

## **Overcoming Trauma and Restoring Peace in Louise Erdrich's *The Round House***

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### **Abstract**

Louise Erdrich is one of the prominent writers in contemporary American literature. She devotes her oeuvre to promote her indigenous Americans' culture, advocate their rights and speak out how they are still suffering in the reservations made by the Federal government. In *The Round House*, Erdrich attracts attention to the short comings of the Federal legal system which unfortunately has some loophole allowing non-indigenous perpetrators to commit crimes with impunity. She illustrates how such criminal acts aggravate the native community's - particularly women's- sense of insecurity and deepen their intergenerational trauma. The article will discuss the different traumas resulting from the sexual assault Geraldine Coutts goes through at the hands of white racist, Lark. It will also identify and explain the psychological consequences on the raped wife, Geraldine, Bazil Coutts, her husband, and Joe, their son. It will probe into each one's reaction to their traumas: the wife's PTSD, Bazil's resilient response and Joe's violent response. It will further explain how the son's revengeful act helps the whole family to restore peace according to Indigenous worldview. Psychological and social trauma theories, Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and the indigenous philosophy of justice will function as theoretical basis for the interdisciplinary analysis in the article.

### **Keywords:**

Indigenous Americans, Louise Erdrich, *The Round House*, Trauma theory, Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, Indigenous Legal system.

تجاوز الصدمة واستعادة السلام  
في رواية "المنزل الدائري" للكاتبة لويز إردريك

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**الملخص:**

لويز إردريك واحدة من الكاتبات البارزات في الأدب الأمريكي المعاصر، فهي تركز أعمالها لنشر ثقافة السكان الأصليين بأميركا، المطالبة بحقوقهم، والحديث عن معاناتهم في المعازل التي حددتها الحكومة الفيدرالية، ففي رواية "المنزل الدائري" تجذب الكاتبة الانتباه لجوانب القصور في نظام القانون الفيدرالي الذي به للأسف بعض الثغرات التي تسمح للمعتدين من غير السكان الأصليين أن يرتكبوا جرائم دونما عقاب، وتوضح أن هذه الجرائم تقاوم شعور السكان الأصليين، خاصة النساء، بعدم الأمان، كما تعمق إحساسهم بالصدمة النفسية بين الأجيال. يناقش المقال أنواع الصدمات المختلفة الناتجة عن الاعتداء الجنسي الذي تتعرض له جيرالدين كاوتس على يد العنصري الأبيض، لارك، كما أنه يحدد ويفسر الآثار النفسية المترتبة على الزوجة المغتصبة، جيرالدين، بازيل كاوتس، زوجها، وجو، ابنتهما. سوف يستكشف المقال رد فعل كل واحد منهم على هذه الصدمات: اضطراب ما بعد الصدمة عند الزوجة، رد الفعل الصامد لبازيل، والرد العنيف لجو، إضافة إلى أن المقال سوف يفسر بشكل أكبر كيف أن الفعل الانتقامي لابن يساعد الأسرة كلها على استعادة السلام طبقاً للرؤية العالمية للسكان الأصليين، وسوف توظف نظريات الصدمة النفسية والاجتماعية كأساس نظري للتحليل متعدد الأوجه في هذا المقال.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** الأمريكيون الأصليون، لويز إردريك، المنزل الدائري، نظرية الصدمة/ اضطراب ما بعد الصدمة، النظام القانوني للسكان الأصليين.

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**Introduction**

The author, Louise Erdrich is an American writer who won the National Book Award for Fiction in 2012 for her novel *The Round House*. The novel has been welcomed by both critics and readers and won the *New York Time's* Notable Book and *Washington Post's* Best Book of The Year. It came second in Erdrich's justice trilogy after *The Plague of Doves* (2012) and was followed by *LaRose* (2016). In the novel, Joe Coutts, a thirteen-year-old boy narrates the traumatic experience his family has been through after Linden Lark, a non-indigenous American brutally raped Geraldine, Joe's mother and attempted to burn her alive. Owing to legal loopholes, which Lark thoroughly knows, Bazil Coutts, Geraldine's husband, Joe's father, and a local judge, is not able to indict the rapist. Consequently, Joe's family are inflicted with individual traumas which amplify their historical/collective trauma as indigenous people. Therefore, the three characters are shocked by the traumatic event but two of them: Geraldine and Joe suffer posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as a consequence of the horrible accident.

Erdrich's keenness to raise the issue of indigenous female insecurity is based on alarming statistics from governmental institutions about violence against native women in the reservations. In her *New York Times'* article, "Rape on the Reservations", Erdrich mentions:

The Justice Department reports that one in three Native women is raped over her lifetime, while other sources report that many Native women are too demoralized to report rape. Perhaps this is because federal prosecutors decline to prosecute 67 percent of sexual abuse cases, according to the Government Accountability Office. Further tearing at the

social fabric of communities, a Native woman battered by her non-Native husband has no recourse for justice in tribal courts, even if both live on reservation ground. More than 80 percent of sex crimes on reservations are committed by non-Indian men, who are immune from prosecution by tribal courts. (Erdrich, 2013)

It is obvious that Erdrich's main objective in the trilogy of justice including *The Round House* is to cast light on the indigenous communities in the United States and North America in general. She tries to trace the problems of aboriginal Americans in the reservations where they attempt to maintain their traditions away from forced assimilation policies of the federal government. The novel focuses on the sexual assaults against women in indigenous reservations. The author advocates the persisting need to modify both the local legal system of indigenous tribes and US federal jurisdiction to deter perpetrators from committing such crimes without trial.

Many critics and researchers tackled the novel from different perspectives. For example, Liang Chen's "Ecology, Return, Transgression: Realism in Louise Erdrich's *The Round House*", studies how the author, through employing parallel plots, presents the suffering of indigenous women on the micro level and the aboriginal American subjectivity to the Euro-American domination on the macro novel from ecological and mythological point of view. In the end, Chen reaches the following conclusion:

In *The Round House*, Louise Erdrich uses rich Native ecological and mythological elements, together with her realistic manner, to exhibit her idea of this key issue, i.e., the key matter in the reconstruction of the contemporary Native American subjectivity should be derived from both the original Native American tradition and the confirmation from its confrontation against the white culture. (Chen, 2017, p. 20)

Laura Roldan-Sevillano, however, in “From Revenge to Justice: Perpetrator Trauma in Erdrich's *The Round House*”, discusses the novel as a representation of the new trend in trauma theory.

...postcolonial scholars have recently moved away from Freudian psychoanalysis and deconstruction, approaches that characterised the foundation of classical trauma theory and have started to embrace less prescriptive theories from other fields, including sociology and anthropology. All these changes have led to a redirection towards decolonization which has meant an advance in Postcolonial Trauma Studies because it has rethought trauma as —collective, spatial and material “rather than —individual, temporal and linguistic” as traditional trauma theory has maintained for years (Sevillano, 2016, p. 139)

Through analyzing Joe’s character as a traumatized perpetrator, Sevillano explains how the distinct borders between victimizer and victimized are blurred in the novel, a situation which makes readers understand Joe’s motivation to do his violent reaction (p. 154).

Another article entitled “Erdrich’s Crusade: Sexual Violence in *The Round House*,” by Julie Tharp discusses how Erdrich declares her crusade, as Erdrich herself puts it, against the deplorable conditions of indigenous Americans especially women.

The *Round House* testifies to the loss of tribal jurisdiction, which has directly affected the ability to protect Native women from sexual and domestic violence. Indeed the legislation makes it difficult to protect all Native people from crimes committed against them by non-Indians, but the complications arising from combined sexism and racism make it even less likely that crimes against Native women will be tried. (Tharp, 2014, p. 26)

In “Law Versus Love in *The Round House*”, Thomas Matchie examines the relationship between law and love,

concluding that Joe Coutts takes revenge as he is driven by his love to his mother. He argues

While most of her novels deal with love in its many forms, here for the first time she juxtaposes it with the complexity of law as it relates to Native American history, life and culture. While there is nothing new about the abuse of Natives in all of these dimensions, here she brings law and love together to highlight the fundamental injustice that interrupts the life of a loving Chippewa family simply because there is no legal consistency on which they can depend. (Matchie, 2015, p. 353)

With regard to this article, it will address the multiple traumas the Coutts experience after the rape of Geraldine. It will further discuss the different reactions of the wife, husband and son against the traumatic event. A psychological explanation of Joe's revengeful act will be provided. The article will also illustrate how Joe's violent reaction is the only available solution to help his family to restore peace and harmony. Trauma theory will be employed to analyze each character's behavior after the traumatic assault of Geraldine. The article will also utilize a brief review of the indigenous legal system to recognize the basic rationale of justice in native American legacy and identify the reasons behind the violent act Joe alludes to as a final remedy for his shattered family. In order to understand the native American mindset, the following section will introduce a brief review of indigenous philosophy of justice to understand the discrepancy between indigenous and non-indigenous Americans' worldviews.

### **Indigenous philosophy of justice**

Aboriginal Americans especially those living in reservations usually follow their ancestors' traditions and religious rituals. They often choose living in reservations to avoid the dominant Euro-American culture into which they are forced to assimilate whether at schools, universities and public facilities. Apart from young adults who usually try to assimilate to the standardized culture, Indian Americans adhere to their tribal legacy which represents the

main constituent of their local culture. This indigenous culture shapes their worldviews and enhances their self-esteem. According to the indigenous culture, the philosophy of justice is based on settling disputes and restoring harmony among the society.

The underlying philosophy in Aboriginal societies in dealing with crime was the resolution of disputes, the healing of wounds and the restoration of social harmony. It might mean an expression of regret for the injury done by the offender or by members of the offender's clan. It might mean the presentation of gifts or payment of some kind. It might even mean the forfeiture of the offender's life. But the matter was considered finished once the offence was recognized and dealt with by both the offender and the offended. Atonement and the restoration of harmony were the goals—not punishment. (The Aboriginal Justice Implementation Commission, 1999)

In part one of a series of articles entitled “Restorative Justice Practices of Native American, First Nation and Other Indigenous People of North America”, Laura Mirsky introduces the indigenous justice system through interviewing three justice practitioners, namely, Robert Yazzie, chief justice emeritus of the Navajo Nation Supreme Court, Judge Joseph Flies-Away of the Hualapai Nation, and James Zion, domestic abuse commissioner in the Family Court at Crownpoint, New Mexico. The indigenous worldview suggests a strong relationship between justice and spirituality. According to Flies-Away,

Spirituality does not, in this context, denote religion or church, but healing. “Spirituality helps to connect and bind us to each other as a community, as a tribe and as a nation,” he said. “It clarifies relationships and is what makes healing happen.” (Mirsky, 2004, p. 5)

Robert Yazzie postulates “The peacemaking process is related to the concept of k'e” which means “to restore my dignity, to restore my worthiness. Through the peacemaking process, an offender can

come to feel better, said Yazzie, especially when the person can say, “I’m responsible, I’m accountable.’ That does a lot to the spirit, the mind and the body of those who participate in the process,” he said (p. 2). Unlike the Western legal system which is based on punishing the perpetrator so that they would not violate the law again, Yazzie argues that “the Navajo way is to focus on the individual. You separate the action from the person” (p. 2). This does not mean that whoever commits a crime can go unpunished. “The Cree word for law is ki-ah-m, which translates as “for everything you do, good or bad, there are consequences” (p. 4). In other words, the American Indian justice urges the perpetrator not only to admit but also to bear the consequences whereas the Western style “not only permits denial; it also encourages lies”, according to Zion (p. 4). The below section will introduce Trauma theory, including definitions of individual and collective traumas, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms and how to recover from them.

### **Individual, historical, collective and social traumas, and PTSD**

Individual trauma refers to:

“an event that only occurs to one person. It can be a single event (e.g., mugging, rape, physical attack, work-related physical injury) or multiple or prolonged events (e.g., a life-threatening illness, multiple sexual assaults)”, (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014)

According to the same source, the person does not have to experience the traumatic event themselves, but they could get inflicted with trauma as long as they know the immediate person who has been through that event. Therefore, Geraldine, Bazil and Joe suffer individual trauma after Geraldine’s rape.

As for historical trauma, the publication posits that it is

known also as generational trauma, refers to events that are so widespread as to affect an entire culture; such events also have effects intense enough to influence generations of the culture beyond those who experienced them directly. The



enslavement, torture, and lynching of African Americans; the forced assimilation and relocation of American Indians onto reservations.

The racist and sexist implications of Linden Lark's rape of Geraldine along with his racist speech before committing the crime resonate with the prolonged and systematized subjugation of indigenous Americans at the hands of the European Americans. The Coutts' realization of this fact emphasizes their sense of historical trauma that persistently reminds them of their unending persecution, marginalization, and powerlessness. Also, the defiling of the round house which is a sacred site to the Ojibwe tribe is another violation that magnifies the family's continued trauma. They never forget the lynching of the innocent Indians for ill-founded allegations without a proper trial. As a result, the three main characters go through a harsh experience relating to their historical trauma.

Further, Danielle Render Turmaud in "What Is Collective Trauma?" indicates that certain events that strike an entire group of people such as "wars, natural disasters, mass shootings, terrorism, pandemics, systematic and historical oppression, recessions, and famine or severe poverty" may cause collective trauma. They lead to "physiological, psychological, relational, societal, and spiritual consequences as reality is turned upside down" (Turmaud, 2020).

However, the repeated traumatizing events that occur to a particular group or society may be also categorized as social trauma. Andreas Hamburger in the introduction of the first chapter entitled "Introduction: Background and Main Theoretical Concepts/Discussions" quoted J. Prager's definition of social trauma as

an event or series of events remembered as so dangerous as to be impossible to preserve an equilibrating belief in a world that presumes our presence" (p. 429). He distinguishes three types of social trauma, (1) traumas of lethality, in which the loving self is placed at risk; (2)

traumas of violence and bodily harm, where the illusion of safety and security as guaranteed by a social contract based upon equal rights is undermined; and (3) traumas of personal invisibility, when the failure to be recognized as an individual produces anti-social results and, therefore, generates a withdrawal of solidary connections with the larger whole (Hamburger, 2021, p. 4).

Hamburger also contends that “The concept of social trauma describes the psychological and relational consequences of a traumatic experience in the frame of societal occurrences, where a social group is the target of a planned persecution”. He Further explains that it has damaging influences on “the social identity of both the victim, the perpetrator and their societal groups, causing an increased rate of trauma transmission.” (p. 6)

Thereupon, the Coutts as individuals and representatives of the indigenous people who live in the reservation have been subject to multiple traumas. The sexual assault against Gerladine causes a direct individual trauma to the wife, husband, and son, and deepens their sense of group traumas whether historical, collective and/or social. In “Postapocalypse Stress Syndrome and Rebuilding American Indian Communities”, Lawrence Gross emphasizes that “Indian societies are in a situation in which post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) has become pandemic to the culture”.

They suffer the consequences of such traumas but diverge in how far the latter influences each one of them and in what way they react. For example, Geraldine, the immediate victim of the rape and attempted murder, suffers one of the common consequences of trauma, i.e., PTSD which is, according to American Psychological Association (APA) Dictionary of Psychology:

a disorder that may result when an individual lives through or witnesses an event in which he or she believes that there is a threat to life or physical integrity and safety and experiences fear, terror, or helplessness.

In “Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder” (PTSD), Jonathan I. Bisson and others posit that this disorder is very common among “populations affected by conflict and reaches more than 50% in survivors of rape”. It is also “associated with depression, anxiety disorders, and drug and alcohol use disorders” (Bisson et al, 2015, p. 1). If stress disorder symptoms last more than four weeks, the case is classified as PTSD which takes the patient up to a year to overcome it because it has “profound effects on clients’ perceptions of safety, their sense of hope for the future, their relationships with others, their physical health, the appearance of psychiatric symptoms, and their patterns of substance use and abuse” (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014, p. 20).

According to Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, an affiliate to National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), US Department of Health and Human Services, the symptoms of PTSD are categorized under four groups:

- a) re-experiencing symptoms, e. g., flashbacks and distressing thoughts,
- b) avoidance symptoms, e. g., staying away from places reminding the patient of the traumatic event and avoiding thoughts and feelings related to it,
- c) arousal and reactivity symptoms, e.g., feelings tense and irritable and having difficulty concentrating and sleep,
- d) cognition and mood symptoms, e. g., self-blame, fear, anger and social isolation (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014)

Although, “most people do not develop a mental disorder after exposure to trauma”, traumatized people usually develop frequent symptoms immediately after the harsh experience they go through and “individual reactions to traumatic events vary greatly” (Bisson et al, 2015, p. 2). The following section will discuss the trauma influence on each one of the Coutts and their different reactions to the traumatic experience.

### **Geraldine's PTSD**

Geraldine's behavior after the traumatic attack reveals that she develops PTSD. She displays most of the PTSD symptoms such, being shocked, afraid, distressed, and helpless. When the family are in the hospital, her behavior and Joe's comments illustrate her miserable condition.

What happened? I asked stupidly. She didn't answer. Tears leaked from the corners of her eyes. She blotted them away with a gauze-wrapped fist. I'm all right, Joe. Look at me. See? And I looked at her. But she was not all right. There were scrapes of blows and the awful lopsidedness. Her skin had lost its normal warm color. It was gray as ash. Her lips were seamed with dried blood. (Erdrich, 2012, pp. 12-3)

She isolates herself from all the people including her family and locks herself up in her bedroom most of the novel time. She is not able to communicate with anyone including Bazil and Joe. Although she knows the perpetrator, she does not tell his name because she is terrified that Lark might kill Mayla's child. Whenever she recalls what has happened, she feels intense pain of the sexual assault and its dark implications. Geraldine's sense of vulnerability on the physical and emotional levels represents ultimate humiliation to her as an indigenous woman. Joe could easily notice that this assault "had nearly severed my mother's spirit from her body" (p. 35).

For example, when Bazil draws closer to her, she trembles and breaks the casserole out of panic. she

flushed darkly and an almost imperceptible shudder coursed over her. She took a gasping breath, and put her hand to her wounded face. Then she stepped over the mess on the floor and walked carefully away (p. 34).

Once she knows that Joe and Bazil realize that Lark is the perpetrator and both are trying to find a clue to indict him, she gradually starts to mingle with them like the old days. She feels that her husband and son support and help her recover soon, and

make Lark pay for his crime. Their support protects her from prolonged suffering as “some evidence suggests that high levels of social support are perceived as protective” (Bisson et al, 2015, p. 1). When Joe asks her a lot of questions about the perpetrator, she behaves in a way that reflects her anger, sentimentality, and fear. She warns her son to judge her behavior and orders him to not be involved in this problem.

Now you listen to me, Joe. You will not badger me or harass me. You will leave me to think the way I want to think, here. I have to heal any way I can. You will stop asking questions and you will not give me any worry. You will not go after him. You will not terrify me, Joe. I've had enough fear for my whole life. You will not add to my fear. You will not add to my sorrows. You will not be part of this. (p. 61)

Later, Geraldine thinks of taking revenge from Linden Lark to end her perpetual fear and restore peace in her life. She tells Joe, “Lark's trying to eat us, Joe. I won't let him, she said. I will be the one to stop him” (ibid, 168). She thinks of revenge because Basil is unable to prosecute Lark owing to legal loopholes. She may also consider this because she is afraid that Joe will take revenge himself. After Lark's murder, Joe asks Geraldine if she is better now, she answers, “Oh sure, my boy. I'm really good; I'm back to myself. Everything is fine now, fine” (p. 200). Thus, the moment she realizes that the potential threat of Lark is over, she feels relieved and leads a normal life again.

### **Basil's resilient response**

Basil Coutts is shocked when he knows about the vicious assault on his wife. He is worried about his beloved wife, Geraldine. Ironically, she is unaware of her husband's love and care for her. Joe comments on his mother's attitude toward his father and him saying,

Women don't realize, how much store men set on the regularity of their habits. We absorb their comings and

goings into our bodies, their rhythms into our bones. Our pulse is set to theirs (Erdrich, 2012, p. 9).

Anger is another immediate traumatic reaction Bazil shows. The crime overwhelmingly reminds him of the long history of oppression his people has been through at the hands of the dominant Euro-American community. He recalls the lynching of the innocent Indian Americans.

We know the families of the men who were hanged. We know the families of the men who hanged them. We even know our people were innocent of the crime they were hung for. A local historian had dredged that up and proved it. (Erdrich, 2012, p. 143)

Fortunately, in the abovementioned health bulletin, “most trauma survivors are highly resilient and develop appropriate coping strategies.” Bazil shows a very rational attitude during the traumatic event. This resilient response includes:

- Increased bonding with family and community,
- Redefined or increased sense of purpose and meaning,
- Increased commitment to a personal mission,
- Revised priorities,
- Increased charitable giving and volunteerism” (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014).

Beside his anger and sorrow after he knows what happens to his wife Bazil shows the first four responses illustrating his resilience. When he finds his wife and knows about her rape, Bazil behaves like a protective husband and a supportive lover. He takes Geraldine to hospital and tries his best to help her overcome the traumatic consequences of the rape. He goes with his son to the crime arena to find any clue that would help them identify the perpetrator. When he knows that the perpetrator is Linden Lark, his main priority becomes to commit him to trial. However, he is caught in a serious dilemma which arises because of two opposing forces the legal and the personal. Seema Kurup suggests that

Contrary to Joe's opinion of him, Coutts is not dispassionate and unaffected, nor should his temperance be mistaken for weakness; he is in an impossible situation, both legally and personally. Responsible for the well-being of his wife and son, he must reconcile his faith in the law with an overwhelming desire to defend his family by any means. Serving as a tribal judge compels him to act according to the legal imperative; he must master his anger and need for vengeance in order to uphold the central obligation he bears to the tribal community as their judicial representative. A misstep on his part could result in lasting and deleterious consequences for the entire Ojibwe community. (Kurup, 2016, p. 68)

As a local judge who considers Felix S. Cohen's Handbook of Federal Indian Law "the Bible", Bazil strictly adheres to law despite its failing to prosecute many white American perpetrators who commit crimes against indigenous people. He feels paralyzed because Gerladine could not identify where Lark has attacked her. He tells Joe, "He's studied us,... Knows we can't hold him. Thinks he can get away. Like his uncle" (Erdrich, 2012, p. 143). This internal conflict within Bazil remains until he meets Lark at the grocery where he tries to take revenge. He does this because putting his wife's offender to trial is unattainable; an act that implies his temporal renunciation of law. However, losing his own battle to try Lark does not make him forget his long-awaited dream, i.e., to reform the dysfunctional laws so that no perpetrator would go with impunity. He adheres to these failing laws hoping that "his diligence will impress the U.S. government and be rewarded in the form of revised laws for future generations of Ojibwe (Kurup, 2016, p. 68).

Like Geraldine, Bazil feels relieved when he knows about Linden's murder. He knows if he goes with impunity in this crime, he will repeat it. Despite suspecting his son's involvement in Linden Lark's murder, he does not want to bother himself who kills him because what is important to him is that the perpetrator is

deservedly punished for his vicious crimes. Bazil also feels happy as peace is restored once more in his life when Gerladine rapidly recovers from her traumatic experience.

### **Joe's extreme reaction and restoring peace**

Joe is a teenager who experiences identity problem most aboriginal children in the United States encounter. Erdrich characterizes the thirteen-year-old boy in a way that highlights how Indian American children consciously or unconsciously suffer identity problem, i.e., whether to hold on to their indigenous identity and adopt its cultural worldviews or assimilate into the dominant Pan-American identity and follow its standpoints. On the one hand, Joe is brought up in a indigenous family whose members commit themselves to advocate Indian American rights. His mother teaches him to be proud of his own aboriginal identity, something that many indigenous parents do not do. He does not accept any racist attitude of white Americans because he does not feel inferior to anyone. When a woman rudely asks him why they have not taken Geraldine to the Indians' hospital, he sarcastically silences her and adds "I was never like so many Indian boys, who'd look down quiet in their anger and say nothing. My mother had taught me different" (Erdrich, 2012, p. 11). On the other hand, Joe, like most teens, is excited to try new things especially if they fulfill his desires. Hence, he attempts to assimilate into the dominant culture unfortunately through a reckless lifestyle where he tries alcohol, drugs, and sex. Nonetheless, he sometimes attempts to integrate into this collective American identity through religion. For example, he asks Father Travis about the Catholic doctrine.

Joe's ambivalence about which identity to adopt indigenous or dominant identity, comes to an end when Linden Lark rapes and assaults Geraldine. Joe's love for his mother drives him to identify with his local culture and behaves according to its cultural legacy. In addition, the good mother-son relationship between Geraldine and Joe, which is foregrounded in the novel, explains why the



latter exhibits immediate trauma symptoms such as anger, fear and tension. He also shows ultimate support and love to his mother.

I was holding my mother tightly now in the backseat of the car. Her blood was on me. I reached onto the back window ledge and pulled down the old plaid quilt we kept there. She was shaking so bad I was scared she would fly apart. (Erdrich, 2012, p. 11)

Like Bazil, he believes it is his duty to protect his mother, find the perpetrator. When he finds out that Linden is the one who commits the vicious crime, Joe helps his father to make sure this offender will be brought to justice. However, he gets upset with his father and wonders why his father still believes in the importance of law as long as it denies his mother's right. He even doubts his father's eagerness to punish Lark until Bazil fights him at the grocery.

Joe's sense of injustice and feeling that he and his father let Geraldine down because they are unable to try the attacker leave no room for forgiveness within Joe. Because his traumatic symptoms persist, Joe develops PTSD's symptoms. As part of the Indian American legacy, Joe assumes the responsibility to take his mother's revenge. He is afraid that his mother might take revenge because he knows if she "went after Lark, he'd kill her" (p. 168).

In psychiatry, "there is much empirical evidence for a relationship between revenge and PTSD." Also "persistent feelings or thoughts of revenge predict severity and maintenance of PTSD symptoms in various trauma-groups." In other words, people thinking of revenge would suffer PTSD symptoms for a longer time and find it very hard to forgive the perpetrators who cause trauma to them, thus making PTSD symptoms more intense (Gäbler & Maercker, 2011, pp. 49-59). For this reason, Geraldine and Joe think of revenge and this makes their recovery from PTSD take much longer than resilient Bazil. Joe seeks revenge because he feels it is his moral obligation to protect his mother and fears she may try to take revenge herself. In this view, the mother and son think of taking revenge because "[a]s long as Lark evades justice,

they cannot begin the process of mental, emotional, and spiritual healing they all desperately need” (Kurup, 2016, p. 69). To encourage himself to murder Lark, Joe starts to remember his mother’s miserable condition, his father’s helplessness, all the details related to Lark’s vicious crime, and the whites’ cruel attitude toward indigenous Americans.

Then I remembered my mother stunned and bleeding in the backseat of the car. My hand on her hair. Or how she had stared from her bedcovers as if from a black cave. I thought of my father helpless on the linoleum floor of the grocery. I thought of the gas can in the lake, on the hardware store shelf. I thought of other things. Then I was ready. (Erdrich, 2012, p. 191)

Thus, Joe decides to kill the perpetrator with the help of his friend, Cappy. The latter teaches Joe how to shoot and he is the one who shoots Lark dead after Joe misses his heart.

This extreme reaction of Joe is broadly discussed by the critics cited in this article and by Erdrich herself. For instance, Erdrich justifies Joe’s revenge arguing that “if a tribal judge—someone who has spent his life in the law—cannot find justice for the woman he loves, where is justice?” She also considers that the result of such injustice is that “an individual needs to seek justice in their own way when they can’t find justice through the system. And that brings chaos” (Kurup, 2016, pp. 69-70). Similarly, Kurup stresses that the federal legal system is the reason why Joe resorts to “vigilantism” “so that another crime does not go unpunished” (p. 69). Bearing in mind the “racist and sexist context” of the novel, Sevillano suggests that Joe’s “difficult choice” is not an act of revenge. Rather, it should be viewed as “a painful consequence of the problematic conditions of that liminal position” or “Third Space” as Homi Bhabha called it. That space is a way out from “two imperfect moral codes: the “ideal justice” that does not respond to Geraldine’s case, and “the best-we-can-do-justice” that Joe has no choice but to embrace” (Sevillano, 2016, p. 153).

Judging Joe's extreme response from the perspective of indigenous legal philosophy and cultural legacy will help understand why Joe turns to violence to end his family's sense of insecurity which is represented in Linden Lark. The shattered Coutts cannot find peace because Lark represents a real threat to them. However, according to the legal rationale of Indian Americans, the perpetrator should first admit their crime, face their victims and try to find a way to reconcile them so that wounds get healed and social harmony is restored. In the novel, however, Linden Lark and other white racists hate and look down upon indigenous people. They believe whatever they do to them is justifiable. Before Lark murders Mayla and rapes Geraldine, he studies law and knows some loopholes that would help him to evade punishment. The man does not regret anything even after carrying out these crimes. Rather, his sadistic behavior is reflected during and after his crimes. Anyone who commits such crimes deserves capital punishment whether in the federal law or aboriginal legal system. However, Basil is neither able to bring Lark to trial nor the latter intends to admit his crimes. The Coutts family realize that the legal system will not help them take back their right, so Geraldine and Joe think of revenge after Basil fails to prosecute him. Although Geraldine admits she will take revenge on Lark, she does not do any step to carry it out because she says that to deter her son from getting involved in her problem. Joe, on the contrary, is keen to take revenge by any means. He first helps his father to get any clue that would put Lark to trial. Then he thinks of killing the offender himself when his father's legal effort fails. He also does this because he does not want his mother to be killed by Lark if she tries to take revenge. Additionally, the teenager is extremely affected by the whole experience, so he takes the initiative to end his family's suffering and help enjoy a peaceful life once more.

Turning to aboriginal cultural legacy to judge Joe's act of revenge, one should first know about the mythological wiindigoo. Erdrich mentions the wiindigoo myth throughout the whole novel

and by different characters to highlight the vital role of that myth in the story. Laura Castor defines this mythological creature which,

according to Anishinaabe mythology, is a “vampire-like figure who was once human but who became a cannibalistic monster with a frozen heart. Considered beyond reconciliation with the community, the only way to solve the problem the Wiindigoo poses for itself and others is to kill it.” (Castor, 2018, p. 32)

Erdrich introduces how Indigenous people associate the wiindigoo monster with white people who harbor intense hatred and adopt a hostile attitude toward them. For example, Joe’s grandfather, Mooshum, tells Joe the story of the liver-eating Johnson who used to kill indigenous people and eat their livers. He also tells his grandson how he retaliates by killing Johnson and eating his liver for this is the only way to bring peace to his community again. Similarly, Bazil and Geraldine associate this wiindigoo monster with Lark’s character, for this white man represents a real threat to the whole Indian American community in the reservation. Therefore, Joe who feels attached to his ancestors’ heritage now more than ever, commits himself to relieve his family from this burden and kill the wiindigoo as the only possible way to stop him from harming his family once again.

When Lark is killed, Bazil compares his murder to the lynching of the three indigenous people despite being innocent, concluding that “it was no lynching. There was no question of his guilt.” Although, he, as a judge, considers it “a wrong thing,” he believes it “serves an ideal justice. It settles a legal enigma. It threads that unfair maze of land title law by which Lark could not be prosecuted” (Erdrich, 2012, p. 208). Also, Geraldine feels relieved that Linden Lark finally gets the punishment he deserves. She rapidly heals from PTSD and lives like a normal indigenous woman. Regarding Joe, he feels satisfied that he has done his duty toward his mother and has helped his family restore their lost peace.

## Conclusion

This article attempts to discuss how the Coutts family experience and overcome the traumatic assault of Geraldine. It sheds light on how each one of the three main characters in *The Round House* reacts to the horrendous attack. Analyzing the behavior of Geraldine, Bazil and Joe, it is noticeable that all of them suffer the immediate symptoms of individual trauma. It is also evident that their catastrophic experience intensifies their sense of their historical/ generational trauma relating what happens to Geraldine to the frequent systematic violations on their indigenous community. Their suffering reminds them of the long history of persecution practiced on them at the hands of white Americans. These traumas bring about the development of PTSD apparent in the withdrawal attitude of Geraldine and violent reaction of Joe. The article also illustrates the resilient response of Bazil and explains his critical situation where he is torn apart between his tribal duty as a local judge and his personal obligation as a husband of the raped victim. Further the article identifies the main differences between the Federal legal system and the aboriginal law concluding that though they agree on the punishment of the attacker – if they are proved guilty- they diverge on the worldview each system views that crime. In the end, the article explains Joe's violent act according to the indigenous cultural legacy, especially the wiindigoo myth. It draws to the conclusion that Joe is forced to seek revenge from the wiindigoo, Linden Lark, for this is the only solution to stop him from harming his family.

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