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COMMUNITY IDENTITY AS AN INTEGRATED PART OF PLACE-IDENTITY

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Abstract

This article explores community identity as an integral component of place-identity in Louise Erdrich's novel *The Plague of Doves*. The study focuses on the ways in which belonging to a family, community, region, and cultural memory shapes the self-perception of the characters. Drawing on Lee Cuba and David M. Hummon's theoretical views on identification with dwelling, community, and region, the paper examines how local attachment, intergenerational memory, storytelling, and indigenous cultural heritage contribute to the construction of identity. Particular attention is paid to Evelina's narrative perspective and Mooshum's oral stories, which function as important sources of cultural continuity and communal belonging. The analysis shows that Erdrich represents place not merely as a geographical setting, but as a living cultural and emotional space where personal and collective identities intersect. The article argues that community identity in the novel is formed through shared history, kinship ties, oral tradition, and emotional attachment to land. Thus, *The Plague of Doves* demonstrates the inseparable connection between place, memory, and the formation of the self.

Keywords: place-identity, community identity, belonging, Louise Erdrich, *The Plague of Doves*, indigenous culture, storytelling, regional identity



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Introduction

Within centuries, it is undeniable fact that people have always strived to acquire a place called ‘home’, a set of shared guidelines, and areas to congregate so they could establish a feeling of authority. Humans have a persistent yearning to belong to a family, community, or group, regardless of their geographic location, culture, ethnic origin, or value system. A person may experience culture and spirituality, exchange feelings, spend time, play, and create amazing activities by engaging in creative endeavors. It simplifies life and lends significance to things where this belonging is achieved. This feeling of belonging is earned in smaller parts of society, and sometimes the people who belong to a special group or community can share these values among them by showcasing these traditions and cultural heritage in them. In the novel “The Plague of Doves” Louise Erdrich showcases how the characters’ selves shape connected to the region, community they reside, as it becomes evident that the Dakota people indigenous keepers of the land. This land was reserved by the Dakota in the Treaty of Traverse to Sioux signed with the United States in 1851 and it remains sacred to them today (13). The Ojibwe people are fellow indigenous inhabitants of this land. The Dakota and Ojibwe people are also the original stewards of stories in what is now called Minnesota. Louise Erdrich clearly depicts the values that influence the identities of the characters.

Literature review

In the research of place-based identity, it becomes clear that this approach is loosely connected with several fields. As in the 1980s researchers started thoroughly learning the relationship between a person's self, or, in other words, identity and environment, this approach resulted in the development of it in fields such as environmental psychology, phenomenological geography, cultural



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history, and others. The authors Lee Cuba and David M. Hummon, in their article “A Place to Call Home: Identification with Dwelling, Community, and Region,” explain that these researches have contributed much to our understanding of place identification (4). In the following paper, we attempt to discuss community identity as an integrated part of place identity in characters’ selves in sociology and literature based on the article “A Place to Call Home: Identification with Dwelling, Community, and Region” by Lee Cuba and David M. Hummon and the novel “The Plague of Doves” by Louise Erdrich.

Results

Community identity refers to the shared sense of belonging, values, norms, history, and culture that bind individuals together within a specific community. It encompasses the unique characteristics that define a group of people who identify with each other based on common interests, experiences, geographical locations, or other factors. Louise Erdrich, in the novel “The Plague of Doves,” introduces the community where the people and relationships with one another are tightly linked. The novel retells the history of a generation, and the characters who belong to the various parts of this generation contribute to the novel’s plot by adding their own story. Evelina, who is one of the youngest characters, passes through different periods in the novel and both becomes inspired by the events that take place around her and from the stories that her close people retell her. Evelina is a girl in her teens at the beginning of the novel and she retells about the events that have touched her, the stories that have motivated her and the people who have inspired her. Especially, Evelina focuses on her grandfather’s stories which have a deep impression on her as a teenager. She points out that ‘Mooshum was our favorite indoor entertainment, next to the television. But our father had removed the television’s knobs and hidden them. Although we made constant



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efforts, we never found the knobs and came to believe that he carried them upon his person at all times. So we listened to our Mooshum instead' (5). The excerpt above showcases the factors that influenced the upbringing of the children in the novel "The Plague of Doves." By giving detailed explanations about the characters' pastimes, Louise Erdrich strives to describe how children were raised during that period and how Evelina's father approaches the upbringing of his children. He does not want to learn or to spend time much by watching TV, but instead he wants them to talk to and get invaluable advice from their grandfather. It shows that a grandfather, as a member of a small community in the city they live in, or as a member of the generation to which they belong, or as the head of the family, is able to pass much more costless values to his grandchildren. Mooshum Chan shares myriad examples of live events connected to their common beliefs they share, principles they follow, and ethical standards that they should possess.

Through creative activity, a person creates places where one can experience culture and spirituality, share emotions, spend time, play, and create great projects. It gives meaning to objects in which this belonging is realized and makes life easier. According to Lee Cuba and David M. Hummon, 'Community attachment research indicates that integration into the local area is a prime determinant of attachment to locale. Local social involvements – particularly those with friends, but also those involving kin, organizational memberships, and local shopping – prove to be the most consistent and significant sources of sentimental ties to local places' (4; 115). Thus, not only psychologists but also sociologists also point out the importance of ties in the family, community, or with the people around us.

In **conclusion**, Louise Erdrich's *The Plague of Doves* presents community identity as one of the essential elements in the formation of place-identity. The



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novel demonstrates that the characters' understanding of the self is closely connected with family relations, communal memory, indigenous heritage, and the emotional significance of place. Through Evelina's narrative and Mooshum's stories, Erdrich emphasizes the role of oral tradition in transmitting historical experience, ethical values, and a sense of belonging from one generation to another.

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