

اضطراب ما بعد الصدمة وتجارب السرد العرقي في رواية "المنزل الدائري" للكاتبة لويس إردريش

## The Post Trauma Disorder and the Indigenous Narratives Experiences in Louise Erdrich's *The Round House*

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### Abstract

The Round House (2012) by Louise Erdrich discusses identity, trauma, and the complex issues that Native American tribes face in the justice system. Erdrich offers a distinctive viewpoint that blends personal and social histories by drawing on her Ojibwe ancestry. Systemic injustices in the American legal system and violence against Native women are among the important subjects discussed in the book. In order to demonstrate how Joe and his mother Geraldine's experiences mirror the larger problems encountered by Indigenous peoples in the US, this study analyses The Round House using the framework of post-traumatic stress disorder theory.

**Keywords:** Trauma, Identity, legal systems, Native American struggle, Systemic injustices.

## ملخص

تتناقش رواية "المنزل الدائري" (٢٠١٢) للكاتبة لويز إردريش الهوية والصدمة والقضايا المعقدة التي تواجه قبائل الأمريكيين الأصليين في نظام العدالة. تقدم إردريش وجهة نظر فريدة تمزج بين التاريخين الشخصي والاجتماعي من خلال الاستناد إلى أصولها من شعب الأوجيبوي. من بين المواضيع المهمة التي تناقشها الرواية هي الظلم المنهجي في النظام القانوني الأمريكي والعنف ضد النساء من السكان الأصليين. من أجل توضيح كيف تعكس تجارب جو ووالدته جيرالدين المشكلات الأوسع التي تواجه الشعوب الأصلية في الولايات المتحدة، تحلل هذه الدراسة "المنزل الدائري" باستخدام إطار نظرية اضطراب ما بعد الصدمة.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** الصدمة، الهوية، الأنظمة القانونية، نضال الأمريكيين الأصليين، الظلم المنهجي.

### 1. *The Round House: The Native American Experience*

The Round House opens with what seems to be an every single day incident: Joe's mother Geraldine leaves the house after conducting a quick errand. This unsettling absence swiftly morphs into a harrowing revelation of her sexual assault, marking a crucial turning point in Joe's journey from innocence to a painful awareness of adult realities. As Joe reflects, "I'd never seen my mother look so small," (page) the weight of the unfolding crisis becomes palpable, encapsulating the sharp transition from childhood naiveté to the harsh truths of lifetime.

Erdrich's narrative structure uniquely intertwines moments of profound consideration with urgent action, immersing readers in the emotive and psychological turmoil experienced by the characters. The author skilfully conveys the many nuances of growing up in the middle of trauma through Joe's perspective, illuminating Joe's inner turmoil as he struggles with the loss of his early years. "I was no longer a boy," he admits, signaling the heavy burden of adult responsibility thrust upon him at an early age (page).

The novel is infused with elements of magical realism that illuminate the intertwined struggles of contemporary life and Indigenous traditions. The round house itself serves as a recurring motif, symbolizing not only cultural heritage but also a sanctuary that both harbors and confronts the brutal realities of violence. As Erdrich writes, “I could stand in that house and feel the pulse of the land,” (page) suggesting a deep connection to ancestral roots and the enduring impact of shared suffering within Native American communities. This dynamic underscores the intersection of past and present, where personal and collective histories become intricately woven together.

Moreover, the novel’s shifts in perspective deepen the narrative, providing intricate insights into how trauma transforms relationships and reshapes perceptions of justice. Erdrich skillfully underscores the variety of voices and experiences, revealing the complex truths inherent in a socio-political landscape marred by colonial oppression. As one character reflects, “We carry our histories with us, and they shape who we are,” (page) demonstrating how the past influences present realities. Through this rich tapestry of storytelling, *The Round House* becomes a poignant exploration of resilience and the enduring spirit of Indigenous identity. Another character poignantly states, “In our pain lies our strength,” (page) capturing the essence of survival amid hardship. This multifaceted approach elevates the narrative, inviting readers to engage with the profound struggles and triumphs of its characters.

## **II. The Post-Trauma Disorder**

The theoretical framework of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) was developed in the aftermath of the Vietnam War, when veterans began to exhibit severe psychological effects as a result of their combat experiences. (Association, 2013) defines PTSD as characterized by symptoms such as intrusive memories, emotional numbness, hyper-vigilance, and avoidance of reminders associated with

the traumatic event (). Mental health professionals such as Bisson and others acknowledge that trauma can fundamentally alter an individual's sense of self and interpersonal relationships, leading to a fractured understanding of both personal and communal identity ().

When veterans returned home, many developed severe psychological symptoms that were not fully understood or treated at the time. In response to the experiences of Vietnam veterans, the (Association, 2013) (APA) officially recognized PTSD as a medical diagnosis in the third edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III) in 1980. Some of the main symptoms include: the aversion of traumatic -related triggers, the emotional alienation or dullness, rising caution or hypervigilance, and recurrent intrusive thoughts of the traumatic experience . This detailing of the symptoms pinpoint the

complicity of Post-trauma Disorder and the manner by which it is able to hamper someone's , social, and cognitive and mental health .

According to Besson and his colleagues, as a mental health experts, have studied how extremely PTSD affects an individual's sensitivity and relationships with others. They explore how trauma can lead to fundamental changes in an individual's sense of self, as well as negatively impact mental health. These changes can manifest as a lack of trust in others, a sense of detachment from oneself, and a challenge in building relationships or empathizing with others. An individual's self-perception and life narrative are unsettled, in sense of effected significantly also fragmented or fractured identity.

The impact of trauma was not limited to the individuals, but also entire communities and cultures. Struggling societies that have experienced collective

trauma, such as war or systematic violence, in restoring social cohesion, mutual trust, and common sense of belonging.. In this regard, each of communal assistance and collective healing become essential factors in the recovery process. Understanding the individual and collective dimensions of PTSD can lead to the development of comprehensive treatment strategies aimed at achieving self-recovery and reshaping social connections.

the relevance of this study of trauma in literary criticism Since the end of the twentieth century. Experts such as Kathy Caruth and Dominick LaCapra have participated considerably to the development of the understanding of trauma narratives, demonstrating how these traditional narratives can be transcended and urging readers to take a new approach to understanding Grief and suffering.

Particularly, Cathy Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996) present a crucial observation into how trauma shatters individual story as well as collective past. Traumatic events frequently transcend the realm of direct transmission of ideas by (verbal communication), leaving individuals who have been deeply affected (victims) with fragmented recollections and a sense of temporal separation , "Trauma is not simply an event but a consequence of the experience of an event; the experience 're-emerges' in an individual's consciousness through different and often chaotic repetitions" (Caruth, 1996) . This notion highlights the strategies in which trauma narratives disrupt conventional notions of time, often revealing in fragmented sequences or non-linear storytelling formats.

Caruth's approach motivates readers to confront the enduring nature of traumatic experiences instead of searching for closure, emphasizing the need to deal with the complexities of these narratives. This points to a broader cultural shift that calls for moving beyond viewing trauma as a finished event in the survivor's life, to seeing it as an unfolding process.

Dominic LoCapra's book *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, and Trauma* (1994), he provides an in-depth analysis of historical trauma, distinguishing between trauma as an event and historical trauma. He stresses the importance of understanding the survivor's perspective in societies' response to collective traumas, such as the Holocaust. For him, trauma is not limited to individual psychological symptoms, but must be addressed within a collective framework, where collective memory and cultural interaction play a crucial role in understanding the effects of trauma..

Through literary and historical representation, LoCapra argues that historical trauma can be transmitted across generations through stories. Writing and literary narrative help give trauma the time and space to engage with memory, desire, and the past. He also presents important trauma through the stories which are not just a means of amusement, but a implement for understanding collective trauma and interpreting painful events that may be problematic for individuals to convey it directly.

The connection between literary narrative and trauma through Cathy's focuses on unspoken trauma that is not simply recognized, clarifying that narrative contributes to understanding trauma, as characters and events in literature work to return the collective memory connected with trauma. A concept that resembles both to LoCapra, Carth believes that grasping trauma is not merely through the individual psychological truth, besides through a cultural process expressed through words and stories. Across historical trauma theory and literary narrative, LoCapra and Carth both advocate that understanding PTSD must include not only interaction with affected individuals, but also with social groups and cultures that cause an impact of those traumas over time.

LoCapra's investigation into trauma in literature emphasises the ways in which narratives serve as mediums for collective memory. Literature not only depicts inner

pain but also collective experiences, to enhanced shared awareness of trauma and providing opportunities for recovery. Using this paradigm, Erdrich explores the psychological impact of trauma on her characters in *The Round House*. Relationships with her family, particularly Joe, are significantly impacted by Geraldine's emotional disengagement and loneliness as a result of her trauma. Joe finds it difficult to view his mother as merely a victim of violence, instead acknowledging her as a survivor, as the novel effectively illustrates how terrible events sever family ties. This change in his perspective highlights the tenacity of Native culture and represents a significant narrative shift from victimization to empowering survival.

#### - PTSD in the *The Round House*

Joe's evolution towards aspiring for a legal career symbolizes a personal and communal response to trauma. His pursuit of justice transcends mere retribution; it embodies a quest for equity for a community that has long been marginalized. As Joe navigates his complex Indigenous identity, "...I realized that I'd chosen the name of my great-grandfather, Joseph. I knew him mainly as the author of inscriptions in books with amber pages and dry leather bindings."() Joe is continually trying to connect with his heritage and the past, which underscores the complexity of his Indigenous identity amidst the trauma his family faces. *realized that I'd chosen the name of my great-grandfather, Joseph. I knew him*

A crucial understanding within Indigenous communities regarding historical treaties. Treaties are agreements made between sovereign nations, and by comparing these treaties to those made with foreign nations, the quote highlights the idea that Indigenous groups are nations in their own right, deserving of the same recognition, respect, and rights as other nations. (7) This moment highlights Joe's realization of the importance of law in protecting Indigenous rights and reinforces his

desire to pursue justice, signifying an evolution from personal grief to collective action.

An exclamation point denotes a sudden, urgent, or emphatic moment. It implies that the data presented on that page is especially crucial and resonates deeply with Joe's family history and identity. This act of marking the page indicates a recognition of the struggles and injustices faced by Indigenous peoples, as well as the seriousness of the legal agreements made between them and the government.

When discussing Joe's aspiration for a legal career, an insightful quote appears: "I knew him mainly as the author of inscriptions in books with amber pages and dry leather bindings." (32) Joe associates his family lineage, particularly his great-grandfather Joseph, with the realm of law and documentation. Erdrich underscores the importance of legacy within Joe's identity, intertwining his personal ambitions with the historical weight of his ancestors' contributions. This connection cultivates a sense of responsibility in Joe, as he grapples with the realities of injustice and the profound need for legal representation and advocacy within his community.

Erdrich's narrative situates Geraldine's trauma within a larger context of structural violence, as discussed by journalist Andrea Smith in (Smith, 2015). Smith critiques the jurisdictional failings that prevent Native women from attaining justice, thus framing Geraldine's personal experience within a systemic pattern of violence. This alignment with Smith's analysis underscores the weight of social inadequacies present in Erdrich's tale. In *The Round House*, the idea of jurisdiction is central; the novel reveals how legal loopholes and governmental failures perpetuate cycles of violence against Native women, further complicating their struggle for justice:

The novel reveals the harsh realities of violence against women and the failures of legal systems, which perpetuate cycles of violence. Joe Coutts begins the story by



considering his family's dynamics following his mother's vicious attack, highlighting the conflict between safety as well as external violence.

Joe's father, a judge, symbolizes a flawed legal system, as Joe notes, "the grandeur and power my Mooshum talked about... still protected by the law," juxtaposing hope with persistent threats. Joe's father's struggle with legal absurdities is evident when he references "United States v. Forty-three Gallons of Whiskey," highlighting systemic failures that allow violence against Native women to continue. In his anger over his mother's attack, Joe proclaims, "I'm going to find him and I'm going to burn him," revealing his frustration with the inadequacies of justice, a sentiment dismissed by his father as "just talk." As Joe and his friends search for truth, they encounter danger, with the round house symbolizing both sacred healing and corruption. Joe feels the round house "cried out to me in my mother's anguished voice," emphasizing the connection between land, identity, and the struggle for justice.

Additionally, racial dynamics manifest through characters like Mr. Lark, whose embodiment of economic exploitation reflects the broader historical violence targeting Indigenous peoples. The casual racism exhibited by various characters serves to reinforce Smith's assertion that these discriminatory patterns are deeply ingrained within the framework of settler colonialism (215). Geraldine's assault, therefore, is not an isolated incident; it exemplifies the continuation of violence directed at Native women, compelling readers to confront the stark realities of injustice still embedded in contemporary society. Geraldine's assault is not an isolated incident, but part of an ongoing pattern of violence against Indigenous women that reflects a history of colonialism and structural discrimination. This violence includes physical, social, and cultural oppression, and calls for radical social and political change.

In addition, Erdrich highlights how the Lark family raised Linda and how sacred spaces like the roundhouse were desecrated, reflecting the entrenchment and

concealment of racism in everyday life. When set against the broader social backdrop, these discriminatory practices reveal the deep-rooted problems of American history. The desecration of the roundhouse is as much a spiritual transgression as it is a physical aggression, an assault on tradition and identity that unfolds throughout the novel.

Throughout the novel, Erdrich uses poignant images and symbols to delve into themes of trauma and resilience. For example, as Joe contemplates the sacredness of the roundhouse and his connection to his ancestors, he notices. "I thought it was a wonder the treelets had persisted through a North Dakota winter. They'd had water perhaps, but only feeble light and a few crumbs of earth. Yet each seed had managed to sink the hasp of a root deep and a probing tendril outward." This meditation highlights the resilience of both nature and characters, highlighting their ability to withstand harsh conditions. It reflects how such places are essential to healing and maintaining cultural continuity in the face of the trauma of colonial violence. Connection to place becomes a recurring theme in the novel, reinforcing the importance of cultural memory in addressing loss and trauma. Moreover, the psychological impacts of trauma manifest not only in Joe's individual experiences but also within his community. As Joe navigates the fallout of Geraldine's assault, he remarks:

At the Catholic beach there was a faded-out statue of the Virgin Mary surrounded by rocks. She was draped with rosaries, one of which belonged to Angus's aunt. Because of that rosary, I believe we felt we had the right to be there. Of course, as the Catholic church was given the land in a time of our desperation, the very time when Nanapush shot the buffalo, it was true that we not only had a right but owned the land, the church, the statue, the lake, even Father Travis Wozniak's little house (Erdrich130).

The significance of spiritual and cultural memory spaces in *The Round House's* trauma recovery process is emphasised by the citation and your explanation. For Joe and Geraldine, PTSD offers a framework for comprehending the psychological repercussions of trauma, cultural memory and place, and both their own and their community's communal pain. The novel discovers how the past and surroundings influence the people's identity. The church and the statue of the Virgin Mary, this conversation revolves around Joe and his community. Cultural memory is symbolised by these.

Both Maria Brave Heart's and Bonnie Duran's works emphasise the importance of cultural memory in the healing process. For example, Duran highlights how storytelling and traditional rituals aid in addressing the psychological effects of trauma in Indigenous communities. In spite of the continual trauma they experience, the church and its symbols (such as the Virgin Mary) can be viewed in *The Round House* as a component of Joe's community's collective memory—a kind of continuity in the face of loss that aids in the healing process.

The ripple effects on other members of the community, signifying how trauma is not merely an individual experience but a communal one. The novel poignantly captures the notion that healing is collective; Joe's pursuit of justice becomes intertwined with the healing of their community's fractured identity. This narrative progression underscores Erdrich's portrayal of resilience as a communal endeavor, where each character's growth is linked to a shared history of suffering and survival. "Nobody else, not Clemence, not even my mother herself, cared as much as we did about my mother. Nobody else thought night and day of her. Nobody else knew what was happening to her" (Erdrich77). The emphasis on Geraldine's attack and the anguish it has caused to her family, particularly Joe and his father is main concern of the passage. Only he and his father are as concerned and urgent about his mother's

anguish and suffering as Joe is, and he believes that no one else can really comprehend the depth of what she is going through.

As the narrative unfolds, Joe confronts systemic barriers that hinder justice for his mother. He recognizes that the fight for justice extends beyond his personal desires; it involves grappling with the complexities of Indigenous identity and advocating for his community's broader needs.

The complexity of justice and its moral ambiguity in *The Round House* are vividly highlighted by this quotation. It brings up important issues regarding the nature of retaliation and justice in light of structural injustices, especially for Indigenous communities. "the question of who killed Lark must be asked. There was no justice for your mother, his victim, or for Mayla, and yet justice exists"(Erdrich207).

According to Thomas Matchie, this particular moment illustrates both Joe's dual trauma and the novel's larger conflict between legality and love. Killing Linden Lark is not only an act of revenge; rather, it is an effort to establish some sort of justice in the event that the legal system is ineffective. For Matchie, this scene might represent how Joe's need for justice stems from his love for his mother, but it also pushes him into ethically ambiguous areas where justice is entwined with remorse and personal grief.

The term "plan of revenge" in *The Round House* describes Joe's well-thought-out choice to murder Linden Lark, the man who had abused his mother Geraldine. As it captures Joe's mental struggle and the structural injustices suffered by Indigenous communities, this "plan of revenge" is essential to the novel's examination of justice, pain, and morality .

Joe comes to this realisation when he admits, "A few days after my mother identified the baby, she began regular hours at her office. There was a backlog, blood quantum

to parse, genealogy hopefuls curious about their possible romantic Indian Princess grandmothers” (Erdrich 144). This illustrates the complexities of identity and heritage that permeate Joe's life and his mother's journey after tragedy to regain her agency

. As she returns to work and confronts the demands of her profession, it signifies not only a step toward normalcy but also her effort to reconnect with her cultural roots amid personal turmoil. The mention of "blood quantum" and "genealogy hopefuls" serves to highlight the broader societal issues surrounding Native identity, suggesting that while personal healing is crucial, the relationship to one's heritage is deeply intertwined with the community and its historical struggles. This moment marks a critical shift in Joe's understanding of resilience, as he observes his mother's determination to rise above her past and engage with the complexities of their shared identity, ultimately reinforcing the theme of strength in the face of adversity.

Throughout the novel, Joe shows interacts and feelings that are typical of PTSD. The book is on how to endure trauma and examines how children may be both sources of suffering and hope. By identifying Malya's son, a child who evokes traumatic memories, she challenges the aftermath of violence after initially separating from her family. In Geraldine's healing journey, the discovery of Malia's child and the revelation of the killer are significant turning points, reflecting her transition from passivity to taking active action against injustice, reinforcing her positive identity . Ultimately, the “revenge plan” becomes a means of escaping the social inequality that deprives her mother Geraldine of any legal means of achieving justice. The novel highlights the power of narrative as a tool for empowerment and resilience. Joe finds that expressing and understanding his pain can become an act of resistance against a culture that seeks to erase authentic identities, through his dialogues with figures such as his father who plays the role of wise guide. The story behind it explains the

concept that healing is closely linked to regaining control over the narrative, allowing identity to be reshaped under the pressures of grief and strength.

## Conclusion

Louise Erdrich's *The Round house* detects the intricate relationship between trauma, identity, and systemic injustice in the context of Native American narrative. Erdrich encounters conventional notions of justice in the face of institutional racism, while highlighting the significant effects of PTSD on individual and collective identities by way of stories of Joe and Geraldine. The novel highlights how past tragedies continue to impact across generations, offering a nuanced examination of personal pain while addressing the collective struggles faced by Native American communities.

Through applying PTSD theory, Erdrich successfully illustrates the psychological impact of violence on her characters, showing how trauma can tear apart family bonds while also building culturally-based resilience. Joe's journey, which is representative of the suffering of many Indigenous peoples, highlights the importance of identifying and removing systemic barriers to justice, especially for Indigenous women like Geraldine, whose voices have been historically diminished and marginalized.

The crucial importance of storytelling in reclaiming control and rebuilding authentic identity through relationship between individual recovery and social memory. Erdrich's use of magical realism and deep symbolism, *The Round House* is a powerful metaphor for the continuity of culture, embodying the suffering of historical injustice and the transformative potential of resilience that comes from the ability to overcome obstacles.

In this novel, *The Round House*, Erdrich offers a deep understanding of trauma and healing. A literary work of contemporary, the narrative power which is require

readers to confront the difficult realities of enduring violence against Indigenous peoples and the difficulties they face in seeking justice under an unjust system. Through her complex and deeply emotional narrative, she goes beyond individual experiences to highlight the collective path toward justice and empowerment of tribal communities.

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