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# Resistance and Persistence in Love Medicine from the Perspective of Ecofeminism

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## Abstract

Louise Erdrich's Love Medicine explores the issues of female oppression, gender roles, and environmental degradation in Native American communities, reflecting ecofeminist concerns. In the context of the global ecological crisis and concerns about gender equality, it is of profound significance to re-examine the ecofeminist theme in Love Medicine. This thesis examines how Native American women respond to environmental degradation, cultural erosion, and gender discrimination from an ecofeminist perspective. Through textual analysis of the novel's characters, plot and themes, the study explores the relationship between gender oppression and environmental degradation. The findings suggest that the female characters strive for a balance between preserving the natural ecology and fighting for gender equality through resistance and persistence, demonstrating unique survival wisdom. Their experiences reveal the interconnectedness of gender, culture, and nature, highlighting the significance of an ecofeminist perspective in understanding women's struggles in Native American communities.

## Keywords

Ecofeminism; Environmental Degradation; Gender Oppression; Resistance. Persistence

## 1. Introduction

Louise Erdrich is a prominent contemporary Native American writer whose works profoundly influence Indigenous Native literature and feminist discourse. Her debut novel, Love Medicine, has been widely acclaimed since its publication in 1984. The novel intricately portrays the lives of multiple generations of Chippewa people, showing their relentless struggles for identity, cultural preservation, and self-governance. Central to the narrative are the experiences of Indigenous Native women, who resist patriarchal oppression and environmental degradation while striving to maintain their traditions and land.

Love Medicine won the National Book Critics Circle Award in the same year as it was published, which has been extensively analyzed by scholars both domestically and internationally. They conducted extensive research on the novel from the perspectives of gender, race and cultural identity. But the existing studies have

generally neglected the ecological dimension of the novel, failing to explore the intrinsic connections between Indigenous women's resistance behavior and environmental protection. That makes it necessary to introduce ecofeminist analysis, a theoretical framework that can reveal the complex interactions among gender, nature and cultural survival in Erdrich's work.

This thesis seeks to explore how the female characters in Love Medicine navigate patriarchal oppression and environmental degradation, how their resistance interweaves with their persistence in preserving cultural heritage, and what insights an ecofeminist lens offers for both literary analysis and contemporary struggles for gender and environmental justice. By examining the dual forces of resistance against oppressive structures and persistence in upholding Indigenous traditions, this study unravels the intricate connections between gender, nature, and cultural survival in Erdrich's narrative.

This thesis consists of four chapters: Chapter One reviews previous studies on Love Medicine; Chapter Two introduces ecofeminism as a theoretical framework; Chapter Three provides an ecofeminist analysis of resistance and persistence in Love Medicine; and Chapter Four synthesizes the lessons into actionable implications for ecofeminist discourse and modern challenges.

## 2. Literature Review

Awarded for the National Book Critics Circle Award for Best Fiction as soon as it was published, Love Medicine has garnered significant scholarly attention and has been widely studied across various academic disciplines. This chapter aims to provide an overview of the diverse research conducted by domestic and foreign critics and scholars. By reviewing these perspectives, this chapter clarifies the research objectives and significance of the present study.

### 2.1. Foreign Studies on Love Medicine

Love Medicine, as a special novel with a special narrative form focusing on the relationship of human beings and nature issues, has generated significant academic discussion since its release, receiving widespread critical acclaim. Jonathan Yardley says that Love Medicine is the work of a tough, loving mind. Philip Roth regards the novel as a masterpiece, written with spellbinding authenticity and animated by a spirited comic energy. Studies on Love Medicine in foreign countries started relatively early since its publication in 1984 and have progressively become more comprehensive and detailed. Up to now, foreign studies on Love Medicine primarily concentrated on images and symbols, narrative techniques, Native American culture, postcolonialism and postmodern narrative technique.

In terms of symbolism, the author Erdrich uses a lot of images and symbols which attract much attention and interest of scholars in the academic field. Catherine Rainwater (1990) conducts an in-depth analysis of the narrative structure of Love

Medicine in his thesis. He points out that Erdrich skillfully employed a multi-perspective narrative technique in the novel, interweaving the perspectives of different characters to create a complex and three-dimensional narrative world. He explores the relationship between women and nature by assuming that sugar symbolizes Nector's beloved Lulu and salt represents his wife Marie in life. Moreover, Jeanne Marie Zeck (1995) also focuses on the symbolic meanings and character relationships in the novel. She takes the novel's chapter "The Beads" as an example and analyzes the sexual images, the symbolism, and the interactions between Eli and Marie. She points out that the beads symbolize the adultery between Eli and Marie. Through analysis, Zeck reveals complex character relationships and deep symbolic meanings in the novel through careful reading, providing a new perspective for understanding the cultural conflicts and character psychology in Love Medicine (Yan, 2024).

As far as the aspect of literature narrative techniques, E. Shelly Reed and Lydia A. Schultz (1991) emphasize Erdrich's excellent narrative skills, considering works are deeply influenced by the long-standing traditions of European and American writers and autobiographers while also drawing on some narrative methods from oral performances, such as the use of multiple narrators' perspectives to reduce the sense of alienation among characters. In addition, Richard Stock (2015) proposes several important viewpoints on Love Medicine from the perspective of narrative innovation. He points out that it is quite unusual for this novel to lack a traditional protagonist, as most popular novels rely on a central character to drive the development of the story. Instead, Erdrich employed a large number of characters from interconnected families, with a small group of secondary characters playing a crucial role in maintaining the coherence of the story. Stoker also notes that the narrative of Love Medicine is mainly arranged in chronological order, with a carefully selected time span of 50 years. The overlapping of characters in different chapters, as well as the clear marking of time and narrators in each chapter, creates a unique structure. Moreover, this novel is mostly narrated in the first person and the characters are also the main figures in other narratives. This first-person narrative is unique because characters openly share their thoughts and experiences in a way which is different from the communication within the story.

Regarding Native American culture, Hans Bak (1991) provides a detailed analysis of Erdrich's hybrid narrative style. He believes that due to Erdrich's mixed-race background, her literary works span two cultural perspectives and are influenced by dual generic orientations. He points out that Native Americans who refuse to adapt to mainstream culture, out of loyalty to their own nation's history, are forced to live a secluded and marginalized life on reservations. By analyzing Erdrich's gender roles, he emphasizes the requirements for integration into mainstream culture.

In the field of postcolonial research, a well-known scholar is Jeana Del Rosso. Rosso (2005) pays attention to the colonial nature of Catholicism when white people used

Catholicism to assimilate Native Americans. She studies three works, Love Medicine, Sugar Queen, and Traces, and regards the monasteries in the three works as colonizers, exposing the collusion between Catholicism and white colonialism. She suggests that political and religious alliances had brought serious colonial oppression to Native American women. In addition, there has been a significant amount of research on the issue of identity from a postcolonial perspective. Foreign scholars' research on the issue of identity mainly focuses on two aspects: the causes of identity crises and the construction of identity.

On the postmodern narrative techniques in Love Medicine, Asst. Khatab Mohammed Ahmad (2023) believes that Love Medicine is one of the richest models in postmodern literary works. He specifically analyzes the postmodern narrative elements in Love Medicine from the aspects of identity, fragmentation, postcoloniality, and multi-narration. His analysis indicates that Erdrich breaks through the traditional paradigm of Western literature by integrating the oral literary tradition of the Chippewa tribe with modern narrative techniques and realizes an important breakthrough in the level of narrative innovation. This provides a unique textual example for postmodern literary creation and research, establishing an indispensable milestone in the Western literary canon.

## 2.2. Domestic Studies on Love Medicine

Research on Love Medicine in China is relatively recent but has gained momentum. Domestic scholars have primarily focused on feminism, postmodern narrative techniques, postcolonial interpretation and ecocritical studies. They have conducted in-depth research on Love Medicine from multiple perspectives, these studies not only contribute to a deeper understanding of this work but also provide valuable insights to explore issues such as the status of women, interpretation of Indigenous culture and environmental problems in real life.

As far as the feminism in Love Medicine is concerned, Li (2014) provides a comprehensive analysis of feminist interpretation in his study. He points out that most of the male characters in the novel neglect Native American cultural traditions and are violent, leading to tragedies in their lives. In contrast, the female characters have a more cheerful outlook towards life and show greater respect for Native American traditions. In this situation, he believes that the four male and three female characters in the novel reflect the author's feminist creative tendency. Jia (2022) mentions in her research that women play an important role in Native American traditional culture, not only for the family but also for the tribe. She notes that the female characters Marie and Lulu in Love Medicine serve as the pillar of the family, reflecting Erdrich's emphasis and affirmation of female virtues. Yan Jing (2024) analyzes Love Medicine from the perspective of ecofeminism. She believes that the novel reflects the oppression of women and nature by patriarchy, such as women suffering from male violence, identity crisis, and nature being abused and

plundered by humans. At the same time, Yan analyzes the reconstruction of the image of women and nature by Erdrich, demonstrating women's self-awakening, pursuit of subjectivity, and the vitality and power of nature in their interaction with nature which express the author's hope for building a harmonious society.

Regarding the postmodern narrative techniques in Love Medicine, Zhang (2007) points out that Erdrich's unique writing ability and rich short stories are attributed to the long-established Native American oral tradition. He emphasizes that the narrative fragmentation, reflexivity, and magical realism in Love Medicine are the most obvious manifestations of postmodern elements. Liu (2018) puts forward that the narrative techniques Erdrich employs in Love Medicine not only reflect the borrowing and development of Native American oral traditions but also embody postmodern narrative elements. Additionally, Erdrich employs these narrative techniques to prevent contemporary American Indians from being marginalized by mainstream American society and to integrate into mainstream American culture. In addition, Liu and Ma (2022) pointed out that Erdrich used "mythology" as a narrative method in Love Medicine. By integrating numerous Native American mythological stories, the narrative space of the novel has been expanded, highlighting the diversity of narrative themes. They also emphasized the use of themes such as "going home," "sacred circles," and "transforming animals" in Native American mythology, combined with the "metaphorical function" of mythology. Love Medicine not only breaks through the traditional narrative perspective of the novel, enriches the traditional narrative content, transcends traditional character settings and moral concepts, but also plays an important role in the structure, plot, and rhythm of the novel.

In terms of postcolonial interpretation, Zhu (2016) explores the motives, strategies, and relevance of cultural hybridity in the book from the aspects of Erdrich's growth environment, the social environment of the times, and literary trends. He also emphasizes that Erdrich shows the possibility of coexistence between Native American culture and white mainstream society by constructing a third space. Chen (2021) concentrates on the impact of white colonial rule on Native Americans. White policies such as the Dawes Act and the reservation system have caused the loss of Native American land, the destruction of traditional living environments and cultural marginalization. In the novel, Native Americans are forced to leave their homes and shift their lifestyle from fishing and hunting to farming, indicating the erosion of Native American traditional culture by human culture. He also mentions that Love Medicine embodies the resistance to white colonialism and cultural preservation of Native Americans. The characters' experiences reveal their struggle to maintain their cultural identity and resist white cultural assimilation. In addition, the intertextuality of the novel with the Bible and social context further reflects the complex relationship between Native American and white cultures, as well as the ways in which Native Americans seek to coexist with white society while

maintaining their cultural roots.

As far as the aspect of ecocritical studies, Qin (2010) in her article expresses her view that Erdrich is well aware of the importance of the close relationship between land and humans, which contains her ecological thoughts. Cui (2012) in her article reveals the oppression of nature and women by patriarchy and expresses the hope for harmony between humans and nature through the deconstruction of patriarchy.

In summary, research on Love Medicine both domestically and internationally involves multiple fields. While previous studies have explored Love Medicine through various perspectives such as symbolism, narrative techniques, and postcolonialism, relatively few have examined the novel from an ecofeminist perspective. Given the increasing global focus on environmental crises and gender issues, this study aims to enrich the interpretation of Love Medicine by analyzing the novel's themes of resistance and persistence from an ecofeminist lens.

## 3. Theoretical Framework of Ecofeminism

In the context of global ecological crises and persistent gender inequality, ecofeminism emerges as a critical theoretical lens that intertwines environmental degradation with patriarchal oppression. By exploring the interconnected exploitation of women and nature, ecofeminism challenges the cultural, economic, and political linkages between the exploitation of nature and the marginalization of women, advocating for a comprehensive approach to liberation. This chapter will introduce the origin, several core viewpoints of ecofeminism and its theoretical relevance with Love Medicine, providing a foundation for analyzing resistance and persistence in Louise Erdrich's Love Medicine.

### 3.1. Development of Ecofeminism

Ecofeminism is an influential theoretical and activist movement that has its roots in both environmental movements and feminism especially radical feminism and cultural feminism in modern western civilization. It primarily addresses the intrinsic connection between women and nature. While ancient cultures, such as Indigenous societies, often revered nature and women as life-givers, modern ecofeminism arose as a response to industrialized patriarchy. The term "ecofeminism" was first coined in 1974 by famous French feminist Françoise D'Eaubonne in her work Le Féminisme ou la Mort ("Feminism or Death"), which critiqued capitalist exploitation of nature and women's bodies. D'Eaubonne argued that the exploitation of nature and the oppression of women stemmed from the same patriarchal structures, thereby advocating for a unified struggle against both ecological destruction and gender inequality. Additionally, there are many other famous ecofeminists supporting her view, including Carolyn Merchant and Karen J. Warren. These Ecofeminists believe that since both feminist and ecological theories focus on patriarchal dualism, there is a connection between women and nature.

From the perspective of ecofeminism, patriarchal dualism is the root of both nature's exploitation and women's oppression. Therefore, there is a close relationship between women and the natural world. Ecofeminists argue that gender equality and environmental justice are mutually reinforcing; sustainable ecological practices must integrate feminist principles to address the systemic exploitation of both women and nature. (Yan, 2024)

The 1970s and 1980s were an important period for the development of ecofeminism. During this period, feminist scholars and activists discovered the link between environmental degradation and systemic gender oppression. For instance, the 1973 Chipko Movement in India became a typical example of ecofeminist resistance. Wangari Maathai's leadership in Kenya's Green Belt Movement demonstrated the great role of women in ecological restoration and social justice.

By the 1980s and 1990s, ecofeminism flourished in the academic field and gained significant achievements. Some of the leading scholars were Vandana Shiva, Carolyn Merchant, and Karen J. Warren. For example, Carolyn Merchant's work The Death of Nature in 1980 critiqued the Western scientific paradigm of objectifying women and nature and called for a comprehensive reconceptualization of the relationships between human and environment. Vandana Shiva's Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Development in 1988 emphasized how Third World societies view the productivity and activities of women and nature. (Cui, 2021) Both works became classics in the field and the academic contributions of these scholars further solidified ecofeminism as a distinct theoretical framework.

### 3.2. Core Concepts of Ecofeminism

Since the emergence of ecofeminism, many scholars have studied and developed it. In the late 1980s, several schools of thought were formed, including cultural ecofeminism, spiritual ecofeminism, materialist ecofeminism, vegetarian ecofeminism, and socialist ecofeminism. Despite the diversity of perspectives, the core of ecofeminism always centers on criticizing hierarchical power structures, respecting women and nature, and advocating holistic justice (Cui, 2021). Its main theoretical views are presented in the following four aspects.

Criticizing patriarchal dualism. Ecofeminism challenges dualism in Western philosophy such as man versus woman, culture versus nature, and reason versus emotion that rationalize domination. Rooted in Enlightenment thought, this conceptualization portrays men as rational "masters" over women and nature. Ecofeminists consider that breaking down this hierarchy is the key to achieving gender equality and ecological sustainability.

Emphasizing ethics of caring and interconnectedness. Drawing on feminist ethics, ecofeminism emphasizes relationality and caring as an alternative to exploitative systems. Scholars such as Carol Gilligan and Nel Noddings advocate for the construction of an ethical system that prioritizes empathy, the principle of

reciprocity, and the well-being of human and non-human communities. This ecofeminism opposes individualism and promotes sustainable coexistence with the earth.

Emphasizing intersectionality and environmental justice. Ecofeminism is intertwined with environmental justice, focusing on how race, class, and gender factors exacerbate ecological vulnerability. For example, women in poor communities often endure the worst water shortages or pollution. Scholars like Vandana Shiva and Wangari Maathai reveal how colonialism and globalization exacerbate these inequalities, calling for systemic change to meet the demands of marginalized groups.

Worshipping spiritual and cultural ecofeminism. Some ecofeminists revive spiritual traditions that worship nature and femininity, such as goddess worship or indigenous cosmologies. Starhawk's The Spiral Dance in 1979 and Paula Gunn Allen's The Sacred Hoop in 1986 demonstrate how reconnecting with sacred feminine archetypes can inspire resistance to ecological destruction and gender violence.

The development of ecofeminism has been relatively mature so far, it has evolved into a dynamic and pluralistic movement, bridging theory and praxis to address intertwined ecological and social crises. By foregrounding the voices of marginalized women and critiquing oppressive systems, it offers transformative visions for sustainability and justice.

### 3.3. Ecofeminism's Relevance to Love Medicine

Ecofeminism provides a unique theoretical framework for interpreting Love Medicine, and its core concerns are highly relevant to the existential dilemmas, cultural resistance and ecological consciousness of the female characters in the novel. Through the following three dimensions, ecofeminism reveals the intertwined relationship between gender, nature and culture in the novel:

The first is the double oppression of gender and ecology: the symbiotic dilemma in the colonial context. The central argument of ecofeminism is the systematic exploitation of women and nature by capitalist patriarchy, which is vividly reflected in Love Medicine. By depicting the encounters of Chippewa women, the novel reveals how colonialism achieves dual control through patriarchy and ecological violence. For example, Lulu Lamartine's resistance to the institution of marriage is not only a rejection of gender oppression, but also a challenge to colonialism's reshaping of Aboriginal social structures. Her declaration that "my body is my story" (Erdrich, 1993, 211) directly echoes Daubron's (1974) thesis that the female body is an object of exploitation alongside nature. Marie Lazare's confrontation with the Western medical system through herbal medicine, on the other hand, exemplifies Silva's (1988) notion of "survival as resistance," in which women guard the integrity of ecology and culture through their daily practices.

The second is the decolonization of dualism: reconstructing the relationship between nature and culture. Plumwood's (1993) critique of patriarchal dualism provides a theoretical tool for interpreting the fragmentation of nature and culture in the novel. Through the practice of female characters, Love Medicine deconstructs the opposing narratives of rational male and sensual female, culture and nature in Western civilization. For example, Marie's knowledge of herbal medicine blends spiritual healing with ecological wisdom, challenging the Cartesian dichotomy between mind and body. Lulu's reintroduction of the bison not only restores the ecological balance but also dissolves the opposition between progress and tradition through the revival of cultural symbols. This narrative strategy of decolonization is highly consistent with the "relational thinking" advocated by ecofeminism.

The last point is that local women as ecological guardians: the intertextuality of theory and text. The assertion made by LaDuke (1999) that "native women are the guardians of the land" is literally interpreted in the novel. Lulu's protection of the tribal land and Marie's cultivation of medicinal plants reflect the central role of native women in ecological and cultural transmission. The recurring imagery of "land as memory" (e.g. June's death and return) echoes the eco-feminist concept of "earth memory," emphasizing the indivisibility of land as a cultural carrier. This intertextuality between theory and text highlights the interpretive power of ecofeminism on aboriginal narratives.

In conclusion, this chapter has revealed the theoretical relevance between ecofeminism and Love Medicine by sorting out its development and core ideas. Ecofeminism's critique of patriarchal dualism, its emphasis on women's symbiotic relationship with nature, and its concern for indigenous knowledge systems provide compelling evidence for interpreting the dual resistance of Chippewa women in the novel. From the dual oppression of gender and ecology to the practice of decolonizing dualism to the narrative presentation of native women as ecological guardians, ecofeminism not only explains the deeper logical aspects of the novel's female characters' resistance and perseverance, but also highlights Erdrich's multiple critiques of colonialism, capitalism, and patriarchy. This intertextuality between theory and text lays the foundation for Chapter Three to explore thoroughly the interaction between resistance and persistence in Love Medicine.

## 4. Analysis of Resistance and Persistence in Love Medicine Based on Ecofeminism

Louise Erdrich's Love Medicine intricately weaves the struggles of Chippewa women navigating patriarchal oppression and environmental degradation while simultaneously preserving their cultural heritage and asserting their autonomy. Their stories reflect the interconnectedness of gender, culture, and nature, offering a profound critique of anthropocentric and patriarchal dominance. As the author mentioned earlier, there are relatively fewer studies which analyze Love Medicine

from an ecofeminism perspective. In order to analyze the ecofeminist ideas embodied in the book in more detail, this chapter will analyze Love Medicine from the aspects of manifestation of resistance and manifestation of persistence. It will discuss how characters like Marie Lazarre and Lulu Lamartine embody resistance against systemic oppression and persistence in safeguarding their identity, culture traditions, and ecological balance.

## 4.1. Representations of Resistance in Love Medicine

D'Eaubonne argues that ecofeminism is a product of the combination of ecology and feminism, and to some extent there is consistence between the long-term oppression of nature by humans and the oppression of women by men under patriarchy are consistent. This viewpoint resonates profoundly in Louise Erdrich's Love Medicine where resistance operates on two interrelated levels: resisting patriarchal constraints and opposing environmental exploitation. These behaviors of resistance are deeply rooted in the spiritual and cultural connection between the characters and the land, aligning with ecofeminist principles that emphasize the liberation of both women and nature from oppressive hierarchies.

### 4.1.1. Resistance to Patriarchal Oppression

In Love Medicine, the patriarchal system within the Chippewa community has been exacerbated by colonial influences, degrading women to subordinate roles defined by family life and silence. However, some female characters like Lulu Lamartine and Marie Lazarre subvert these expectations through rebellious acts, reclaiming control over their bodies, relationships, and destinies.

In the novel, Lulu emerges as one of the most subversive figures, she embodies radical defiance. As Shi Meng (2021) notes, Lulu's "unapologetic authenticity" positions her as a "symbol of rebellion against the patriarchal order." On the one hand, Lulu rejects conforming to monogamous norms are acts of resistance against settler-colonial impositions of nuclear family structures. She engages in multiple relationships but consistently refuses to be confined by marriage. Lulu's autonomy directly challenges the gendered double standard that condemns women for the same desires celebrated in men. Her brief union with Beverly Lamartine ends with her initiating separation. Traditionally, marriage is considered as a path to social legitimacy for women, but Lulu's transient partnerships broke male's control over female bodies and labor. By refusing to be defined as a wife or property, she asserts that a woman's worth lies in self-determination, not marital status. Lulu's defiance mirrors ecofeminist critiques of the nature and woman dichotomy. Patriarchal societies equate women and nature as exploitable resources, but Lulu's variable relationships reject this commodification (Yan, 2024). Her autonomy symbolizes resistance to the systemic erasure of Indigenous women's self-control under colonialism.

On the other hand, she pursues sexual freedom and defies the male gaze. She openly

embraced her sexuality, wearing vibrant clothing and frankly talking about her romantic story. This challenges the stereotype of the "docile native woman" perpetuated by both colonial and Indigenous patriarchal systems. When male figures like Chief Nanapush try to humiliate her, she retorts that the body belongs to the individual and has nothing to do with others (Erdrich, 1993). Lulu's sexual autonomy is not merely personal liberation but a reclamation of narrative power. She subverts patriarchal authority by refusing to allow men to define her own morality. This corresponds with ecofeminist principles of "body as politics" which means women's bodies like land should not be stripped of autonomy by external forces. Furthermore, Lulu's resistance against patriarchal oppression extends beyond personal choices to political autonomy. When tribal leaders collaborate with white authorities to industrialize reservation land, Lulu angrily denounces their betrayal: "You've sold our ancestors' bones for a few coins!" (Erdrich, 1993: 132). Her confrontation critiques the complicity of Indigenous men in perpetuating colonial and patriarchal systems, highlighting ecofeminism's intersectional critique of power dynamics.

In contrast, Marie Lazarre employs strategic resilience. Marie's resistance, though more subtle than Lulu's, is equally transformative in challenging patriarchal norms. She challenges patriarchal norms by redefining religious symbolism and motherhood. Marie spends her early years in a convent where she suffers physical and psychological abuse by Sister Leopolda, and it is during her convent years that her resistance begins. After being scalded with boiling water, she transforms her pain into strength and escapes the convent, reclaiming her Chippewa identity (Yan, 2024). This act of survival resonates with ecofeminist scholar Vandana Shiva's assertion that women's daily acts of sustenance are revolutionary (Shiva, 1988). The Catholic Church symbolizes the collusion of patriarchy and colonialism, seeking to erase Indigenous spirituality and female autonomy. Eventually Marie abandoned the Catholic: "My skin was dust. Dust my lips. Dust the dirty spoons on the ends of my feet. Rise up! I thought. Rise up and walk! There is no limit to this dust!" (Erdrich, 1993: 60). The dust here symbolizes the influence of Catholic Church on Indian native religion. Marie's removal of dust means that she got rid of the Catholic and returned to her native religion, asserting sovereignty over her body and spirit.

Moreover, as a guardian of motherhood society, Marie subverts patriarchal expectations of motherhood. While superficially conforming to the role of dutiful wife, she quietly controls family decisions. For instance, she supports her adopted daughter June's pursuit of education despite her husband Nector's objections, stating "She'll learn what they can't teach here… how to survive their world" (Erdrich, 1993: 89). This act destabilizes the patriarchal notion of male authority, transforming motherhood into a vehicle for intergenerational solidarity and liberation. Later, as a matriarch, Marie subverts patriarchal authority by becoming the family's decision-maker. Her husband, Nector Kashpaw, rises to tribal leadership

largely due to Marie's guidance, undermining the myth of male superiority. Marie's resistance reflects the ecofeminist ethics of care. By nurturing marginalized children like June and fostering community bonds, she challenges systemic oppression through relational strength. Her strategy demonstrates that resistance can thrive within traditional roles when those roles are reimagined as acts of defiance.

At the same time, there are other secondary female characters as agents of resistance that further illustrate communal resistance. The novel further amplifies resistance through figures like Fleur Pillager, whose mystical connection to nature defies patriarchal domination. Fleur's ability to commune with spirits and control natural forces, such as her survival of multiple drownings which positions her as a guardian of Indigenous cosmology. Her resistance is both ecological and gendered and she refuses to relinquish land to colonizers and rejects subservience to men. Fleur's narrative aligns with ecofeminist critiques of rational masculinity that seeks to dominate both women and nature (Plumwood, 2003).

#### 4.1.2. Resistance against Environmental Destruction

Louise Erdrich intricately weaves the struggles of Indigenous women with the degradation of their ancestral lands in Love Medicine. For Chippewa people, land is not merely a physical space, but a sacred entity intertwined with cultural memory and spiritual identity. Ecofeminism's emphasis on the parallel exploitation of women and nature is vividly illustrated through the characters' fight against ecological degradation. Female characters in the novel resist environmental destruction through acts of cultural preservation, spiritual reclamation, and direct confrontation. Their resistance is not merely a reaction to ecological harm but a holistic assertion of identity, sovereignty, and intergenerational responsibility.

Lulu Lamartine is an active environmental advocate. She emerges as a pivotal figure in resisting environmental exploitation through her active protection of tribal lands. When the U.S. government attempts to confiscate tribal land for commercial development, she organizes community protests and leverages her political influence to stop the deals. In a confrontation with government officials, she bluntly states, "This land holds the bones of our grandmothers. You cannot buy what was never yours to sell" (Erdrich, 1993: 132). Scholar Winona LaDuke (1999) argues that indigenous women's resistance to land exploitation stems from their role as "guardians of the land" (Erdrich, 1993: 78). Lulu's behaviors corroborate this view. Her resistance transcends environmental activism as a defense of cultural sovereignty over capitalist patriarchy's alienation of nature. Moreover, Lulu preserves biodiversity while defending sovereignty. She helps reintroduce the wild buffalo, an important species sacred to Chippewa mythology. This act restores ecological balance and symbolizes cultural revival, embodying ecofeminist principles of reciprocity between humans and nature.

Marie Lazarre's resistance against environmental exploitation is more subtle but no less significant, which is rooted in her spiritual connection to the natural world.

Early in the novel, Marie critiques the Catholic Church's role in displacing Indigenous ecological spirituality. She reflects, "The priests called our ceremonies pagan, but they never saw how the trees prayed with us" (Erdrich, 1993: 57). By rejecting the Church's demonization of Indigenous land ceremonies, Marie resists the ideological underpinnings of environmental exploitation. Marie's role as a healer further emphasizes her resistance. She uses traditional herbal remedies to treat community members, countering the environmental degradation that has polluted modern medicine. For example, she gathers uncontaminated plants from hidden areas of the reservation, ensuring the survival of Ojibwe medicinal knowledge. She chose to give birth at home with the help of traditional midwife Fleur Pillager, rejecting Western medical institutions that devalue Indigenous knowledge. This decision reaffirms trust in nature's wisdom and resists the commodification of life under colonial modernity. And Marie's reliance on herbal remedies, such as Love Medicine, further underscores her commitment to ecological harmony. As Xu (2016) argues that these practices assert Indigenous science as equal to Western paradigms, challenging the hegemony of technocratic imperialism.

Through acts of defiance against patriarchal oppression and environmental degradation, these women reclaim their agency and challenge the systemic hierarchies imposed by colonialism. However, resistance alone is not enough; the persistence of Indigenous identity and cultural practices ensures that these struggles endure beyond individual acts of defiance. The following section will explore how persistence functions as a long-term strategy for Indigenous survival and empowerment.

## 4.2. Representations of Persistence in Love Medicine

If the last section explores how women challenge oppression through active resistance, this section emphasizes how they consistently practice their cultural identity (persistence) in their daily lives. Resistance is a "direct confrontation", while persistence is a "long, silent struggle". The two complement each other, and together they build the path of emancipation for women in Love Medicine. While resistance confronts intersecting oppression that is rooted in patriarchy, colonialism, and environmental degradation, persistence emerges as an active and transformative force to ensure the survival of Indigenous identity and traditions. Marie and Lulu exemplify this duality, balancing defiance with cultural stewardship. Their persistence is not passive endurance but an active reaffirmation of Indigenous values in the face of assimilation.

### 4.2.1. Pursuit of Identity and Independence

The female characters in Love Medicine persistently negotiate their identities within a patriarchal and colonial framework, asserting autonomy despite systemic constraints. (Warren, 2000).

Marie Lazarre's journey begins with her rejection of the squaw stereotype imposed

by colonial narratives. As a young girl, she joins the convent, not out of religious devotion but to escape the poverty and marginalization faced by Indigenous women. Her decision symbolizes a quest for self-definition beyond societal expectations. However, her encounter with Sister Leopolda, a figure embodying colonial and patriarchal violence, forces Marie to confront internalized oppression. Despite Leopolda's physical and psychological abuse, Marie persists in claiming her agency. When she declares, "I was not going to be a saint. I was going to be something else" (Erdrich, 1993: 45), she rejects the martyrdom expected of Indigenous women and carves a path toward self-determination. Scholars like Smith (2005) argue that Marie's persistence reflects a broader Indigenous feminist resistance to assimilation. After escaping the convent, she consciously reclaims her Chippewa identity by relearning traditional practices and language. Her efforts to teach her children Indigenous values subvert assimilationist policies aimed at severing intergenerational knowledge, such as respect for nature and communal responsibility. In later years, Marie insists on speaking Chippewa despite societal pressure to assimilate, and it becomes a political act of linguistic.

Lulu Lamartine's persistence lies in her unapologetic authenticity. She often labeled a "seductress" by the community for her refusal to conform, but Lulu remains steadfast in her beliefs. Her son remarks that his mother belongs to those who aren't afraid of life (Shi, 2021). This fearless authenticity challenges both patriarchal and colonial narratives that seek to homogenize Indigenous identities. Even when ostracized for her relationships, Lulu refuses to apologize, asserting: "I loved who I loved. That was my right as a person and a Chippewa" (Erdrich, 1993: 146). Her defiance mirrors ecofeminist assertions that "self-determination is the foundation of decolonization" (Smith, 1999).

Albertine Johnson's academic pursuits are another example that reflects the persistence in seeking identity and independence. She is a younger generation character who persists in seeking education as a means of empowerment. Her enrollment in university represents a break from cyclical poverty and a reclamation of intellectual sovereignty. When she reflects, "I wanted to be the one who told our stories, not the one they were told about" (Erdrich, 1993: 212), she echoes Hooks' (1989) assertion that education is a site of resistance for marginalized women.

#### 4.2.2. Persistence in Preserving Cultural Heritage and Tradition

Women's preservation of culture in Love Medicine is a practice of ecological and feminist restoration. For instance, Marie Lazarre's role as a "Mother Earth" figure (Xu, 2016) is central to this theme. She revives endangered traditions, such as crafting "love medicine" which is an herbal remedy symbolizing spiritual and ecological healing. This practice not only honors ancestral knowledge but also critiques Western biomedicine's alienation from nature. And the garden where she cultivates medicinal herbs becomes a realistic reflection of the idea of nourishing reciprocity advocated by ecofeminism.

Zelda is initially portrayed as a stereotypical person, but her adherence to Ojibwe ceremonies demonstrates her perseverance. She organizes the annual "love medicine" gathering, a ceremony that blends spiritual healing with community healing. She meticulously prepares traditional foods and medicines, such as harvesting sage and brewing cedar tea, symbolizing a reconnection with the land.

In addition, June Morrissey's symbolic return to the land is also a reflection of persistence. June Morrissey, portrayed by Erdrich in Love Medicine, is a female figure who has been suffering since birth. The novel opens with June's tragic death but completes the sublimation of her life by returning to the land. As a struggling woman, the author gives her a vigorous identity. The author Erdrich incorporates the biblical story of Jesus and Chippewa mythology into her creation, allowing June to break through the boundaries of life and death in her homeland on the reservation, redeeming her people with love and forgiveness and reuniting with them. International scholar Gao (2020) points out that June's death is a metaphor for the Indigenous' belonging, and the land becomes a carrier of memory and persistence.

These female characters in Love Medicine transform endurance into a positive survival strategy with sustained perseverance. They regain identity, assert independence and preserve cultural heritage. This kind of persistence not only resists colonial encroachment but also fosters the spiritual and ecological foundations of their communities. However, such persistence does not exist in isolation, it is dynamically intertwined with acts of resistance to form a whole emancipatory framework. The next section will explore the intertwined logic of resistance and persistence in the novel and its significance in deconstructing patriarchy and reshaping a sustainable future.

### 4.3. Interrelation Between Resistance and Persistence

In Love Medicine, resistance and persistence are not isolated acts but interdependent forces that jointly confront patriarchal colonial oppression and ecological exploitation. Resistance as an active defiance and persistence as a sustained cultural persistence reinforce each other, enabling Chippewa women to regain autonomy, identity, and ecological balance. Their interconnection manifests in three dimensions.

Firstly, resistance and persistence are complementary dynamics. Resistance is an act of persistence, and vice versa. In Love Medicine, resistance and persistence are two sides of the same coin. Resistance confronts the oppressive system while persistence strengthens resistance by ensuring the survival of indigenous values and traditions. Lulu Lamartine's resistance to patriarchal norms, such as her refusal of monogamy and her insistence on sexual autonomy, stems from her adherence to indigenous kinship systems. Her environmental actions, such as organizing protests to stop land sales and promoting the reintroduction of wild buffalo, are both

resistance to capitalist exploitation and persistence in cultural heritage (Shi, 2021). Marie Lazarre's subtle resistance, such as subverting traditional motherhood roles and reinterpreting Catholic symbols, is similarly rooted in her guardianship of Ojibwe herbal knowledge and language. Her medicinal garden resists Western biomedical systems and cultural assimilation while maintaining ecological balance and perpetuating cultural memory. The ceremonial gatherings organized by Zelda directly confront the erasure of indigenous knowledge by colonizers, proving that the preservation of traditions is itself a powerful act of resistance. As ecofeminist Vandana Shiva (1988) says, resistance is persistence in the face of erasure. By persisting in tradition, these female characters resist the cognitive violence of Western hegemony.

Secondly, resistance and persistence together indicate the emancipatory goals of women and nature. Ecofeminism emphasizes the breakdown of the binary logic of women and nature as exploitable resources. The persistent resistance in the novel comes together to dismantle the patriarchal colonial logic of commodification of women and nature. Lulu's declaration of "My body is my own story" directly criticizes the co-exploitation of nature and women under the dualism (Erdrich, 1993, 211). Marie's persistence in herbal healing and home births resists colonial modernity's alienation from nature, affirming Indigenous science. The characters' struggles also reflect ecofeminism's emphasis on relationality. Resistance in the novel is rarely individualistic but rather thrives in networks of persistent communities. For instance, Fleur Pillager's mystical bond with the land exemplifies how resistance against environmental destruction thrives in persistent spiritual communication. Her role as a "guardian of the land" is inseparable from her persistence in practicing rituals that honor the interdependence of humans and ecosystems. Similarly, June Morrissey's symbolic return to the land after death is a fusion of Christian and Chippewa symbolism that transforms tragedy into regeneration, highlighting the contributions of the persistence of cultural memory in resisting cultural erasure (Yan, 2024).

Thirdly, the land serves as a narrative core of resistance and persistence. Erdrich employs the land as a central symbol that bridges resistance and persistence. Lulu's protection of tribal lands is both defiance and cultural revival, as seen in her reintroduction of buffalo—a keystone species symbolizing ecological and spiritual reciprocity. Marie's garden, a microcosm of sustainability, merges resistance like defying commodified health systems with persistence like preserving Ojibwe knowledge. June's death, reinterpreted through Indigenous cosmology, positions the land as a site of memory and healing, reflecting ecofeminist belief of Linda Tuhiwai Smith that "the earth remembers". And through this remembrance, resistance against colonial fragmentation gains strength.

In Love Medicine, resistance and persistence are interdependent in sustaining indigenous survival and sovereignty. The former dismantles oppression while the

latter rebuilds cultural ecologies destroyed by colonialism. This interweaving constitutes a complete ecofeminist practice that rejects hierarchical opposition and emphasizes interconnectedness. Through female characters such as Lulu, Marie, and June, Erdrich shows that the true liberation of women and nature requires both the courage to confront the powerful and the resilience to guard tradition.

This interconnection not only deepens the understanding of the novel but also enriches the ecofeminism with indigenous perceptions that sublimate resistance and perseverance into inseparable love and healing.

## 5. Implications of Resistance and Persistence in Love Medicine

Louise Erdrich's Love Medicine transcends literary narrative, providing guidance for the theoretical construction of ecofeminism and the contemporary practice of social change. By portraying Chippewa women's dual actions of resistance to oppression and persistence of tradition, the novel provides critical lessons for reconciling gender equity, cultural survival, and ecological balance. This chapter synthesizes these lessons into actionable implications for ecofeminist discourse and modern challenges.

### 5.1. Ecofeminist Awareness and Its Practical Applications

The analysis of resistance and persistence in Love Medicine offers significant insights into the evolution and practical application of ecofeminist theory. Nowadays, the global ecological crisis is aggravating and gender inequality is prominent. The intertwined dilemmas of climate change and gender discrimination urgently require systematic and comprehensive solutions. In recent years, the struggle of rural women for land rights under the impact of climate change coincides with the resistance of the characters in Love Medicine. Modern activists also draw from these historical struggles to develop intersectional solutions that simultaneously address ecological and social justice issues. Analyzing Love Medicine from an ecofeminist perspective is profoundly enlightening on how to cultivate more ecofeminist consciousness and practice in contemporary society.

Specifically, the intrinsic connection between women and nature revealed in Love Medicine confirms the history of patriarchal and colonial oppression of them. This suggests that contemporary societies need to emphasize the intrinsic value of women and nature, translating it into sustainable development practices. For example, companies can implement green production policies, governments can enforce regulations that protect ecosystems and women's rights, and individuals can make conscious choices that support these values. In the novel, the persistence of Native American women in the face of environmental degradation and patriarchal oppression provides spiritual support for contemporary social movements. This highlights the critical role of collective action and cultural inheritance in the pursuit of social justice, which can help the ecofeminist movement strengthen the

perception of women's role as guardians of ecology and community.

In addition, Love Medicine demonstrates the transformative potential of literary narratives in fostering ecofeminist consciousness. Empathic understanding between social groups can be enhanced by sharing stories that celebrate women's connection to nature and their resistance to oppression. Educational institutions and cultural organizations can incorporate ecofeminist literature and art works into their teaching and activities to promote the social dissemination of ecofeminist awareness.

Therefore, it is necessary to further explore how these lessons can be applied to a broad range of social movements in order to address the complex ecological and contemporary social challenges after exploring the guidance of Love Medicine in ecofeminist awareness cultivation and practice.

## 5.2. Lessons for Contemporary Society

The analysis of resistance and persistence in Love Medicine also provides valuable insights for contemporary social movements that aim to address ecological and gender justice.

In terms of intersectionality, it emphasizes the intersectionality of how race, class, and gender inequalities intersect with environmental vulnerabilities. For example, Indigenous women in Brazil combat land dispossession, cultural erasure, and systemic racism simultaneously, reflecting the intertwined nature of ecological and gender justice, much like the characters in Love Medicine. So contemporary movements must recognize and resolve these interconnected oppressions to achieve true liberation.

At the level of community power, the narrative of Love Medicine underscores the power of community and solidarity in the struggle for justice. The characters' resistance and persistence are often grounded in their community bonds and shared cultural heritage. This suggests the importance of building inclusive and supportive networks that uplift marginalized voices. Contemporary social movements can learn from this and promote community-based initiatives that help women and indigenous communities to protect their lands and rights.

In terms of the transformative potential, the novel champions the transformative potential of personal and collective transformation. Despite adversity, characters in Love Medicine embody resilience and creativity, proving that persistent commitment to justice can inspire meaningful change. This reminds contemporary activists to remain optimistic while criticizing reality.

In addition, the ecofeminist analysis of Love Medicine also has practical implications for individuals seeking to integrate these values into their everyday lives. On an ecological level, it prompts people to re-examine the relationship between human beings and nature. We are interdependent with the natural world and should respect it more. We should reduce our ecological impact and practice sustainability

through a green lifestyle. On a social level, the novel reminds us of the importance of uplifting women and marginalized groups. In our personal and professional lives, we should advocate for gender equality, fight against discrimination and support initiatives that empower women and indigenous groups. At the cultural level, Love Medicine encourages us to value and protect our cultural heritage. We can build a more inclusive and understanding society that respects the rich diversity of humanity by celebrating our cultural roots and supporting different cultural expressions.

Overall, Love Medicine transcends its literary boundaries to offer actionable insights for ecofeminist theory and contemporary practice. Intertwining resistance and persistence, the novel advocates for a world where ecological sustainability, gender equity, and cultural sovereignty are mutually reinforced. For ecofeminism, it means embracing decoloniality and centering marginalized epistemologies. For society, it calls for systemic changes from inclusive policymaking to base-level activism to respect the interconnectedness of all life. As climate disasters and social inequalities intensify, the lessons from Love Medicine remind us that true liberation does not lie in domination but in balancing the subtle relationship between humans and nature.

## 6. Conclusion

Ecofeminist theory provides a unique perspective for interpreting Love Medicine. Therefore, this thesis explores the themes of resistance and persistence in Love Medicine from the perspective of ecofeminism and provides the author with some findings. The study not only enriches the understanding of Love Medicine but also contributes to a broader discussion on ecofeminism and Indigenous epistemology, expanding the boundaries of ecofeminist discourse.

The analysis demonstrates that resistance and persistence in Love Medicine constitute an interdependent dynamic that is crucial to indigenous cultural survival and female liberation. The female characters' resistance to patriarchal and colonial systems is reinforced by their unwavering persistence in maintaining Indigenous culture, demonstrating how ecofeminist practice can be enacted in real-world struggles. This dual dynamic coincides with Vandana Shiva's (1988) concept of resistance grounded in persistence, providing a fresh perspective on ecofeminist practice. By emphasizing the applicability of ecofeminism to Indigenous narratives, this study enriches the interpretation of Love Medicine in literary criticism and provides a decolonial perspective for addressing systemic inequalities.

Additionally, the study also reveals the centrality of land as both a site of resistance and a symbol of cultural continuity. The land emerges as a dual symbol of defiance and continuity, reflecting Indigenous women's role as ecological guardians and resonating with Winona LaDuke's (1999) concept of Indigenous women as keepers of the land. The synergy of resistance and persistence in the novel provides critical insights into contemporary struggles toward ecological balance and gender justice.

However, this thesis has certain limitations due to my limited academic capabilities. There are many different characters in the novel worth examining, while the thesis primarily focused on central characters. A more nuanced ecofeminist analysis could further explore secondary characters like Fleur and Albertine. These characters represent different dimensions of resistance and persistence, especially concerning the intersection of Indigenous spirituality and the environment, which could potentially deepen the ecofeminist reading of Erdrich's work. Hence it is necessary to expand the dimensions from other theoretical perspectives.

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