the termination policy. This program demonstrates this logic from the collective to the individual body. When the committee first reads the bill, Joyce Asiginak says, "They want to 'relocate.' That's fancy for 'remove.' How many times were we removed? No counting. Now they want to send us to the Cities." (Erdrich, 2020 p. 106). Later, this becomes evident through Vera's disappearance.

When Patrice reaches the relocation office to find information about

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Vera, there is a poster for the recruitment of this relocation plan pasted on the wall, promising "Good Jobs in Retail Trade, Manufacturing, Government Federal, State, Local, Exciting Community Life, Convenient Stores" (Erdrich, 2020 p. 60). But after relocation, the state does not ensure the continuity of support. The Relocation Office does keep Vera's last recorded destination on Bloomington Avenue. But when Patrice asks, "Don't you keep track of where people go?", Deanna reveals, "not after a while" (Erdrich, 2020, p. 60). What Patrice finds at the end of her search is a room with "chains fixed to the walls," "slashed leather collars on the floor,"¹⁸² "dried shit in the corner" that "was human" (Erdrich, 2020 p. 136). This shows working of biopower where the state does not kill Vera but lets her die by simply not monitoring her and refusing state's protection through abandonment. Her disappearance seems a statistical outcome and not an offence in the state's eyes. So, when Foucault's modern power "lets die", it does not refer to outright murder. It works through abandonment which involves the state's withdrawal from giving attention to a life that has, administratively, stopped to exist.

To sum up, Erdrich assembles a coherent analytical portrait of biopolitical power across these registers. This modern power makes itself invisible when it speaks in the passive voice, dresses elimination as emancipation and measures people in blood fractions. This is done until they can be administered out of existence. The state's biopower relies heavily on the bureaucratic tedium that utilizes the dry hammering of legislative language, the cancelation of coffee break, gleaming promises of the relocation poster and stress on blood quantum. Erdrich appears to focus on such mundane aspects because biopolitical power accomplishes its most enduring outcomes through these day-to-day mechanics of administration. However, the novel also demonstrates resistance beginning within these same ordinary spaces. Thomas does not read the Termination bill only, he also prepares the petition against it. The night watchman who guards the jewel bearing plant becomes the man drafting letters to Washington during the quite early hours of the morning. He thus refuses to permit bureaucratic language to go unreciprocated. These quiet and persistent acts appear as Erdrich's defining images of resistance. These may not be heroic in a conventional sense, but surely these look deeply rooted in responsibility. From this perseverance, every other form of resistance in the novel takes shape.

Indigenous Resistance to the Termination Policy

Louise Erdrich's *The Night Watchman* (2020) embodies Indigenous resistance to the Termination policy across four interlinked domains that include political action, cultural continuity, spiritual endurance, and communal

solidarity. These spheres do not stand separate rather they overlap and reinforce each other. The political and legal actions involving drafting of the petition, the testimony and the delegation to Washington would not have been accomplished without the cultural continuity and the spiritual perseverance. These help sustain Indigenous identity and inspire hope in the face of erasure. Likewise, communal solidarity through food-sharing, nursing of babies and the adoption of sisters appears as the foundation of political resistance.

These strategies of resistance have been framed and traced across the entire novel through the theoretical lenses of Vizenor's survivance, L. B. Simpson's resurgence, Audra Simpson's refusal, Coulthard's grounded normativity and Scott's hidden transcripts. Collectively, this Indigenous resistance framework illuminates the way characters in *The Night Watchman* (2020) refuse to vanish, challenge assimilation and endeavor to preserve their land, identity and sovereignty in the face of biopolitical termination policy.

1. Political Action: Petition, Testimony, and the Delegation to Washington

The most visible manifestation of Indigenous resistance against the Termination policy appears through political action in *The Night Watchman* (2020). In order to testify against House Concurrent Resolution 108, the tribal chairman Thomas Wazhashk coordinates a delegation to Washington. He himself drafts letters to senators, commissioners and newspaper columnists, Thomas wrote first to Senator Milton R. Young...requesting a meeting. Next he wrote to the county commissioner...requesting a meeting. He wrote to...the newspaper columnist Bob Cory...to tour the reservation. He replied at length to several people who had written to the tribe out of curiosity. (Erdrich, 2020 p. 22).

Likewise, he at once convenes emergency meetings of the advisory committee (Erdrich, 2020 p. 106) and raises money through a boxing match. Hence, these political actions are not spontaneous, they are strategically deliberate and collective.

This deliberate effort appears visible during the drafting of the petition. Thomas attempts to explain to the committee, "We could start there. Get everyone in the tribe to sign it...Then we might have to put up a delegation" (Erdrich, 2020 p. 105). So, Louis Pipestone keeps the petition with him all the time and "tended the petition like a garden" (Erdrich, 2020 p. 137). He corners tribal members to sign the petition wherever he finds them, "...at the gas pump, mercantile, at Henry's, on the road, or outside the clinic and hospital" (Erdrich, 2020 p. 137). The petition does not have any legal value, it simply appears as a declaration of Indigenous existence. Each signature symbolizes

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resistance against the termination policy.

The deeper significance of petition is illuminated through Gerald Vizenor's concept of survivance. Vizenor identifies survivance as an active feeling of presence and the ongoingness of native stories. The petition appears an act of survivance that reveals the active presence of the Turtle Mountain Band and the continuity of their stories. This shows their refusal to stand reduced to victimhood. Each signature represents an assertion of existence. Moreover, the petition also embodies James C. Scott's (1985) concept of hidden transcripts. These show an offstage discourse of resistance through the jokes, the gossip, the laughter, the stories narrated in private, away from the gaze of the power. The petition signed in private remains away from the gaze of the state. It is a hidden transcript made visible, a private act of refusal that becomes public testimony.

The culmination of the political action appears when the delegation gives testimony before the Senate subcommittee. Thomas thus testifies, "In view of the fact that employment has shown a considerable downward trend throughout the United States as a whole, we believe the relocation program is ill timed and would be fraught with insurmountable difficulties" (Erdrich, 2020 p. 332). He also makes the Senate believe through records that their trip to Washington has been funded by the tribe and not by the government. This crucial point indicates that the tribe is a sovereign nation and not a client of the state.

Further, Patrice also testifies about the jewel bearing plant. She gives a description of her job and holds up the magnifying glass with all confidence. While Millie Cloud produces her economic survey and gives documentary proof of the poverty prevailing in reservation and hence the unfeasibility of termination. The testimony looks like an act of resurgence, as defined by Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2017). This resurgence portrays the retrieval of Indigenous land, their language and sovereignty deploying the Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing. The testimony is resurgence: the tribe speaks for itself, documents its own condition, refuses to be spoken for by the state.

The testimony also emerges as an act of refusal, as formulated by Audra Simpson. This refusal portrays an active rejection of the biopolitical categories of the state through which the state governs Indigenous peoples. The testimony by Thomas, Patrice and Millie embodies refusal where they refuse to approve the state's parameters of recognition.

Yet another manifestation of resistance through political action appears when Thomas goes to visit Senator Watkins in his office after the hearing. It

represents a masterclass example of strategic deference. He pays homage to Senator Watkins for listening to their case. Watkins looks surprised, "In all of my days as a senator, nobody has ever thanked me for listening to their testimony" (Erdrich, 2020 p. 336). At this, Thomas reflects. "I am willing to forgo my dignity to try to butter you up to the teeth. I hope it helps our cause" (Erdrich, 2020 p. 336). This manifests a political strategy and not cowardice. Thomas had learned during his days at boarding school, "Study hard because we need to know the enemy" (Erdrich, 2020 p. 229).

This strategic deference appears to exemplify Scot's hidden transcript. He contends that hidden transcripts generally involve performances of deference, submission, and acceptance that can mask resistance. Thomas's deference by thanking Watkins does not seem like submission. Here the buttering is a strategy of resistance.

2. Cultural Continuity: Language, Food, and the Transmission of Knowledge

Indigenous communities also resist termination policy through cultural continuity that helps to sustain political action. The petition and the delegation to Washington would lose all meanings without the cultural identity that they are seeking to protect. The cultural continuity in *The Night Watchman* (2020) incorporates language, food and the transmission of Indigenous knowledge across generations. The Natives adopt these practices as strategy and these keep them alive.

The Native characters employ Native Language as an essential means of cultural continuity to resist the biopolitical logic of the Termination policy. This helps them to preserve identity, memory and Indigenous ways of knowing. Patrice uses Chippewa while talking to her mother, Millie attempts to record Chippewa vocabulary and Thomas when tired unconsciously prefers to think in Chippewa. Moreover, he observes that using Chippewa with his father "signaled that their conversation was heading in a more complex direction, a matter of the mind and heart" (Erdrich, 2020 p. 64). Chippewa therefore seems more than a channel of communication and materializes an Indigenous epistemology that cannot be fully expressed through English. This reflects Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's Indigenous resurgence when the reclamation of language becomes inseparable from Native resistance as language shows deeper relationships to land, wisdom and community.

Similarly, Millie's attempt on cautious compilation of words like *baashkizige* and *biinda'oojigan* (Erdrich, 2020 p. 276) embodies an act of cultural preservation against colonial erasure. Likewise, Zhaanat, the principal communicator of cultural knowledge, is "traditional, an old-time Indian raised

by her grandparents only speaking Chippewa, schooled from childhood in ceremonies and the teaching stories" (Erdrich, 2020 p. 28). Her "real job was passing on what she knew. People came from distances, often camped around their house, in order to learn" (Erdrich, 2020 p. 28). However, her cultural knowledge is not abstract, it embodied, "...a web of strategies that included plenty of animals to hunt, wild foods to gather, gardens of beans and squash, and land, lots of land to roam." (Erdrich, 2020 p. 28). Through such continuous use of Chippewa language and cultural knowledge, the text appears to codify Vizenor's (1994) idea of *survivance* as it actively endeavors to preserve Indigenous stories and manners of thought. Thus, the novel exhibits linguistic continuity by keeping the language alive in their everyday speech, thought, and writing. It looks like a quiet but powerful rebuttal of the state's vicious attempts on elimination of Indigenous beingness through assimilation.

Traditional Food as Resistance

Zhaanat cultural knowledge also includes traditional food. When Louis Pipestone comes to get their signatures on the petition, Zhaanat entertains Louis with, "...light bannock, a small dish of salt, fresh grease from a roasted duck, and a plate of shredded thigh meat. There was a bowl of dried berries, cold wild boiled turnips, pemmican, hot tea" (Erdrich, 2020 p. 118). Louis exclaims with deep pleasure: "Old-time food" (Erdrich, 2020 p. 118). This food does not just support sustenance; it embodies memory connecting the present to the past and the living to their ancestors.

This looks akin to grounded normativity that according to Coulthard (2014) outlines a place-oriented ethical framework rooted in Indigenous land-connected practices and forms of knowledge. The old-time food is grounded normativity and not mere nostalgia. Hence, the practice of eating in the old way, connection to the land and refusal of the industrial food system resist the erasure of Indigenous affiliations with the earth.

3. Spiritual Endurance: Indigenous Spirituality as Resistance

Another strategy of resistance to the biopolitical logic of the Termination policy emerges through spiritual endurance. This looks quite a significant form of resistance that demonstrates that Indigenous spirituality cannot be regulated by biopolitical governance. Indigenous spiritual endurance manifests itself when Thomas has a vision of the star powwow. The vision reinstates his spirits as he not only perceives to dance with ancestral beings but also receives their song. This enables him to reconnect himself with spiritual practices that colonial foundations seek to erase. Likewise, the same becomes evident when Roderick's ghost resists the inevitability of assimilation, reassuring that "Even as a ghost, Roderick was never going to be assimilated.

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You can't assimilate Indian ghosts" (Erdrich, 2020 p. 305). The persistent presence of his ghost illustrates Audra Simpson's refusal through the repudiation of colonial incorporation. The manifestations of resistance through spiritual endurance can be located in the novel when Zhaanat uses traditional medicines, the painted bear skull communicates reciprocal affiliations with the more-than-human world, Millie exhibits readiness to hold scientific and spiritual awareness of the northern lights together, and the spirit duplicator that symbolically releases the names of Turtle Mountain ancestors "along with each duplicate" (Erdrich, 2020 p. 358). Collectively, these occasions demonstrate Glen Coulthard's (2014) notion of grounded normativity, showing that persistent connections with land, community, spirits and ancestors offer the cultural base for Indigenous endurance and resistance. Erdrich presents spirituality as the permanent generator of Indigenous resilience that equips the Natives to stand firm against the state's design of elimination.

4. Communal Solidarity: Kinship, Adoption, and the Care

The Night Watchman (2020) appears to portray communal solidarity as a collective refusal of the collapse of kinship ties and communal belonging during the termination period. When the colonial power aims to fragment Indigenous bonds, Erdrich presents kinship as an enduring practice that exceeds state recognition. The manifestations of communal solidarity appear through Patrice's decision to adopt Millie as her sister without legal sanction, "After Vera comes home I was thinking I want to adopt you. I was thinking that you could be my sister" (Erdrich, 2020, p. 346), Zhaanat's nursing of Vera's baby according to traditional practices "sometimes in the old days, when the baby's mother couldn't nurse, the older women were sometimes able to take over" (Erdrich, 2020, p. 160), and Wood Mountain's devoted care for Archille despite having no biological obligation to him ((Erdrich, 2020, p. 265). All these exhibit that it is responsibility and care which constitute family and not the blood or state approval. Such chosen kinship constitutes Simpson's (2017) notion of Indigenous resurgence as it resists the state's authority to decide about belongings by reactivating the Indigenous networks of affiliations that have systematically been disrupted by colonial institutions.

Similarly, the women at the jewel-bearing plant quietly sustain relationships with one another through sharing of food, clothing, and other everyday acts of care, "Saint Anne pushed a buttered bun across the table to Patrice. Someone handed an oatmeal cookie down the line. Doris gave her half a bacon sandwich." (Erdrich, 2020, p. 17) This creates what James C. Scott (1985) labels as the hidden transcript of solidarity that evolves beyond the gaze of colonial power. Likewise, Patrice's earnest search for Vera and later her

determination to look after Vera's child until her return further seems a rejection of the abandonment through which the settler state seeks to dissolve Indigenous communities. This appears to exemplify Audra Simpson's (2014) idea of refusal as it looks to sustain relationships that do not rely upon colonial recognition, while also reflecting Glen Coulthard's grounded normativity, where care, reciprocity, and collective responsibility sustain Indigenous life. The tribe's insistence on holding land collectively rather than accepting individual ownership under the Termination policy similarly resists colonial individualism, affirming that Indigenous survival depends upon preserving communal bonds, shared responsibilities, and collective belonging rather than the isolated subject imagined by the colonial state.

Conclusion and Findings

This study has evaluated Louise Erdrich's *The Night Watchman* (2020) by using the overlapping lenses of Foucauldian biopower and Indigenous resistance theory. This overlapping establishes the Termination policy as an all-encompassing apparatus of biopolitical governance that seeks to regulate, classify, disperse, and eventually dissolve collective life of the Anishinaabe employing the governing machinery of the settler state. Simultaneously, Erdrich's novel equally emphasizes that this state machinery meets Indigenous refusal at every register. This Indigenous refusal appears strategic, collective and rooted deeply in spiritual and cultural practices. The findings of this study have been summarized across the two broad axes that have organized its inquiry.

The first major finding represents the Termination policy in *The Night Watchman* (2020) as a biopolitical apparatus governing Indigenous lives through administrative tactics instead of overt violence. The Legislative language, blood quantum, relocation programme, bureaucratic techniques and land dissolution serve as interconnected mechanisms to regulate Indigenous populations and undermine tribal sovereignty. Erdrich attempts to expose how settler colonialism shifts elimination from the battlefield to paperwork and legal processes to disguise dispossession as reform and extend its control over Indigenous identities, lands, and collective existence.

The second finding of the study focuses on Indigenous communities by presenting them as active agents of resistance. They are not portrayed as passive victims. Erdrich sketches Indigenous resistance across four interlinked domains including political action, cultural continuity, spiritual endurance, and communal solidarity. By highlighting legal petitions, testimony, Native language, traditional knowledge, Indigenous ceremonies and kinship, and collective care, *The Night Watchman* (2020) validates that Indigenous

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resistance stretches beyond formal and routine political protest into the everyday practices that help preserve Indigenous identity, sovereignty, and the entire community against colonial elimination.

The third crucial finding upholds that Indigenous resistance theory appears to complement and extend Foucauldian biopower by elucidating active resistance of Indigenous communities against colonial regulation. The concepts of survivance, resurgence, refusal, grounded normativity and hidden transcripts present resistance in *The Night Watchman* (2020) as an ongoing political, cultural and spiritual practice which is conveyed through language, storytelling, ceremony, kinship ties and everyday acts of concern. All this helps sustain Indigenous sovereignty beyond colonial authentication.

Finally, this study contributes to the existing scholarship through the intersection of Foucauldian theory of biopower and Native American literary studies. This offers a steady theoretical reading of *The Night Watchman* (2020) that lays focus on the novel's formal and conceptual architecture, moving beyond historical documentation. It additionally demonstrates that reading Foucault in combination with Indigenous resistance scholars offers methodological and productive possibilities for future works on federal Indian policy and land dispossession narratives. This intersection appears particularly promising for assessment of contemporary Indigenous fiction that raises questions related to identity, sovereignty and cultural survival.

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