Hacettepe University Graduate School Of Social Sciences

Department of American Culture and Literature

# POSTMEMORY, SURVIVANCE, AND JUSTICE IN LOUISE ERDRICH'S JUSTICE TRILOGY

Semanur IŞIK

Master's Thesis

Ankara, 2024

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## ACCEPTANCE AND APPROVAL

The jury finds that Semanur IŞIK has on the date of 12/06/2024 successfully passed the defense examination and approves her Master's Thesis titled "Postmemory, Survivance, and Justice in Louise Erdrich's Justice Trilogy."

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Assoc. Prof. Dr. S. Bilge MUTLUAY ÇETİNTAŞ (Jury President)

---

Assist. Prof. Dr. Merve ÖZMAN (Advisor)

---

Assist. Prof. Dr. Zeynep Ayça GERMEN

---

Assist. Prof. Dr. Ceylan ÖZCAN

---

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Gamze KATI GÜMÜŞ

I agree that the signatures above belong to the faculty members listed.

Prof. Dr. Uğur ÖMÜRGÖNÜLŞEN

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12/06/2024

**Semanur IŞIK**

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*(3) Madde 7. 1. Ulusal çıkarları veya güvenliği ilgilendiren, emniyet, istihbarat, savunma ve güvenlik, sağlık vb. konulara ilişkin lisansüstü tezlerle ilgili gizlilik kararı,* ***tezin yapıldığı kurum*** *tarafından verilir *. Kurum ve kuruluşlarla yapılan işbirliği protokolü çerçevesinde hazırlanan lisansüstü tezlere ilişkin gizlilik kararı ise,* ***ilgili kurum ve kuruluşun önerisi*** *ile* ***enstitü*** *veya* ***fakültenin*** *uygun görüşü üzerine* ***üniversite yönetim kurulu*** *tarafından verilir. Gizlilik kararı verilen tezler Yükseköğretim Kuruluna bildirilir.*
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# ETİK BEYAN

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# ABSTRACT

IŞIK, Semanur. *Postmemory, Survivance, and Justice in Louise Erdrich's Justice Trilogy*, Master's Thesis, Ankara, 2024.

Native Americans carry along historical traumas as a result of a turbulent history defined by relocation, cultural deracination, and racial extermination. Scholars argue that many of the contemporary challenges such as negative self-image, mental health issues, self-destructive behavior, high rates of suicide, domestic violence, and substance abuse, that trouble Native American communities today stem from these historical traumas. Louise Erdrich's Justice Trilogy, comprised of *The Plague of Doves* (2008), *The Round House* (2012), and *LaRose* (2016), depicts the struggles of the Ojibwe that people these novels to obtain justice from the U.S. legal system for their traumatic experiences. Erdrich does not offer simple solutions to complex problems of justice and reparation in these novels. This thesis will analyze the trilogy, utilizing Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory which is the transmission of traumatic personal and collective memories that are spatially and temporarily distant to postmemory subjects who transmit these memories. Although postmemory has negative implications as it perpetuates traumas across generations, this study argues that it works as a catalyst for Evelina, Joe, and LaRose, the postmemory subjects of the selected novels, in achieving survivance, a term coined by Gerald Vizenor to emphasize Native American resilience and adhesion to Native American culture by continuing to cherish its practices despite settler colonists' erasure efforts. Juxtaposing the experiences of her multiple characters, whose lives are shaped by the negative effects of historical trauma, with those of the postmemory subjects in her novels, who are dedicated to finding out about, understanding, and embracing their ancestral past, Erdrich's Justice Trilogy demonstrates the role of postmemories in reshaping characters' understanding of their identity, justice, and community.

### Keywords

Native Americans, historical trauma, postmemory, justice, survivance, Louise Erdrich

# ÖZET

IŞIK, Semanur. *Louise Erdrich'in Adalet Üçlemesi'nde Postbellek, Yerli Amerikalı Kimliğinin Olumlanması ve Adalet*, Yüksek Lisans Tezi, Ankara, 2024.

Yerleşimci sömürgecilerin Yerli Amerikalıları topraklarından eden ve onları kültürel ve ırksal soykırıma maruz bırakan uygulamaları ile şekillenen çalkantılı bir tarihin beraberinde getirdiği tarihsel travmalar Yerli Amerikalılar üzerinde halen etkilidir. Uzmanlar Yerli Amerikalı topluluklarda gözlemlenen olumsuz benlik algısı, ruh hastalıkları, öz-yıkımsal davranışlar, yüksek intihar oranları, aile içi şiddet, madde bağımlılığı gibi sorunların bu tarihsel travmalardan kaynaklandığını iddia etmektedir. Louise Erdrich'in *The Plague of Doves* (2008), *The Round House* (2012), ve *LaRose* (2016) kitaplarından oluşan Adalet Üçlemesi, Yerli Amerikalı karakterlerin maruz kaldıkları travmatik olaylar söz konusu olduğunda, tâbi oldukları ABD adalet sisteminin adaleti sağlaması için verdikleri mücadeleleri konu edinir. Bu eserlerde, Erdrich, adalet ve telafi gibi karmaşık sorunlara basit çözümler sunmaktan kaçınır. Bu tez, söz konusu üçlemeyi, Marianne Hirsch'ün öznenin kendisine zaman ve mekân olarak uzak olan kişisel ve kolektif travmaları miras alması anlamına gelen postbellek kavramından faydalanarak analiz eder. Postbellek, travmanın nesiller arası aktarılarak sürekli kılınmasına sebep olması nedeniyle olumsuz bir deneyime işaret eden bir kavram olarak ele alınsa da, üçlemenin postbellek özneleri olan Evelina, Joe ve LaRose karakterleri için postbellek, Gerald Vizenor'un Yerli Amerikalıların, yerleşimci sömürgecilerin tahrip edici politikalarına karşın dirençlerini ve kültürel değerlerini muhafaza etmeye devam etmelerini vurgulamak için öne sürdüğü, "Yerli Amerikalı kimliğinin olumlanması" becerisinin edinilmesini mümkün kılan bir katalizör işlevi görmektedir. Tarihsel travmanın olumsuz etkileri ile şekillenen hayatlara sahip çok sayıda karakterin tecrübelerini, atalarının geçmişini öğrenmeye, anlamaya ve özümsemeye adanmış postbellek öznelerinin tecrübeleriyle eşzamanlı sunan üçleme, postbelleğin karakterlerin kimlik, adalet ve topluluk algılarının yeniden şekillendirmelerini sağlayan bir etkiye sahip olduğunu gözler önüne serer.

**Anahtar Sözcükler**

Yerli Amerikalılar, tarihsel travma, postbellek, adalet, Yerli Amerikalı kimliğinin olumlanması, Louise Erdrich

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# INTRODUCTION

European settlers called the American continent the “New World,” although it was by no means “new” to Native Americans—or American Indians—consisting of hundreds of tribes with unique traditions, laws, and languages of their own. Native Americans had been inhabiting the continent for more than 10,000 years when Christopher Columbus first arrived at the continent in 1492. From then on, the American continent started to attract people from other countries, mostly European, with its natural and economic resources. These people came with the intention of settling on the land and making financial profits from its resources. In the following years, the Native American population began to decrease because of the conflicts over land that often led to bloody wars, diseases Native American people were not immune to, and imperial and assimilationist policies carried out by the settler colonists. Piling up violent experiences such as loss of population, land, and cultures over centuries caused trauma among Native American people, which would be transmitted across generations. Scholars and psychiatrists—such as Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart, Donald Warne, and Lemyra M. DeBruyn—attribute many of the contemporary problems, such as negative self-image, mental health issues, self-destructive behavior, high rates of suicide, domestic violence, and substance abuse that Native American face, to historical traumas.

According to the statistics provided in a series of reports by social institutions, Native Americans experience trauma symptoms at disproportionate rates compared to other minority groups in the United States. The Association on American Indian Affairs has reported that Native Americans are “2.5 times more likely to be subject to violent crimes and at least 2 times more likely to experience rape or sexual assaults compared to all other races” (“Violence against Native Peoples”). Another report funded by the National Institute of Justice in 2016 reveals that “84.3 percent of American Indian and Alaska Native women have experienced violence in their lifetime” which corresponds to more than four in every five Native American and Alaska Native women (Rosay 2). In 2018, The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration published a manual for healthcare professionals and psychologists who would help Native Americans combat substance addiction and mental health problems. The manual touches on the

relatively higher rates of substance addiction and mental health issues among Native Americans than the rest of the country's population (7). This disproportion is attributed to historical trauma and to problems—such as poverty, difficulties in reaching healthcare facilities, unemployment, lack of proper housing, and cultural and tribal disruptions—that stem from historical subjugation and ongoing discrimination handicapping Native Americans (7). Kathleen Brown-Rice, a professor at the University of South Dakota and a national-certified counselor, who specializes in mental health and historical trauma, also correlates Native Americans' tendency to substance addiction to "low self-esteem, loss of cultural identity, lack of positive role models, history of abuse and neglect, self-medication due to feelings of hopelessness, and loss of family and tribal connections" (120). Brown-Rice points out that suicide rates among Native Americans are 3.2 times higher than the national average and she argues that it is a result of "family disruptions and loss of ethnic identity places" of Native Americans (120).

Scholars have conceptualized new terms as an attempt to understand trauma and to raise the visibility of its negative implications for people affected by it. Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart, a mental health professional known for her pioneering work on historical trauma among Native Americans, proposed the term "Indigenous historical trauma" to specifically refer to the trauma inflicted on Native Americans because traditional academic frameworks are limited with a Eurocentric perspective which fails to acknowledge the historical and cultural context of the Native American experience. Brave Heart has published various works in which she asserts that almost all of the problems that plague Native Americans stem from the trauma after centuries of subjugation, which remains unresolved. She thinks that "post-traumatic stress disorder," a mental health condition triggered by experiencing or witnessing a traumatic event, is insufficient in covering the scope of intergenerational trauma experienced by Native Americans (Brave Heart "From Intergenerational Trauma" 3). She asserts that,

> …the body of work that is most relevant in the United States to [Native American] people is actually the Jewish Holocaust literature because it is addressing trauma for a group of people. It addresses a massive group trauma and genocide. That was what [Brave Heart] started to look at and it was very helpful and informed some of [Native American] thinking and ideas. [Native Americans] are survivors of genocide. [They] may have a

> higher trauma threshold due to … severe chronic trauma so [they] may not fit the PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) criteria. (3)

Brave Heart's assertion renders Marianne Hirsch's postmemory a useful concept to comprehend the scope of Native American trauma. Postmemory refers to the direct or indirect transmission of historical, cumulative, and collective trauma of a distinct past to the generations that do not have autobiographical memory or first-hand experience of the source event (Hirsch *The Generation of Postmemory* 5). The term was first utilized specifically in the context of the Jewish Holocaust, yet, as Hirsch developed the term, she encouraged the expansion of its scope to encompass traumas in other historical contexts (19). Samuel O'Donoghue explains Hirsch's motivation in suggesting the term, which is:

> …to defend the interests of the weak and oppressed. She conceives of her intellectual work as a form of social activism and upholds her commitment to righting injustices. This social commitment, which goes beyond narrow conceptions of legal justice, consists of bringing about acts of "repair and redress," forms of justice for which Hirsch takes responsibility through her academic work in the field of memory. … [P]ostmemory, through the creative works in which it is channeled, is able to transform a painful and destructive past into something socially beneficial. ("Postmemory as Trauma")

Corresponding to Hirsch's aim, postmemory can help raise awareness about historical trauma and its serious implications for Native Americans. According to Brave Heart et al., recognition empowers Native Americans to reclaim their stories which would enable survivance (288). The premise of postmemory intersects with that of Gerald Vizenor's concept of "survivance" which promotes asserting Native American existence and resistance in the face of erasure efforts of settler colonists through cherishing Native American cultural values and practices (Vizenor *Manifest Manners* vii). These two approaches encourage reclaiming agency to offer counter perspectives against dominant narratives which deliberately aim to ignore and erase the alternatives. Both concepts promote transforming unfavorable historical legacies into beneficial social endeavors. This thesis argues that postmemories catalyze the survivance of Evelina, Joe, and LaRose—three postmemory subjects of Louise Erdrich's Justice Trilogy, comprising *The Plague of Doves* (2008), *The Round House* (2012), *LaRose* (2016).

Although such a negative implication as the perpetuation of traumas by transmitting their memories across generations inherently nestles in the definition of postmemory, an observation of the experiences of the postmemory subjects in the selected works demonstrates its function as a stimulus to achieve survivance. An observation of multiple meanings of and attempts at justice for and by Native Americans in the selected literary works allows this work to examine the characters' disillusionment with the American legal system which almost always disadvantages Native Americans. This thesis will also try to demonstrate how Erdrich's Justice Trilogy contributes to a larger political discourse around the serious and devastating consequences of settler colonialism and its subjugation policies on Native American communities. To contextualize these discussions, an overview of the historical dynamics that shaped Native American-Euro-American relations is necessary.

Following a short period of relative peace, the settler colonies—mainly consisting of the British, French, and Spanish—often engaged in violent actions to force Native Americans out of the lands they desired. Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz and Dina Gilio-Whitaker, who are American historians and social justice activists, suggest that in the following five centuries after the first contact, getting access to the land has been the central issue in shaping the dynamics of the relationship between Native Americans and settler colonists (ch. 1). The conflicts between the two groups stemmed mainly from their contrasting perceptions of the land and its resources. Native Americans perceived land as an essential part of their spiritual and physical existence while settler colonists perceived land primarily as a commodity to be exploited for economic gain (Deloria 49). An important Native American chief and author, Luther Standing Bear, in *Land of the Spotted Eagle* notes:

> Only to the White man was nature a "wilderness" and only to him was the land "infested" with "wild" animals and savage people. To us it was tame. Earth was bountiful and we were surrounded with the blessings of the Great Mystery. Not until the hairy man from the east came and with brutal frenzy heaped injustices upon us and the families we loved was it "wild" for us. When the very animals of the forest began fleeing from his approach, then it was that for us the "Wild West" began. (38)

Standing Bear's expression is exemplary of Native Americans' attitude towards the land, which can be defined by feelings of compassion, respect, and gratitude while for

settler colonists land means "property, real estate, capital, or natural resources" (Kimmerer 17). Settler colonists' attitudes toward the land and the policies they used to acquire it almost always led to disruptions of Native Americans' relationship with the land.

Thomas Jefferson, who served as the third president of the United States, perceived Native Americans as an obstacle for American expansion (Ronda "The Voyage Begins"). He enforced policies towards the mission of getting rid of that obstacle during his presidency. In 1803, he delivered his address to the U.S. Congress and asked for funds to send Meriwether Lewis and William Clark to an expedition of the newly acquired Louisiana Territory so they could gather information about the resources and inhabitants of the land ("The Voyage Begins"). The government's aim was to keep Native Americans under control by forcing them to live on a limited piece of land and to turn them into farmers dependent on the government ignoring their varying economic cultures based on fishing, hunting, gathering depending on where they live ("The Voyage Begins"). This expedition promoted the efforts to assert the government's authority over Native American tribes and lands.

The government bent treaties in settler colonists' favor towards the mission of granting them access to Native American lands. The Bureau of Indian Affairs was established in 1824, ostensibly to assist Native Americans and maintain their tribal relationship to the U.S. government, yet, in reality, it implemented federal Native American policy characterized by assimilation of Native Americans and their removal towards the west of the Mississippi River (McCarthy 4; Palmer and Rundstrom 1144). The bureau has been criticized for its incompetence in and failure of serving its initial purpose (McCarthy 6). In 1830, the U.S. Congress passed the Indian Removal Act during Andrew Jackson's presidency (Ringel and Brandell 200). The act allowed settler colonists to confine Native Americans to allotted portions of land with limited resources (200). Native Americans were often forcibly relocated to the lands undesired by the settler colonists in exchange for the fruitful lands (200). The U.S. military forces often attacked and massacred those who refused to leave (200). Countless Native Americans lost their lives during the forced marches from their ancestral lands to the West. The most infamous of those marches is the Cherokee Trail of Tears of 1831, which caused

approximately 6,000 Native Americans out of 17,000 to die ("Trail of Tears"). The forced relocations resulted in the loss of cultural connection as Native Americans were forced to abandon their traditional spiritual practices along with their sacred lands and burial grounds and adopt Christianity along with other aspects of white culture (Nichols 152). As settler colonists continued their westward expansion, a series of bloody wars between Native American tribes and settler colonies, known as the Indian Wars, broke out and continued until the end of the nineteenth century.

Settler colonists rationalized their violent exercises with the concept of "manifest destiny," which is the belief that it is "the American nation's sacred duty not only to bring law and order to the Wild West but to secure its borders from sea to shining sea" (Hoxie and Iverson 8). Manifest destiny has been used as the motive and justification behind settler colonists' endeavors to remove Native Americans "to reservations away from the white man's civilization" (8). Between 1830 and 1850, 100,000 Native Americans were relocated by federal and local military forces and more than 15,000 deaths occurred during these relocations ("The Legacy of Injustices against Native Americans"). In 1851, the Indian Appropriations Act was passed by the U.S. Congress during Millard Fillmore's presidency and created the reservation system. It represented the continuation of the government's intentions to move Native Americans from the land that settler colonists set eyes on. As Joseph Healey puts it, Native Americans were "a conquered and colonized minority group" by the end of the nineteenth century (Healey 428).

Native American reservations were governed by a system that is similar to the way African American slave plantations were operated, with regulations imposed by the federal government. They were designed to diminish the sovereignty of Native Americans, the Bureau of Indian Affairs making all final decisions on and about the reservations (Mauk et al. 97). Life on reservations was neither prosperous nor peaceful. Terry L. Anderson and Dominic P. Parker refer to the reservations as the "islands of poverty in a sea of wealth" in their 2008 article, referring to the poor conditions (641). They point that "Native Americans living on the reservations are among the poorest of the country's minorities" (641). Poor housing, difficulty accessing resources such as food and clean water, and absence of adequate and efficient healthcare facilities

contribute to challenging living conditions of Native American tribes living on reservations. As noted in an article published by the American Bar Association, "significant disparities in health, education, and economic opportunity" that Native Americans are going through "are only exacerbated by the lack of basic services on reservations" ("Justice in Indian Country"). Malfunctioning reservation system not only caused problems for Native Americans but it also perpetuated their disadvantageous position by preventing their progress with such unfavorable conditions.

In 1887, the Dawes Allotment Act was passed under the presidency of Grover Cleveland. It was offered as a solution to "white-defined 'Indian problem'" that aimed to parcel reservation lands to be individual allotments (Stuart 451). Accepting these limited portions of land was the precondition for becoming a U.S. citizen (452). The "surplus" land—the sizeable remainder of the land of which 160 acres of which had been allocated to each Native American family and 80 acres of which had been allocated to each single Native American man—was made available for white Americans to claim and settle ("Dawes Severalty Act Approved"). This policy was rooted in individualistic perspective of Euro-Americans, which starkly contrasted with Native Americans' emphasis on tribalism. Consequently, the act not only diminished Native American control over reservation lands, surrendering much of it to white settlers, but also disrupted the tribal integrity that was essential to their cultural and social continuity. The law was replaced with the Indian Reorganization act in 1934, returning the land remaining from allocation to Native Americans ("Indian Reservations").

The government implemented other policies that also targeted Native American tribal integrity, further eroding their cultural and social solidarity. Dunbar-Ortiz describes U.S. history as "a history of settler colonialism—the founding of a state based on the ideology of white supremacy" (2). For settler colonists, "[w]hiteness is centered by default" and Native Americans were non-white "savages" who needed to be civilized (Dunbar-Ortiz and Gilio-Whitaker Introduction). To serve the purpose of "civilizing" and Americanizing Native Americans, the U.S. government authorized Richard Henry Pratt—an American military general who believed that "the only good Indian is a dead

one" (Pratt 46; Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center). He established the first Native American boarding school, that is, Carlisle Indian Industrial Boarding School, in 1879. In an 1892 speech he gave during the National Conference of Charities and Correction, Pratt stated the rationale behind the foundation of boarding schools. For him, assimilating the Native American into white ways would be advantageous and that education is a useful tool to "[k]ill the Indian in him, and save the man" (46). In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, more than five hundred twenty three Native American boarding schools had been established with the financial and administrative aid of the US government (National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition). Government officials forcibly took Native American children to boarding schools where they were required to abandon their Native American identities and adopt European-American lingual, religious, and cultural practices. These schools aimed to erase Native Americans' tribal identities and indoctrinate them with the teachings of Christianity. J. E. Luebering suggests that Native American Boarding schools were where "[t]he worst offenses of the assimilationist movement occurred" (209). The boarding school experience often included "abuse, neglect, and the strict and unfamiliar regimen of institutional life" (Trafzer et al. 220-221). These had consequences on Native American individuals, families, and tribes. Being forcibly taken from their families and communities and sent to boarding schools far from their tribes disrupted Native American children's sense of belonging and identity. Many lost ties with their tribal cultures. Suzanne Methot, a Cree writer, points to the bitter experiences at boarding schools, which include "the physical, sexual, and psychological abuse" depriving Native Americans of "the capacity … to build and sustain healthy families and communities" (12). Methot's suggestion on the negative implications of the boarding school experience for Native Americans disproves settler colonists' assertion that colonization has improved the lives of Native Americans. It also challenges their widespread belief that current issues that Native Americans struggle with are rooted in inherent flaws in their cultures, to which settler colonists resort to absolve themselves of the crimes they committed against Native Americans.

According to Joseph Healey, Native American tribes "fought for their land and to preserve their cultures and ways of life. European colonizers encountered Native American resistance, yet most of the time, they had the upper hand" (427) as they

“possessed insurmountable technological advantages, including metal weapons, textiles, written languages and books” (Mauk et al. 92). Healey continues: “The tribes had enough power to win many battles, but they eventually lost all the wars” (Healey 427-28). David Stannard, an American historian known for his work on the consequences of European colonization of the Americas, depicts the crimes the U.S. government committed against Natives Americans as the “the worst human holocaust the world had ever witnessed” (qt. in Smith 7). Many scholars agree that the severe Native American depopulation stemmed from a variety of factors, such as diseases, wars, and policies that disrupted the Native American way of life, such as forced displacement, assimilation, mass killings through wars and massacres (Smith 10; Ringel and Brandell 199; Dunbar-Ortiz and Gilio-Whitaker ch.1). The most recent estimations extrapolated that there had been 15 million Native Americans in North America before the settler colonization of the continent began (Dunbar-Ortiz 10). According to the findings by David Michael Smith, a professor of political science, within a four-hundred-year span after European colonization began, the Native American population in the United States decreased to 600,000 (13). In the 1900s, it decreased to 237,000, marking the lowest point of their population (7). As of 2021, there are 9.7 million Native American people living in the United States, which corresponds to 2.9% of the total U.S. population (National Council on Aging).

Mental health experts, sociologists, and theorists have suggested terminology to address the trauma resulting from tumultuous histories and violent historical events and its serious implications for cultural and racial communities affected by it. One of these theorists, Kai Erikson, a professor emeritus of sociology and former president of the American Sociological Association, proposed a new definition for the term “trauma,” other than its medical meaning, to make it “a useful sociological concept” in 1991 (455). After providing the term’s meaning in its medical usage, which is “an external blow to the body,” Erikson states that, sociologically, trauma is a blow to the human psyche that “can result from a constellation of life’s experiences as well as from a discrete event from exposure to danger as well as from a sudden flash of terror, from a continuing pattern of abuse as well as from a single assault, from a period of attenuation and wearing away as well as from a moment of shock” (457). In his article, Erikson also refers to his earlier report on the Buffalo Creek disaster of 1972, in which

he used the term trauma in its sociological context for the first time and made a distinction between two types of traumas—individual and collective. He defines individual trauma as an experience "that breaks through one's defenses so suddenly and with such brutal force that one cannot react to it effectively" (459), while he defines collective trauma as,

> …a blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of communality. The collective trauma works its way slowly and even insidiously into the awareness of those who suffer from it, so it does not have the quality of suddenness normally associated with "trauma." … [I]t is a gradual realization that the community no longer exists as an effective source of support and that an important part of the self has disappeared. (460)

According to Erikson, collective trauma strips society of its functionality. Gilad Hirschberger, an associate professor of social psychology whose studies focus on collective trauma, builds on Erikson's study and redefines collective trauma. In his definition, collective trauma "refers to the psychological reactions to a traumatic event that affects an entire society; it does not merely reflect a historical fact, the recollection of a terrible event that happened to a group of people" (1). He states that these traumas reside in the collective memory of a group and this memory is "remembered by group members that may be far removed from the traumatic events in time and space" (1). Hirschberger points out its importance in forming group identity as it tells people of their origins (3).

Some scholars prefers to use "historical trauma" to refer to the "multigenerational trauma experienced by a specific cultural, racial or ethnic group" ("Trauma"). Brave Heart describes it as the "cumulative emotional and psychological wounding over the lifespan and across generations, emanating from massive group trauma experiences" ("The Historical Trauma Response" 7). Brave Heart conceptualized the term "Indigenous historical trauma" in the 1980s to draw attention to the social ills that specifically plague Native Americans. She benefitted from her ancestral legacy and personal observations as a Native American and was influenced by the trauma studies on Jewish Holocaust survivors when developing her concept. In her 2003 article, "The Historical Trauma Response Among Natives and Its Relationship with Substance Abuse," she shares her motive to come up with a new concept, which is because it

"describes massive cumulative trauma across generations rather than the more limited diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which is inadequate in capturing the influence and attributes of Native American trauma" (8). She explains that the reason Native Americans cannot live up to the American dream is not because they are inherently incapable or racially inferior as settler colonists used in their arguments, but because settler colonialism loaded Native Americans with a heavy historical burden, the effects of which continue to disadvantage Native Americans.

Shoshana Ringel is another clinical social worker and therapist whose research areas extend to trauma, loss, and grief. She argues that "present-day [experiences] … have the potential to be traumatic at the individual and cultural level at much higher rates than other racial groups" for Native Americans who also had to "contend with the cumulative effects of cultural and intergenerational traumas, which are conceptualized as historical trauma" (199). Lisa Poupart, an Ojibwe associate professor of First Nations Studies whose works focus on healing historical trauma, similarly argues that the Native American "genocide" is a "raw and unhealing wound" (88). She thinks the blood or pain needs to cease for this wound to heal (96). Brave Heart and Lemyra DeBruyn—a behavioral scientist and professor who collaborates with Brave Heart in her research of Native Americans' mental health condition—assert that returning to Native American cultural healing practices could help healing from that wound (74). They suggest that "[t]ribes need to conduct specific grief ceremonies, not only for current deaths, but for historical traumas: the loss of land, the loss of the right in the past to raise our children in culturally normative ways at home, and mourning for the human remains of ancestors and sacred objects being repatriated" (74).

Marianne Hirsch is a professor of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University and a noteworthy scholar in memory studies. Her works focus on the construction of memory and its transmission across generations, particularly in the context of violent and traumatic experiences. Having parents who were Jewish survivors of the Second World War, she developed the concept of postmemory around what Eva Hoffman, a professor of literature, called the "postgeneration" and the "hinge generation," which refer to the literal second-generation of trauma survivors, in her 2004 book, *After Such Knowledge: Memory, History and the Legacy of the Holocaust*

(xv). Hirsch borrowed the terms and used them interchangeably in her works to refer to the children of survivors, who struggle with the trauma that originally belongs to their survivor parents. As she extended the scope and meaning of postmemory, the terms took on a figurative meaning extending their referral to subsequent generations. Sébastien Fevry, a professor in the field of memory studies, came up with the term "postmemory subject" to refer to the inheritor of memories of a traumatic event which is temporally and spatially distant to them in his 2018 article, "Beyond the Era of Contemporary Witnesses." Fevry suggests that the postmemory subject combats "the gradual disappearance of memories and of previous generations" (100).

Unlike memory, postmemory is not based on direct experience, rather it is passed down through various verbal or non-verbal means—such as family narratives, stories, images, and behaviors that might have been shaped around the trauma (Hirsch *The Generation of Postmemory* 5). Similar to Indigenous historical trauma, postmemory draws attention to the ongoing effects of ancestral trauma on postmemory subjects. The postmemory subjects "'remember' only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to *seem* to constitute memories in their own right" (5). So the individual and collective identities as well as behaviors of postmemory subjects are inevitably affected by the inherited trauma.

Hirsch first came up with the term in her 1992 article titled, "Family Pictures: *Maus*, Mourning and Post-Memory," which deals with Art Spiegelman's graphic novel *Maus* (1980). With this article, Hirsch attempts at making sense of why she remembers emotions associated with her parents' bitter experiences while she only vaguely recalls how her childhood memories felt. She proposed the term "with some hesitation" as she was aware that the prefix "post" could imply a state of being "beyond memory" ("Family Pictures" 8). Hirsch's insistence on the prefix "post" originates from her effort to "define both a specifically inter- and transgenerational act of transfer and the resonant aftereffects of trauma" (*The Generation of Postmemory* 3-4). She remarks that any contradiction this may cause is "inherent to this phenomenon" (4). To clarify her take on the prefix post- and to prevent an unintended meaning, she writes: "[Postmemory] … has certainly not taken us beyond memory, but is distinguished from

memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection" ("Family Pictures" 8). This way she also distinguishes between memory and postmemory, which she elaborates on in her 1997 book, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory*:

> Postmemory is a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation. This is not to say that memory itself is unmediated, but that it is more directly connected to the past. Postmemory characterizes the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can be neither understood nor recreated. (22)

Although the difference between the two concepts is clear, Hirsch suggests that postmemory is equally affective for its subjects in an emotional and psychological sense as is memory (*The Generation of Postmemory* 31). This is also highlighted in her assertion that traumatic memories are transmitted to their subjects so effectively that they may create memories of their own (5).

When Hirsch first conceptualized the term, the transmission she referred to was limited within familial relationships such as one between parents and children. Yet, she "has continued to circle back to postmemory since then in order to clarify and complicate the concept" and expanded its meaning to encompass a transmission beyond familial boundaries (Hong 129). This led her to distinguish between two different kinds of postmemory—"familial" and "affiliative"—to highlight the differences in their transmission, both of which involve the transmission of memories across generations, but differ in their intermediary and context.

Familial postmemory refers specifically to the transmission of memories within families, often through direct communication, family stories, and photographs (Hirsch *The Generation of Postmemory* 230). It includes both the traumatic individual and collective experiences of the survivor. Maria Roca Lizarazu, an author and a specialist in Holocaust and memory studies, asserts that familial postmemory "is closely tied to the notion of *affliction*" and subjects of familial postmemory are "receivers of their ancestors' traumas, which befall them through 'nonverbal and precognitive acts of

transfer'" (20). It can be deduced from her assertion that suffering is inherently involved in the content of familial postmemory. So, the original subject of the suffering may transmit their memories to postmemory subjects through unconscious behaviors that have been modified around trauma. Postmemory subjects may also exhibit these behaviors without being fully aware of their origins. These can be somatic symptoms, such as bodily pain or illness, or psychological symptoms, such as anxiety or depression.

Hirsch "broaden[ed] the scope of postmemory to think through 'affiliative structures of memory beyond the familial' and beyond the generational" with affiliative postmemory (Hong 130). Affiliative postmemory extends the scope of transmission of memories across different cultural groups, often through cultural channels such as literature, film, or art. According to Lizarazu, affiliative postmemory "is linked to the concept of *adoption*" which "means that later generations actively identify with a trauma that is not connected to their own experience or familial-biological background. They gain from adopting these memories a heightened sense of historical responsibility" (Lizarazu 20). In the case of affiliative postmemory, the postmemory subject adopts the trauma that belongs to a different cultural group through their feelings of empathy and responsibility. In this regard, it can function as a bridge enabling multigenerational relationships across different cultural backgrounds.

According to Hirsch, postmemory indicates a continuity in the effects of traumatic memory which is powerful enough to haunt the postmemory subject in the present. Caroline Kyungah Hong, who published works that primarily focus on Asian American literature and cultures, emphasizes the "haunted" nature of postmemory (130). Hauntedness signifies the nature of postmemory that is invisible yet looms so large on its subjects. Similarly, Gabriele Schwab, a distinguished professor at the University of California, calls the memories passed down through generations the "haunting legacy" (181). In Schwab's words:

> …[t]he transmission of violent legacies by far exceeds the passing on of historical knowledge or even of stories with thick descriptions of personal involvement. What [she calls] "haunting legacies" are things hard to recount or even to remember, the results of a violence that holds an unrelenting grip on memory yet is deemed unspeakable. The psychic core of violent histories

> includes what has been repressed or buried in unreachable psychic recesses. The legacies of violence not only haunt the actual victims but also are passed on through the generations. (1)

Schwab emphasizes that the content of memory transmission stretches out for the traumatic experiences in spite of the suppression efforts of the victim's consciousness. These legacies also haunt the postmemory subject's present and may also manifest themselves with unfavorable effects on them.

Hirsch puts an emphasis on photograph as an important medium of postmemory. Since the Jewish Holocaust is one of the most widely photographed historical events in the twentieth century, why Hirsch puts an emphasis on photography in postmemory discussions in the context of the Jewish Holocaust is understandable ("An Interview with Marianne Hirsch"). Hirsch points to the haunting nature of photographs, calling them "ghostly revenants" that "are very particular instruments of remembrance, since they are perched at the edge between memory and postmemory, and also, though differently, between memory and forgetting" (Hirsch *Family Frames* 13). Hirsch adds that photographs are "the medium connecting first- and second-generation remembrance, memory, and postmemory. They are the leftovers, the fragmentary sources and building blocks, shot through with holes, of the work of postmemory. They affirm the past's existence and, in their flat two-dimensionality, they signal its unbridgeable distance" (23). She also calls the connection photographs bear to life "umbilical," signifying that postmemory subjects' present is fed upon by the photographs (*Family Frames* 5). For Hirsch, photographs "represent what no longer is. But they also represent what has been and what has been violently destroyed. And they represent the life that was no longer to be and that, against all odds, nevertheless continues to be" ("Family Pictures" 9). Photographs, therefore, become remainders of the past and reminders of how much of that past have been lost.

Hirsch thinks that postmemory subjects connect to the memories through imagination when these memories cannot be reached verbally or visually (*The Generation of Postmemory* 5). The gaps that come with the memories of previous generations are filled with imagination (5). Sébastien Fevry elaborates on Hirsch's emphasis on imaginative investment and creation as the mediation of postmemory through. He suggests that it "fills the blank spots in family memory. It is not merely about

remembering, but about using the imagination to connect with a past that was not experienced first-hand and that is characterized by ellipses and silence" (94). Lizarazu similarly asserts that what postmemory subjects "cannot possibly remember, they must imagine or invent, which puts fiction in the broadest sense at the center of Hirsch's work" (16). Postmemory subjects, in this sense, are called into action to fill in the gaps in what Henri Raczymow calls "mémoire trouée" (memory with holes) which he used as a synonym for postmemory, by bringing light to the dark spots in transmitted memories through fiction.

Some scholars point out postmemory's reconnective function between generations. One of them is Inge Melchior who defines postmemory as a "living memory" that connects the past and the present (197). According to Melchior, "[i]f a postmemory would not be living, it would simply be dead history, deprived of its 'organic' experiential relationship and not actively part of the second generation's everyday lives" (198). Melchior's description of postmemory signals to its presence in and relevance to the lives of its subjects. It enables a connection between the past and the present that infiltrates into its subject's life, shaping its identity, perceptions, and relationship dynamics.

Robert Eaglestone, a British literary critic, and theorist, also reveals some positive influences of postmemory on its subjects. He establishes his work on Hirsch's postmemory redefining it as a "representation, mediated by and created in texts: family stories, books, tapes, and so on" in his 2010 book, *The Holocaust and the Postmodern* (97). Eaglestone pleads that although suggesting postmemory as a new term may seem unnecessary since "memory is already communal, passed down, and not necessarily immediate," it is necessary for its effort "to reflect the special concerns of memory and identity" (80). He does a close reading of three books from different countries on memory and mourning which he categorizes as "accounts of postmemory" (95). What he deduces from his readings of these works is that "they lead from isolation to community, from absence to a negotiation between absence and presence" (99). He reveals that another function of postmemory is that it may lead its subjects towards healing.

Another such scholar is Ernst van Alphen, a Netherlander professor of literary and

cultural studies. In his 2006 article, Alphen uses Hirsch's postmemory to investigate the underlying reason of the problems the children of survivors face. He tries to ascertain whether these problems can be explained in relation to the inherited traumas. What he finds out as the source of the problems is the subsequent generations' disconnection from their parents' past rather than the traumas infiltrated into the present from that past. He argues that postmemory can remedy that disconnection. Alphen asserts that "the more children feel disconnected from the past of their survivor parents—the less they are able to understand it—the deeper they feel personally connected to them or the more they need that connection" (488). It is because past traumas that are unknown to children lead up to familial relationships shaped by "silences and obliquities" that prevent generations from connecting with each other "smoothly" (477). So postmemory not only connects generations to each other but it also balances the family dynamics.

Different traumatic experiences manifest with different effects in subsequent generations depending on their historical contexts. Therefore, postmemory should be included in discussions with an understanding of the specific historical and cultural contexts to which it is applied. Geoffrey Maguire, who specializes in Latin American studies and cultural memory, points out some criticism that the term has drawn. He touches on the criticism by Beatriz Sarlo, an Argentinian literary and cultural critic, who thinks the use of postmemory in each and every context may lead to a dehistoricization of the past. It bears the risk of reducing historical events to personal stories, losing their broader context (Maguire 15). While postmemory can be instrumental in shedding light on serious repercussions of historical events, the limitations of the subjective experience and its transmission should always be considered ("The Generation of Postmemory" 109).

Michael Rothberg, an American professor of memory studies, states that "[m]emory is capable of bridging contexts and eras" in *Multidirectional Memory,* his 2009 book that brings Jewish Holocaust studies and postcolonial studies together (17). Rothberg asserts that "memory itself is not afraid to traverse sacrosanct borders of ethnicity and era" (17). Postmemory, an inherited version of memory, is also capable of transcending these borders. Scholars, such as Lizarazu, Hong, and Maguire, reiterated the wide scope of

historical and cultural contexts in which postmemory can be useful for understanding the trauma that resides in those contexts based on Hirsch's invitation not to limit postmemory to the context of Jewish Holocaust (Lizarazu 16; Hong 130; Maguire 4, 25). Bearing its limitations and the risks it poses in mind, postmemory can also be utilized in acknowledging the consequences settler colonialism had on Native Americans. Their experience is often described as "genocide," "Indigenous Holocaust," and "ethnic cleansing" by historians and political scientists such as David E. Stannard, Howard Zinn, David M. Smith, Russell Thornton, and Alexander L. Hinton (Stannard 49; Zinn and Arnove ch. 13 "The Myth of American Exceptionalism"; Smith 7; Hinton et al. ix). Postmemory becomes a useful concept to understand the historical events that shaped Euro-American and Native American relationships. It illustrates the extent to which the repercussions of these events weigh down on Native Americans.

Postmemory generally stands out with its negative implication which is that it perpetuates trauma by enabling its intergenerational transmission. Yet, scholars such as Melchior, Eaglestone, and Alphen introduce its possible positive functions of it. Alphen revealed that the subsequent generations' disconnection from their ancestral pasts is the underlying reason for most of the problems they face. While his and Melchior's work point out that postmemory is the solution to fix that disconnection, Eaglestone's work points to its ability to heal by giving its subjects a sense of identity and belonging. Considering its reconnective force, when applied to the Native American context, postmemory can contribute to Native American "survivance," which is the "renunciation of dominance, tragedy, and victimry" (*Manifest Manners* vii). Gerald Vizenor, an important Ojibwe theorist and writer in Native American literature, adds layer to the term, which has a longer history, in his 1999 book *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance* and makes it popular in the Native American context (Doerfler 189). He uses survivance to allude to Native Americans' ability to reject erasure and subjugation, through resilience, agency, cultural continuity (190). Therefore, survivance underlines Native Americans' ability "not merely to exist, but to flourish" through adherence to Native American practices and spirituality (191; Mei 1181). It empowers Native Americans by bringing forward their stories and efforts to survive and thrive despite being subjected to centuries of violence, forced assimilation, and cultural annihilation policies by settler colonists (1181).

Jill Doerfler asserts that survivance challenges "[n]arrow Western definitions of sovereignty[,]" which considers Native American tribes as "dependent, domestic nations," sabotaging their ability to manage healthy tribal nations (191). It emphasizes Native American self-determination by defying dominant narratives that portray Native Americans as remainders of the past and encouraging Native Americans to reclaim agency to tell the stories from their perspectives (Gamber 81). Vizenor sees storytelling as the essential medium for Native American survivance because "native stories of survivance are creases of transmotion and sovereignty" (Snyder 48). Survivance does not oppose change, rather it initiates a precondition to prevent the fading away of Native American identity. While it acknowledges that change is inevitable and necessary it requires Native Americans to persevere their cultural practices and rituals when adapting to changes. Doerfler argues that survivance leads to "mino-bimaadiziwin" which is the potential for leading a fulfilling life in Ojibwe (Doerfler 190). They both invite Native Americans "to a higher quality of life [that] relies on action, not fate or luck" and that leads to a "good and healthy collective life" (191). Therefore, they both encourage Native Americans to reclaim agency to define their experiences.

Karen Louise Erdrich is an important writer of the Native American Renaissance. Her works offer realistic portrayals of Native Americans' experiences with ongoing issues and implications of settler colonialism in their lives. While some of Erdrich's characters yield to fate and let a turbulent history define their experiences, some of her characters manage to maintain a sense of survivance. Deborah Madsen states that the mino-bimaadiziwin is one of the central themes in Erdrich's works, where her characters succeed in living fulfilling lives and contribute to their communities' well-being through productive work "even though opportunities for living well, with courage, generosity and kindness are limited for [Erdrich's] characters, … who live under conditions of colonization and within a history of physical and cultural genocide" (ch. 1). There is an interplay between postmemory and survivance in her works. While postmemory sheds light on the often devastating consequences of settler colonialism in her novels, it also contributes to the survivance of some of her characters.

Born in 1954 to a German American father and Ojibwe French mother, Erdrich was raised in Wahpeton, North Dakota (Kurup 1). Both her parents were teachers at a school

administered by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (Stookey 1). Like her mother, Erdrich is an enrolled member of the Turtle Mountain Band of Ojibwe, which is a federally recognized tribe of the Anishinaabe, also known as Chippewa or Ojibwa (2). Growing up, she was engaged in both her Ojibwe and Euro-American cultural heritages (Kurup 1-2). She was raised as a Catholic and grew up in close contact with Ojibwe culture: "she heard traditional stories, participated in cultural ceremonies, and learned tribal history" (2). It was her maternal grandparents who had a great influence on Erdrich's storytelling skills and her choice to set her books in Native American settings.

Erdrich was mostly concerned with poetry and "the evidence of her origins can be found in her lyrical prose, in her deft use of imagery and metaphor, and in her fiction of patterned designs and recurring motifs" in the beginning of her literary career (Stookey 8). She has written twenty-eight novels that reflect her "awareness of the historical and ongoing devastations of Native American life" (Baym 3173). She weaves literary techniques "with narrative elements from the Ojibwe oral tradition" (Beidler 2) because "remembering through storytelling is a traditional and time-honored form of preserving Ojibwe heritage" (Kurup 2). Her characters speak a mixture of English and Ojibwe. She uses multiple narrators who sometimes provide multiple perspectives to the same event adding dimension and details to the central events in her novels. In Erdrich's works, stories generally do not follow a linear and chronological order reflecting a Native American understanding of time (Brave Heart and DeBruyn 76). She has frequently been compared to Gabriel García Márquez and William Faulkner (Kurup 5). Like Faulkner who created a fictional town, Yoknapatawpha as the setting of his novels and short stories, Erdrich created a richly imagined, fictional town in North Dakota in which many of her books take place, with complex overlapping family trees. Different novels in her oeuvre provide different perspectives on the same setting and the same community, which is usually the same Ojibwe community. Much of her writing explores the experiences of Native American and Euro-American communities in and around North Dakota. The reason she is compared to Márquez is because of her use of supernatural elements in her works which reflects her Ojibwe heritage (Stirrup 30). There is an unclear line between history and legend in her novels.

Three of her loosely connected books published in the years 2008, 2012, and 2016—*The Plague of Doves, The Round House,* and *LaRose*—are referred to as the "Justice Trilogy." It was the scholars and readers who started using this title as a result of the shared theme of justice by the three works (Jacobs & Peterson xii). Erdrich soon embraced the title and referred to these three novels as a trilogy in her interviews. Aitor Ibarrola-Armendariz asserts that the Justice Trilogy,

> …has been trying to tackle the thorny issue of how anybody should respond fairly or justly to such terrifying events as racist mob executions (*The Plague of Doves*), rape and murder (*The Round House*), or a child's death by gunfire (*LaRose*), which seem to unleash the ghosts of intergenerational trauma in the community and for which neither conventional justice nor Christian religion seem to offer ready solution. (46)

The most comprehensive study on the trilogy to the date is a collection of essays, *Louise Erdrich's Justice Trilogy: Cultural and Critical Contexts.* These essays focus on subjects ranging from Erdrich's narrative techniques to trauma and healing, the Ojibwe culture, and the injustices included in the novel such as "lynchings, murders, and other acts of violence, land loss, boarding schools, and other traumatic experiences" (Peterson and Jacob xviii). In another comprehensive study on the trilogy, Rosa María Rascón compares it to William Shakespeare's three plays, *Antony and Cleopatra, Titus Andronicus,* and *Julius Caesar*. Through the experiences of the trilogy's characters, this thesis examines how postmemory contributes to the survivance efforts of the novels' postmemory subjects specifically in the context of Native American experience. Shedding light on other characters' experiences as well, it examines the devastating effects of past traumas that infiltrate into the present of postmemory subjects without reducing it to one of its positive or negative connotations.

The first chapter of this thesis will focus on *The Plague of Doves*, the first novel of the trilogy. The novel is set in an unnamed Ojibwe reservation near the fictional town of Pluto, North Dakota. It follows a non-linear storyline going back and forth between the beginning and middle of the twentieth century. An actual incident, known as the Spicer Murders, in which three Ojibwe men including a thirteen-year-old boy, were accused of murdering the Spicer family and were lynched in 1897, inspired the novel. The fictionalized version of the event that Louise Erdrich provides in the novel draws

attention to the often ignored issue of Native American lynching and it illustrates the effects of racism that has always been prevalent in the communities that border Native American reservations. The novel mainly follows Evelina—the eleven-year-old Ojibwe girl and the novel's postmemory subject. She transmits postmemories of the lynching attempts that her grandfather, Mooshum, survived, as well as the postmemories of the settler colonists' unjust seizure of Native American lands through Mooshum's storytelling. These postmemories contribute to the shaping of Evelina's identity, behaviors, and perception of justice. While they drive many of the novel's characters toward destructive and self-destructive behaviors that sabotage their survivance as seen in the examples of Billy and Corwin Peace, they contribute to Evelina's survivance and embracing of her racial identity by providing her with a connection and an understanding of her ancestral past, even though, at times, she also struggles with disappointment with the U.S. institutions of justice that fail to function properly. Unlike Billy and Corwin, Evelina is able to sustain survivance by embracing her cultural identity and heritage and by becoming a psychiatric nurse to contribute to the well-being of her community. The first chapter brings postmemory's role into prominence as the catalyst in Evelina's survivance experience by connecting her to her ancestors and their sufferings in *The Plague of Doves*.

The second chapter of this thesis will analyze the second novel of the trilogy, *The Round House*. The novel follows the thirteen-year-old Joe—grandson of Mooshum and cousin of Evelina in *The Plague of Doves*—who one day finds out that his mother, Geraldine, was raped and survived an attempted murder by a white man. The novel covers the three months span following the incident. Even though his father, Antone Bazil Coutts, has been the judge on the reservation, he is not powerful enough to provide proper legal sanction for Linden Lark, who gets away with the crime because of the intricacies in the U.S. legal system that diminishes Native Americans' power while providing escapeways for white people who commit crimes against them. His personal experiences with the dysfunctioning justice system, compounded with postmemories of past injustices, prompts Joe to embark on a personal endeavor to find a solution to the injustice his people have been experiencing for centuries. Through conversations with his father and the stories Mooshum tells, Joe finds out that the U.S. government systematically undermined Native American sovereignty and jurisdictional rights.

Furious about the inability of the authorities, including his judge father, in bringing justice for his mother's case, Joe seeks redress by turning to Ojibwe law. He kills the rapist according to the wiindigoo justice, which permits the killing of someone who is believed to be possessed by a malevolent, cannibalistic spirit. Yet, it does not bring any satisfactory results instead the guilt resulting from the crime haunts him for years. Through Joe's failed attempt to redress justice, *The Round House* illustrates that there cannot be a simple solution for injustice. Despite his bitter experience with the justice system that perpetuates Native American subjugation, Joe manages to maintain survivance by becoming a judge to set precedents to help his people regain the sovereignty. The second chapter will argue that Joe succeeds to sustain a sense of survivance by choosing to become a judge to reform the U.S. justice system for the favor of Native Americans despite his disillusionment with it in his mother's rape case, in *The Round House*.

The third chapter will center upon Erdrich's 2016 novel *LaRose,* which concludes the trilogy. *LaRose* opens with Landreaux Iron's accidental killing of the 5-year-old son of Peter and Nola Ravich, Dusty, who is best friends with Landreaux's son, LaRose, the novel's postmemory subject and titular character. Landreaux has not been sentenced or received any kind of punishment for his unintentional crime. Having been overcome with feelings of sorrow and guilt, he seeks a way of reparation to alleviate the sadness he caused for the Ravich family. As a devout Catholic who also follows Ojibwe religious practices, he seeks help from both beliefs. He attends a prayer session at the church accompanied by its priest, Father Travis Wozniak, yet that does not remedy his unrelenting feelings. Consulting to his Ojibwe belief he conducts a sweat lodge and sundance ceremony, two of Native American healing and praying practices, with his wife Emmaline, to seek guidance from their ancestors who show them a way towards healing: to give their son to the bereaved family according to an old Ojibwe law. Although it is a hard decision for the Iron family, they give LaRose to the Raviches. LaRose's fosterage is not depicted as a merciless abandonment, rather it is a way of acknowledging and sharing the pain Landreaux unintentionally caused. LaRose first struggles with separation from his family, yet the spiritual and healing powers he inherits from four LaRose women in his parents' lineage—along with his name—allow him to heal himself and the people around him. The novel covers the four-year-span

between the years 1999 and 2003 but postmemory reveals the experiences of LaRose's ancestors that reach back to the 1840s. The postmemories of his ancestors' bitter experiences—including rape, abuse in the boarding schools, and racial violence—connects him to his ancestors and to his Native American identity. He inherits the spiritual healing ability from four LaRose women, which he uses to deal with the trauma of his ancestors and of being separated from his family first. After healing himself, he succeeds in healing people around him by bridging the gap between the two families and alleviating their sorrow. His ability to maintain survivance amidst traumas that are incomprehensible for his young mind suggests that while there may not be a single remedy for trauma, cultural engagement can pave the way for healing. Unlike LaRose, who resorts to Ojibwe culture and healing ceremonies, for many characters—such as Romeo Puyat, Nola Ravich, and Landreaux Iron—memories and postmemories of traumatic experiences manifest themselves as negative consequences on Native Americans' lives such as alcohol and drug addiction, self-loathing, parental dysfunction, and suicidal tendencies. The third chapter illustrates that postmemories contribute to LaRose's survivance who first heals himself by conducting Native American healing ceremonies and then reunites the estranged families and prevents his community's social order from destruction in *LaRose*.

These three novels—*The Plague of Doves, The Round House,* and *LaRose*—collectively form a trilogy that delves into the intricate interplay of personal and historical trauma, Native American and Euro-American relations, and Native Americans' quest for justice within the U.S. legal system. By exploring the impacts of historical injustices and contemporary legal challenges, these novels highlight the resilience and agency of their Native American characters and underline the relevance of justice issues in shaping identity and actions.

# CHAPTER 1
# LYNCHING AND THE LEGACY OF INJUSTICE IN *THE PLAGUE OF DOVES*

*The Plague of Doves* is Louise Erdrich's 2008 novel which she expanded from a short story she published in 2004 in *The New Yorker* under the same name. The novel won her the 2009 Anisfield-Wolf Book Award and it was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize. Seema Kurup describes the novel as "a multigenerational, historical account of Ojibwe on reservation" (59) in which "the dispossession of ancestral, tribal land assumes the power of a psychic wound" for its characters (Barker 8). *The Plague of Doves* is set in an unnamed Ojibwe reservation adjacent to the fictional town of Pluto, North Dakota, a place marked by a history of racial violence. Erdrich employs a nonlinear storyline that goes back and forth in history revealing the cultural conflicts between the white people living in Pluto and the Ojibwe living on the neighboring reservation. She also makes use of multiple narrators who share their personal experiences with postmemories of the past while providing different perspectives on the main event, which is the unjust lynching of Native American men by a mob of white men. The narratives provided by multiple of the novel's characters are weaved together like a "quilt," connecting the characters' experiences with injustice and the trauma it caused ("One Book | One Minnesota"). Postmemories connect Evelina to her ancestral past, allowing her to embrace her cultural roots, values, beliefs, traditions, and habits of coping with historical trauma. Although the novel provides insights into the lives of multiple characters, it mainly centers around Evelina, the eleven-year-old girl who is the postmemory subject and one of the novel's narrators. Despite the fact that the postmemories of historical injustices cause disillusionment for her, Evelina manages to achieve survivance by choosing to be a psychiatric nurse and contribute to the well-being of her community. This chapter explores the role of postmemory in shaping Evelina's identity and its role as a catalyst in her pursuit of survivance.

The novel touches on various periods in both Pluto's history and the characters' family histories, but the narrative mainly goes back and forth between the early years of the twentieth century and a later period encompassing the 1950s through the 1980s. The event that marks the early period in the novel is the lynching of a group of Ojibwe men,

Seraph “Mooshum” Milk, Asiginak, Cuthbert Peace, and thirteen-year-old Holy Track, falsely accused of the murder of a white family, the Lochrens, in 1911, by a mob of angry townspeople—consisting of Emil Buckendorf, Eugene Wildstrand, Frederic Vogeli, and William Hotchkiss. The later period focuses on the lives of the descendants of both parties, whose lives become entangled either through marriage or neighborhood. Erdrich’s inspiration for the novel comes from a historical event, known as the Spicer Murders, that haunted her for years (Kurup 61; Pfeifer 84-85). In 1897, three Native American men, including a thirteen-year-old boy were accused of massacring a white family, the Spicers, in Winona, North Dakota. In the following legal proceedings, the court released the suspects due to lack of evidence and ordered a second trial. A mob of local citizens, who were “convinced that a new trial would result in acquittal,” hanged the three Ojibwe men (Beidler 3). Peter G. Beidler in his 2021 essay on the historiography of the lynching of Native Americans points out to the fact that there is no accurate information or evidence of whether the Native men were involved in the murders or not, but it is a known fact that mob members were “never arrested, tried, or punished” (3).

Lynching of Native American people is a subject that has been overlooked (Barker 5). Michael Pfeifer argues that one of the reasons why Native American lynching has remained in the background in literature is that the geographical focus of lynching studies has been on the American South where African Americans were being lynched, while the majority of Native American lynchings took place in the Midwest and West (81). Another reason why Native American lynchings have not been recognized widely in literature is that the data considering Native Americans was not in the radar of anti-lynching activists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (81). Data collection was possible only in the later decades of the nineteenth century and the earlier decades of the twentieth century, while the majority of Native American lynching happened in the earlier periods of the nineteenth century when settler colonists were moving into the Midwest and the West (82). As Debra Barker alleges, John Rollin Ridge, a Cherokee novelist, and Louise Erdrich are the only writers to draw attention to the subject in their works (5). Erdrich’s fictionalized version of the lynching “reflect[s] on the collective memory of anti-Native violence and the complex relationships between [Native Americans] and whites in late nineteenth- and twentieth-century North Dakota” (Pfeifer

84-85). The novel grants recognition to Native American lynching in literature while it raises awareness on the deadly implications of racism for Native Americans.

The novel is narrated by four of its characters; Evelina Harp (the granddaughter of the only survivor of the lynchings), Antone Bazil Coutts (the tribal judge and grandson of Joseph J. Coutts who took part in the expedition of Ojibwe ancestral lands on which the town of Pluto would be established), Marn Wolde (the niece of Warren Wolde who, later in the novel, is revealed to be the actual murderer of the Lochren family), and Cordelia Lochren (the doctor of the town who is the only survivor of the Lochren murders). These characters provide individual perspectives on their experiences with the postmemory of the lynching. Evelina does most of the narration and her sections reveal vivid details of the lynching as well as her personal struggles to come to terms with her racial identity. This familial postmemory of the lynching, transmitted to Evelina through her grandfather's autobiographical accounts of the events, becomes central to her journey into adulthood. It shapes her understanding of race, identity, and justice. The novel traces her growth from childhood to early adulthood, which renders possible an analysis of postmemory's role in her character formation and actions. She is the daughter of Clemence and Edward Harp and sister to Joseph Harp. Evelina's grandfather from her mother's side, Mooshum, aged over a hundred years, lives with the Harp family as well. He is the sole survivor of the lynching of 1911 and he spends most of his time reminiscing about the past, consuming alcohol, and being paid occasional visits by his brother Shamengwa and the reservation's priest, Father Cassidy. Whenever Father Cassidy visits them at Harps' place, Mooshum and Shamengwa speak about the past injustices the settler colonists imposed on Native American people. They always bitterly resent the fact that settler colonists took the land once Native Americans depended on for survival and if things had not worked out the way they did, and Native Americans had their rights Father Cassidy would be working *for* Native Americans and more importantly their people would be paid the respect they deserve (Erdrich *The Plague of Doves* 33).

Mooshum and Shamengwa, separately escaped from their family because they did not want to abandon their Ojibwe beliefs and follow the example of their elder brother who became a Catholic priest. They have found different ways to cope with the trauma of an

eventful past. As Evelina observes, “the history affected them in different ways. Shamengwa was driven to music and Mooshum to storytelling. Both escaped as soon as possible but history followed them” (22). Shamengwa is known for playing the violin mesmerizingly, while Mooshum resorts to telling stories of his past whenever he finds an audience, which usually consists of Evelina and Joseph.

On the importance of storytelling, Cielo Festino states that “[t]here is no culture that does not need to hear and know the stories of its own experience and community” (212). For Native Americans, storytelling is especially important because their cultural survival and continuity depends on oral storytelling as their cultures developed orally (Kroeber 1). In the Native American context, storytelling enables survivance, because, in the face of the ethnic and cultural erasure efforts of the settlers, it gives Native Americans agency to tell their own stories removed from the dominance of the settler colonists’ perspective. Since it functions as a tool to transfer tribal history and knowledge, storytelling allows Native Americans to preserve their cultural memories and to revive their cultural values as it does in the novel. Mooshum’s stories on the history of Pluto as well as his personal life function as a bridge that binds the past to Evelina’s present, since she depends on these stories to learn about the history of the reservation and their ancestors. Festino highlights the importance of remembering the past in order “for the constitution of identity traces, which grant the group a sense of belonging” (216). Evelina, as Festino claims, embraces her Native American identity; thus, through remembering she gains a sense of belonging. Mooshum’s stories function both as a vehicle for Evelina to acquire postmemories and a bridge that prevents her from disconnecting from her culture.

Mooshum regularly tells the story of the historical event where a massive flock of doves descended upon Pluto and the Ojibwe reservation, consuming crops and causing widespread devastation back in 1896 (Erdrich *The Plague of Doves* 5). The event gives the novel its title, and as Erdrich states, it is based on an actual historical event happened in North Dakota, which “haunted [her] as some of the other historical pieces in this book did” (“Plague of Doves” Multigenerational Murder Mystery). The story of the plague serves as a metaphor for the intrusion and colonization of Native American lands by white settlers. Just as the doves descend in overwhelming numbers, consuming

and destroying the crops, white settlers swarmed onto Native American lands, disrupting and dismantling their established way of life. With the story of the plague, Erdrich both enriches the historical backdrop of the novel and adds layers of memory and history to the story, which shape Native Americans' experiences.

Mooshum usually tells his stories whenever Clemence is absent since she wants to protect her kids from hearing these stories. One day when Clemence realizes Mooshum starts storytelling again and she feels a discomfort. Clemence's protective reaction does not escape from Evelina's notice, whose curiosity is piqued by this unexpected reaction. She becomes fully fascinated with pursuing the details of the story. Although not having heard Mooshum yet, Clemence knows that he is preparing to tell the story of the lynching. She warns him not to tell her children what happened to their people:

> "They don't need to hear it," she said.
> "Hear what?" asked Mooshum.
> "You know."
> "Ah, that, tawpway, my girl!" (Erdrich *The Plague of Doves* 59)

Although Mooshum pretends not to know what she is referring to, Clemence's assertion reveals that the incident has an enormous place in their lives. Since the event preceded her birth, it is a postmemory for Clemence as well. Having experienced the role of this postmemory in her own life and how much space it occupies, Clemence tries to protect her children from it. Her concern may resonate in what Hirsch suggests:

> To grow up with overwhelming inherited memories, to be dominated by narratives that preceded one's birth or one's consciousness is to risk having one's own stories displaced, even evacuated, by our ancestors. It is to be shaped, however indirectly, by traumatic fragments of events that still defy narrative reconstruction and exceed comprehension. These events happened in the past, but their effects continue in the present. (Hirsch *The Generation of Postmemory* 5)

Clemence does not want to risk her children's memories being replaced by those of Mooshum's traumatic memories of being subjected to racial violence. Yet, although she may be right as postmemories are so powerful that they may replace its subject's own memories, Evelina needs these postmemories to locate herself within her community. Postmemories provide her a connection, the lack of which worsens the symptoms resulting from inherited trauma. The findings Kathleen Brown-Rice reported on the

increased suicide rates among Native Americans and their correlation to the lack of connection to the past prove it. According to Brown-Rice, "an increase in the number of suicides corresponds to a lack of linkage between the adolescents and their cultural past and their ability to relate their past to their current situation and the future" (120).

Memories and postmemories are "more than a recollection; rather than *recollective,* [they are] *reconnective*" (Alloa et al. 4). By reconnecting generations, by means of trauma, postmemory is a necessary component in alleviating destructive trauma symptoms because the reconnection not only allows the transmission of the unfavorable parts of the past but it also allows that of the ways to live through traumatic experiences and to thrive despite it. From the beginning, Evelina seems to be aware of the reconnective function of these memories, which is illustrated in her remark that "this current of drama holds together the generations" (Erdrich *The Plague of Doves* 9).

Evelina's repetitive mentions of her teacher, Mary Anita Buckendorf, who is also a nun for whom Evelina grows a platonic love and admiration, grips her mother's attention. Clemence asks the surname of this teacher whom Evelina seems to be obsessed with. The revelation gives discomfort to Clemence and Mooshum, who is present during Clemence's interrogation. Their discomfort with the surname captures Evelina's attention. When she finds an opportunity in her mother's momentary absence, Evelina tries to convince Mooshum to tell why he reacted when he heard the surname. Mooshum's unwillingness to tell why increases Evelina's curiosity and impatience. Succumbing to Evelina's insistence, Mooshum starts to unburden the memories of the lynching after warning them not to tell their parents what they will hear (55). Mooshum implies that the reason Mary Anita chose to be a nun is an effort of redemption for the past injustices her ancestors imposed on Native American people. He remarks: "Not too many people have the privilege of seeing right before their eyes there is no justice here on eart [sic]" (55). Mooshum provides details of the lynching which makes him believe that the world is deprived of justice.

While the four Native American men—Seraph "Mooshum" Milk, Cuthbert Peace, Asiginak, and Holy Track—are passing close to the Lochren farm they hear cows bawling. Asiginak, the oldest person in the group, suggests that they do not go any closer to the house (61). Mooshum and Cuthbert do not listen to him after they hear a

baby cry in the house. Cuthbert goes for the baby and Mooshum goes to milk the cows. The uncanniness of the place seems to make Asiginak anxious as they see the murdered bodies (62). His anxiety does not seem baseless as his conversation with Mooshum and Cuthbert reveals. When Cuthbert insists on helping the wailing baby by taking her back to the sheriff Asiginak knows that it is not the wisest idea given a whole history of racial prejudice and profiling. "The white sheriff?" (63) Asiginak utters, as he knows what the white sheriff would make of their story: "We are no-goods, we are Indians, even me. If you tell the white sheriff, we will die" (63). He continues bitterly because he knows that if they go to a white person with this story, they would be held responsible for the slaughter. Mooshum also knows that the whites would "hang [them] for sure" (63). Their dilemma about risking their lives in the name of doing the right thing contrasts with the actual murderer, Warren Wolde's cold blooded attempts to fire the jammed gun to kill the baby in the opening section of the novel (1). The contrast between Warren, a white man, taking his time while committing a crime in cold blood and Native American men hesitating to save a baby because they fear how it would be perceived by the whites, shows the severity of racial bias in the country.

After debating whether they are going to give the baby to the white sheriff or take her back to the house, they decide to take her back. As Evelina unearths later in the novel, Mooshum alters this part of the event while telling it. In Mooshum's version of the story, the four Ojibwe nestle in a church for the night and the church's priest turn them into the sheriff and cause their hanging, except for Mooshum. This version of the story does not provide the details of his escape and he evades any question that Evelina may have by saying the rope around his neck was cut by his future wife, Junesse, the stepdaughter of Eugene Wildstrand, who was one of the mob members. Evelina is not convinced that it was that simple but does not pursue the truth behind it at that moment. Out of naivety, Joseph questions if Holy Track and Asiginak "'lived to be old men'" (76) before he hears that they have not. After a long search for a tree where they can hang the four Native Americans, the mob decides on an oak tree on Wolde's land, which is ironic because the Native American men are unfairly being hanged on Warren Wolde's land for the crime he committed. Despite the tragic irony, the men start singing in Ojibwe with ropes around their necks: "*These white men are nothing/What they do cannot harm me/I will see the face of mystery*" (78). The act of singing and the lyrics of

the song themselves signify a defiance against the mob's unfair act. Rather than confiding into the victim position, the Native American men die bravely singing a song in their own language that empowers them against the white people who think they have defeated them. The Native American manages to maintain survivance in the face of death, which would be passed along through generations, inspiring and empowering their progeny's efforts towards survivance.

As a postmemory subject, Evelina undertakes the responsibility to prevent the stories she hears from Mooshum from oblivion. Sébastien Fevry notes that,

> [t]he postmemory subject's actions are determined by an awareness of and wish to shed light on certain dark spots in History: the postmemory subject is not subject to the caprices of involuntary remembrance or sudden recollections that would otherwise dictate which path to take. Once again, it is rather a matter of consciously and determinedly appropriating fragments of a past that was not experienced by oneself, but becomes nevertheless an important part of one's search for identity. (97)

Correspondingly, Evelina questions the fate of the lynching mob, asking "[w]hat happened to the men who had lynched [her] people" (Erdrich *The Plague of Doves* 82), just to learn that whites, including the actual murderer, Warren Wolde, got away with an act of "injustice legitimatized by centuries of white settlers dehumanizing Indigenous peoples" (Barker 35). These questions reveal Evelina's feelings of shock and disillusionment. Despite her awareness of racial differences, she has not directly faced the harsh realities and consequences of pervasive and deadly racism. She expresses her hope for the survival of Native American victims and seeks answers about the consequences for the racist actions of white mob members. In doing so, she comes to realize their position as people of color in a society that often views them as inferior. Referring to the Native American victims as "our" people, Evelina shows her connection to them and acknowledges the deep-rooted traumas inflicted upon them in the past. Her deep connection to her roots paves the way for her to cobble together an understanding of her place in the racist world, inheriting "mixed loyalty and outrage, together with a deep confusion about her identity" which encourages her "attempts to leave America behind" to escape from a "conflicted legacy, one in which colonialism and American exceptionalism battle the forces of attraction and love" (Strehle 121-122). Her investment in French culture and desire to live in France stems from her

disappointment with America and its past. Evelina faces internal conflicts as she tries to understand her people's past and her own place in it. Coming of age with the weight of racial violence against her community inflicted upon her, she comes to understand that even some people she cares about are linked by family to the very townspeople who perpetrated the violence against her grandfather and others. Yet, despite their blood ties to the suffering of her people, white people do not only get away with what they have done but they also live well-off:

> The Buckendorfs got rich, fat, and never died out. … They prospered and took over things. Half the county. But they never should of. And Wildstrand. Nobody hauled him up on a murder charge. Sheriff Fells turned into a cripple and old Lungsford, out of disgust, he went back to the civilized world he called Minnesota. He moved to Breckenridge, where in 1928 they went and hung the sheriff. (Erdrich *The Plague of Doves* 82)

The absence of punishment for the lynching mob, who is responsible of the deaths of three innocent Ojibwe individuals serves as an example of the disparity in the treatment of different racial groups in terms of justice. The disparity between the two parties' lives frustrates Evelina causing her to become obsessed with the incident. Nevertheless, it is not Mooshum's first story of being nearly lynched. Mooshum and Junesse escape and take shelter at Mustache Maude's farm after the lynching. During their stay at Maude's farm, Mooshum shows up to be the first person to be blamed for the murder of a white woman in a neighboring farm. A group of angry white men raided the farm and demanded Mooshum from Mustache Maude:

> "Send out the goddamn Indian!" But the yell had less conviction, and was punctuated by the shot man's hoarse shrieks.
> "What Indian?"
> "That boy!"
> "He ain't no Indian," said Maude. "He's a Jew from the land of Galilee! One of the Lost Tribe of Israel!" (18)

The frantic assemblage of neighbors simply "disregarded the sudden absence of that woman's husband and thought about the nearest available Indian" (17). Mooshum's life was only spared after Maude convinces the lynching mob that Mooshum was not Native American. With the character of Mustache Maude, a well-off white woman who accepts two Native Americans under her protection, Erdrich indicates that her aim is far from offering a single-sided portraiture in which all white people are villains with purely evil

intentions while Native Americans are their innocent objects of victimization. Evelina concludes the story of her Mooshum's near-lynching with these remarks: "This was western North Dakota at the turn of the last century. Even years later, when an entire family was murdered outside Pluto, four Indians including a boy called Holy Track were blamed and caught by a mob" (17). Although it is not the first story in which her grandfather is the scapegoat being the nearest available Native American to blame, when there is a white person murdered, the slaughter of a child close to her age in the 1911 lynchings is incomprehensible for Evelina's young mind. It awakens her to the deadly implications of injustice and racial prejudice. She begins to understand that such violence is not just a distant concept but a present and tangible threat when it comes to being of Native American origin. This realization unsettles Evelina who is newly confronted with brutality and injustice, forcing her to bear witness to the racial hatred and the cruelty it may beget.

The execution reflects the historical and cultural tensions between Native Americans and white settlers. Evelina becomes obsessed with the town's lineage and with people who may have a role in the sufferings of her people:

> The story Mooshum told us had its repercussions—the first being that I could not look at anyone in quite the same way anymore. I became obsessed with lineage. … I wrote down as much of Mooshum's story as I could remember, and then the relatives of everyone I knew—parents, grandparents, way on back in time. I traced the blood history of the murders through my classmates and friends. (86)

Given the tangled bloodline of the town, almost everyone Evelina knows is related to the lynching in one way or the other. She is quick to pass judgement on Sister Mary Anita Buckendorf as the current bearer of her ancestors' guilt. Mooshum's belief that Mary Anita chose to be a nun out of guilt for what her ancestors have done to the Native American men and went away with it, makes her angry with Sister Mary Anita. Before Mary Anita, Evelina was platonically in love with Corwin Peace. It is after Corwin failed to remain loyal to their secret of sharing a kiss, Evelina loses interest in him and starts hating him. Yet, after Evelina finds out about the lynching, her feelings towards Mary Anita and Corwin start to change drastically. Although she does not rekindle a love for Corwin, she grows an apparent sympathy for him, while being disappointed with her admiration towards Mary Anita.

Before she learns about the lynching, Evelina admires everything French and wishes to go and settle there in the future. However, after postmemory takes the leading role in her life and enables her to rekindle her connection to her tribal culture, her admiration and wish to go to France fades away. When she attends college, she admits to herself that she would not be able to stay away from the reservation for so long. These changes in Evelina's emotions emphasize the effect of postmemory in her life. It ignites her to find ways to pursue a way of survivance even in the most unfortunate conditions.

The postmemory of the lynching haunts Evelina while it does not seem to have the same effect on her brother, Joseph, who simultaneously receives these postmemories from Mooshum. Pascale Bos, a professor who specializes in genocide and memory studies, argues that postmemory subjects may respond to trauma by either "deny[ing] the existence or the significance of this particular history (this is possible in particular families where no one speaks of the experience)" or by "feel[ing] strongly compelled to 'fill in the blanks' of the stories, to come to understand better the source of silence and loss in their families that so thoroughly affected its dynamics" (59). Joseph's response may resonate with the first suggestion because he is younger than Evelina which is why he may not be able to comprehend the complexity of the event. Evelina's response does correspond to the latter as she goes above and beyond to unravel the truths of the event. She feels an obligation to "find out the details of what had happened to those who made it through, as well as those who did not" (Bos 59). Acknowledging that the stories Mooshum tells "hold together the generations," Evelina listens to Mooshum's stories "not only from suspense but for instructions on how to behave when [her] moment of recognition … should arrive" (Erdrich *The Plague of Doves* 9). She feels the need to hear more of them to come to terms with her cultural identity and gain a better understanding her place in her community. Evelina is determined to bring the dark spots in Mooshum's version of the story into light. Mooshum leaves out the details of how he was, somehow, able to escape from being lynched. Evelina fills in that gap in the story of the lynching with her imagination, an act which is explained by Sébastien Fevry: "the imaginative investment that fill the blank spots in family memory. It is not merely about remembering, but about using imagination to connect with a past that was not experienced at first hand and that is characterized by ellipses and silence" (*Beyond the Era* 94). Evelina imagines a more naïve past, thinking that Mooshum's life has been

spared only because he was the son-in-law of one of the mob members. The postmemory has such an effect in her life that, the story of the lynching followed Evelina even after she graduates from college. Only after she comes home from college, she finds the courage to face Mary Anita. She daringly asks, "So the reason you became a nun … was it because you're a Buckendorf? Because a Buckendorf hung Corwin's great-uncle?" (250). Mary Anita does not deny the role of the guilt, "To live my life atoning for another person's sin? … I wouldn't have had the strength. But then again, the hanging had undoubtedly something to do with my decision, growing up and finding out. Knowing one could be capable" (250). To Evelina's surprise, Mary Anita reveals the unpleasant truth that fills in the gap, that is Mooshum drunkenly blabbed out their presence in the murder scene to his father-in-law. Mary Anita reveals a fact that was carefully hidden by Mooshum while telling the story (250). With sudden embarrassment, Evelina asserts, "I couldn't look at her suddenly. I could only see Mooshum. A ragged flush rose from deep inside of me, a flood of pure distress" (251). She feels a sudden dismay but is not very surprised since it answers some of the questions she has about the course of the events. While the mob is searching for a proper place where they can hang the men, the three Ojibwe—Cuthbert, Asiginak, and Holy Track—do not speak to Mooshum, a detail which Evelina did not ponder on when she first hears the story, but is enlightened now: "Nowhere in Mooshum's telling of the events did he make himself responsible. He never said that he had been the one who betrayed the others, yet instantly I knew it was true. Here was why the others would not speak to him in the wagon. Here was the reason he was cut down before he died" (251). Nevertheless, this unpleasant revelation does not deter Evelina from seeking some sort of justice that would satisfy her. She assumes the mission of facing her grandfather, without having any resentful feelings towards her ethnic identity. Mary Anita hands her the sole relics from the lynched, Holy Track's boots, and confronts Mooshum by showing him the boots (252).

Mooshum seems to suffer from survivor's guilt which "occurs when the person survived the traumatic event while others were injured or killed in a disaster" (Doctor and Shiromoto 134). When Evelina forces Mooshum to bring Holy Track's boots to the tree where the three innocent Native American people were hanged, Mooshum says that Evelina "killed him some, too" as he is "sick to look on these old boots and think of

Holy Track" (Erdrich *The Plague of Doves* 253). Mooshum's feelings show that he carries along sorrow and unresolved grief, indicating to the feelings of responsibility for and anguish over the incident. By sharing the story of the lynching with younger generations, Mooshum attempts to process his guilt and ensure that the memory of those unjustly killed is not forgotten. His storytelling becomes a means of coping with his survivor's guilt and seeking some form of redemption.

The characters in *The Plague of Doves* also grieve over the loss of ancestral lands and ties. Judge Antone Bazil Coutts's narrative sheds light on how Native American lands were lost. He learns from his grandfather's notebooks that the land on which the town of Pluto was established originally belonged to the Ojibwe and was unrightfully claimed by the white people. His grandfather was one of the members of the expedition team that discovered the land. According to his notes, the survival of the white expeditors was only possible thanks to Henri and Lafayette, Corwin's ancestors, and guides of the expedition who know how to survive on this piece of land. When Evelina's aunt, Neve Harp, incites Mooshum, "to talk about how the town of Pluto came to be and why it was inside the original reservation boundaries, even though hardly any Indians lived in Pluto, well, both of the old men's faces became like Mama's—quiet, with an elaborate reserve, and something else that has stuck in my heart ever since" (84). *The Plague of Doves* does not tend romanticize the American frontier settlement (Barker 2). It gives attention to political issues related to the settler colonial invasion through the conquest of Pluto, North Dakota, tracing this legacy into the present. The characters carry a unique cultural, political, and historical baggage into the present and it affects their identities and actions. Their struggles in the present reveal how the past is inextricably tied to present, as Evelina summarizes in the novel: "history works itself out in the living" (Erdrich *The Plague of Doves* 243). She is an observant child who is able to understand the mimics and empathize with the feelings of her elders. Evelina adopts the trauma of the land that was lost to the white people years before her and even her mother's birth:

> I saw that the loss of their land was lodged inside of them forever. This loss would enter me, too. Over time, I came to know that the sorrow was a thing that each of them covered up according to their character—my old uncle

> through his passionate discipline, my mother through strict kindness and cleanly order. As for my grandfather, he used the patient art of ridicule. (84)

Evelina reveals her awareness of the presence of different coping mechanisms that the adults around her develop around trauma. Such an awareness of the ways to respond to trauma allows Evelina to find her own way of coping as she grows up. Her experience shows that she chooses to channel her sorrow to productivity that would help her community's well-being.

In *The Plague of Doves*, each character has their own understanding of and expectations from justice. Marn Wolde's narrative sheds light on Billy Peace's experiences with memories of boarding school trauma as well as postmemories of historical trauma. Billy Peace, the nephew of Cuthbert Peace, gets married to Marn, who is the niece of Warren Wolde and the inheritor of his land as he does not have any children. Billy uses this marriage as a means to get access to the Wolde farm by manipulating her. Susan Strehle interprets Billy's subsequent actions as a search for "redress for the wrongs committed against Native people" (119), since, at one point, he reclaims, "[t]his was my family's land, Indian land. Will be again" (Erdrich *The Plague of Doves* 152). He gets the title to the land registered under his name. He establishes a religious cult, "The Kindred," on it. He directs his anger and desperation, resulting from a traumatic ancestral past, at people and these feelings manifest themselves as violence. Kenneth Roemer draws attention to the resemblance of the system that operates the cult to those of boarding schools, as Billy "reenacts boarding-school policy of erasing all children's names" (123). He physically and psychologically abuses his family and the cult's followers—consisting of both Native Americans and white people. Billy's actions, reclaiming the Wolde land and torturing white people in the name of religion, reflect his desire to avenge the unfair conquest of Native American lands, the lynching of his ancestors, and the boarding school experience of millions of Native Americans in the past. The parallels between boarding school policies and the practices Billy carries out in his cult show how historical traumas, such as the forced assimilation tactics of boarding schools, reverberate through generations and manifest in the present. Billy's behaviors can be explained with reenactment, a trauma response that "may take the form of either victim or perpetrator of traumatic material" (Doctor and Shiromoto 35). In Billy's case, Billy reenacts trauma as the perpetrator, while, in reality, he and his ancestors were the ones

who had been victimized. His reenactment provides an understanding of his motivations and behaviors and sheds light on the cyclical nature of historical oppression. His actions reflect an intergenerational reverberation of the trauma inflicted by settler colonial policies and show how past injustices continue to shape and influence present-day realities for Native American people. This reenactment, however, does not even satisfy him as his frantic and perverted actions deprive him of his family. Violence begets violence and it does not leave Marn another choice but to kill him. Marn, who has the supernatural ability to communicate with the snakes she owns, commands them to kill Billy and save her kids, Judah and Lilith—who shows up in *LaRose* as Nola Ravich—from Billy's physical and psychological abuse.

In contrast with postmemory's violent manifestation in Billy's example, Evelina's brother, Joseph finds comfort in isolation. Evelina describes herself and her brother as kids who do not seek socializing (Erdrich *The Plague of Doves* 28).

> We were not social. Plus Joseph and our father were somewhat isolated by their fascinations—collecting stamps … which was a way of traveling without leaving, but also stars and heavenly phenomena, grasses, trees, birds, reptiles and happenstance insects, which they collected methodically, pinned to white squares of cardboard, and labeled. (28)

Joseph seems to be fixated his focus on stamp collection and science, which he inherits from his father who is a science teacher. He seems to turn in on himself and become more involved in scientific experiments, after acquiring the postmemory of the lynching. While he also tries to cope with the past events, compared to Evelina's attempts to unearth the altered parts of the story, he seems rather uninterested.

Corwin Peace—who is the nephew of Billy Peace and great-nephew of Cuthbert, Henri, and Lafayette Peace—is also loaded with the traumas of the past injustices. He exhibits the most common consequences of historical trauma responses that emerge among Native Americans. He drops out of school, and shows signs of borderline personality disorder accompanied with alcohol and drug abuse (197). Evelina is objective enough to see that Corwin's self-destructive behavior does not help him get a better life. He tries to pull Evelina into the whirlpool of drug consumption by drugging her in a fragile moment when she was having a breakdown because of her tumultuous love life. Yet,

Evelina is sensible enough to follow the example of her family's resilience and productivity. After she finishes her college education, she starts working as a psychiatric nurse in a mental health institution (226). Although she gets admitted to the mental health institution for a short time period because of a breakdown, Evelina does not let it characterize her experience. She finds the strength in herself to quickly rehabilitate. Choosing a career in psychiatric nursing, Evelina contributes to a critical need within her community considering the mental health challenges faced by Native Americans, which often exacerbated by historical trauma, socioeconomic disparities, and ongoing discrimination. Her choice of profession highlights the importance of culturally sensitive mental health care and represents a bridge between traditional healing practices and modern medical approaches, offering hope and support to those struggling with mental health issues. Although she lives in conditions shaped by settler colonization and a history marked by both physical and cultural genocide, Evelina does not let these conditions to deter her from cherishing and contributing to Ojibwe culture by showing a willingness to learn about her ancestral past and reconnect with her ancestors.

In *The Plague of Doves* postmemory provides a historical background to the problems that result from that history and continue to trouble Native Americans, by shedding light on traumatic Native American experiences. Erdrich states that her aim is to "tell a story that goes back and forth through time and that shows the influence of history on the passions and decisions of people who live in the present" ("'The Plague of Doves:' Multigenerational Murder Mystery"). Postmemory serves as a useful tool to show how the past infiltrates into the present and affects people's lives. It contributes to Erdrich's aim to draw attention to the racial conflicts in Native American history, which might have been ignored and silenced in mainstream narratives. By perpetuating traumatization to generations that are temporally and spatially distinct from the traumatic event, postmemory may resonate with negative responses. Although postmemory has negative effects on some of the novel's characters—one of which is preventing their survivance efforts, exemplified in Billy's and Corwin's experiences—it contributes to that of Evelina. It influences her perspective on and expectations from justice in the present and, in return, affects her identity and actions as well as her reactions to injustice. Through Evelina's experiences, *The Plague of Doves* highlights

postmemory's potential role as a catalyst for survivance in Native American context. The way Evelina handles postmemory by channeling it into productivity proves that postmemory also has the potential of having postmemory subjects turn ancestral traumas into stories of survivance. Postmemory widens Evelina's "narrow sense of community … as she traces the connections, past and present, among Ojibwe and non-Ojibwe" (Kurup 62). It encourages her to embrace the stories of her ancestors and her people. In spite of her dissatisfaction and disillusionment with the given definition of justice by the U.S. institutions, through struggles and triumphs, Evelina manages to embody survivance in the face of historical trauma and ongoing oppression. Evelina's dissatisfaction and anger against the lack of "justice" for Native Americans, resonates more deeply in the central character of *The Round House,* Joe, because of the failure of his father, Judge Antone Bazil Coutts in his efforts to achieve justice.

# CHAPTER 2
# RAPE AND THE “MAZE OF INJUSTICE” IN *THE ROUND HOUSE*

Louise Erdrich published *The Round House*, the second novel of the Justice Trilogy, in 2012. The novel was critically well-received like the previous novel. It won Erdrich the National Book Award for Fiction in 2012, the Minnesota Book Award in 2013, and was shortlisted for Andrew Carnegie Medal for Excellence in Fiction. Erdrich says that she felt a necessity to write another book on jurisdictional issues to draw attention to the complex and problematic legal procedures that disadvantages Native Americans after publishing *The Plague of Doves* (“The Sunday Rumpus Interview: Louise Erdrich”). *The Round House* portrays the complexities of the unique and often complex mixture of federal, state, and tribal laws that Native American reservations live under and their real-life implications for Native Americans. The novel depicts the complications in the U.S. legal system which makes it difficult for Native Americans to achieve justice. The novel follows a rape incident and the subsequent legal procedures, in which a Native American woman, Geraldine Coutts, a tribal enrollment specialist, is raped and nearly killed by a white man. The novel reveals the political background of how her perpetrator evades justice due to the racial biases inherent in the jurisdiction of the American legal system.

The novel focuses on the experiences of Geraldine’s son Joe. Joe is both the narrator and the main character of the novel. His frustration and lack of faith in the U.S. institutions of justice, snowballs by the postmemories of past injustices, such as the white people’s unjust seizure of Native American lands, forced assimilation policies that disrupt the Native American way of life, and the government’s strategies to disempower Native Americans in the face of the U.S. law. His bitter feelings and disappointment are compounded with the realization that the justice system has been built in a way that gives his father, Antone Bazil Coutts, a tribal judge, no power to prosecute a white man. The dead-ends in the justice system have led Joe to turn to Ojibwe law of wiindigoo justice, which points to killing the perpetrator. However, killing the perpetrator traumatizes and the guilt haunts him for years rather than bringing him the satisfaction he hopes to achieve. Although postmemories of past injustices compounded with his personal experience with the U.S. justice system that

fails to serve Native Americans disappoint Joe pushing him into a hurried vengeful action, in the end, they encourage his survivance as he decides to become a judge to rule verdicts that would strengthen Native American's hand on a legal basis. This chapter will argue that postmemories of historical injustices compounded with Joe's experiences with injustice in his mother's rape case lead him towards survivance. Rather than helplessly accepting injustice and victimry as an inherent part of the Native American experience, he endeavors to change the situation by choosing an occupation by the help of which he can serve his community and empower Native Americans.

Louise Erdrich's *The Round House* remains relevant because there is still a lack of recognition and adequate legal sanctions for the cases where Native Americans are victimized, although more than a decade has passed after its publication. A study funded by the National Institute of Justice in 2016 reveals that more than four in every Native American or Alaska Native women, which corresponds to 84,3 percent of them, experience some kind of violence in their lifetime (Rosay 2). Native American women do not typically report rape because of the complexities in the legal system, so the actual numbers are presumably higher. A 2021 report by the U.S. Department of the Interior shows that over 4,000 Native Americans have gone missing or been killed. Not surprisingly, murder ranks as the third leading cause of death for young Native American women (Claiborne). Community advocates attribute this "silent crisis" to the legacy of "generations of government policies of forced removal, land seizures and violence inflicted on Native peoples" (Claiborne). According to a survey the First Nations Development Institutes carried out in 2023, the problem of missing and murdered Native American people continues to be the most important issue for Native Americans (Sanchez et al.). The survey also reveals that the general public is not aware of the issues affecting Native Americans (Sanchez et al.). Erdrich uses her novel as a tool to draw attention to these problems that have their roots embedded in the settler-colonial oppression and subjugation. She explores the effects of these legal challenges on individuals and communities, emphasizing the need for greater understanding and reform.

Rape or sexual exploitation in any form "was almost unheard of" in Native American societies before the arrival of settler colonists (Whyatt). Native American tribes'

matrifocal and egalitarian social systems contrasted with the male-dominant and phallocentric social systems of "thoroughly misogynistic" Euro-American societies that settled on the continental United States (Smith 76; Allen 89-90). According to David Michael Smith, settler colonists perceived Native American women as a threat for "the project of genocide" (76). Rape has been used as a tool for oppression and conquest by the settler colonizers like the government-aided sterilization of Native American women without consent, to sabotage Native American women's "ability to reproduce the next generation of peoples who can resist colonization" (78-79; McKinley and Knipp 2). According to a 2016 study funded by the National Institute of Justice, more than one in every three Native American women in the United States experience rape and that Native American women are at a higher risk of experiencing sexual assault compared to women of other racial groups (Rosay 2). As the statistics reveal, rape still continues to be an extension of settler colonial oppression and racism in the United States. The U.S. government enacted laws that systematically undermined Native American tribal sovereignty and restricted their jurisdiction. These laws laid the basis of a justice system that disadvantages Native Americans. Native American tribes "are largely forced to rely on Euro-American institutions for 'help'" (Poupart 95). It is evident in *The Round House* that the Euro-American institutions are designed to trap Native Americans into "a maze of injustice"—the title of the 2007 Amnesty report that laid out striking statistics about Native American rape incidents and their insufficient judicial processes—that perpetuates discrimination rather than offering satisfying solutions for injustice.

Unlike most of Erdrich's other novels, *The Round House* is a monophonic novel, which Erdrich also calls "a book of memory" (Erdrich, "The Burden of Justice"). The novel is narrated by adult Joe Coutts, who retrospectively reminisces about the time when he was a 13-year-old boy. Although these memories mainly consist of his personal experiences as he comes of age within the span of three months following his mother's attack, he interweaves stories of other people, such as Mooshum, Akii and Nanapush in his narrative. Joe lives with his mother, Geraldine, and his father, Antone Bazil Coutts, a tribal judge on an unnamed North Dakota reservation, which is the same unnamed Ojibwe reservation in *The Plague of Doves*. The two novels share some of the characters and are consequential in terms of both the time and the events they cover.

The members of the Harp family, Mooshum, Shamengwa, and Whitey also appear in *The Round House* as they are related to the family of Coutts through Geraldine. The memories Joe recounts date back to the summer of 1988 which picks up from where *The Plague of Doves* leaves off. The latter concludes in the late 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s when Anton Bazil Coutts gets married to Geraldine Milk.

Joe begins by recounting the day that irrevocably altered his life. Geraldine leaves for work on a Sunday, upon receiving a phone call from Mayla Wolfskin, a young Native American woman, asking for Geraldine's help filling out the tribal enrollment file for her baby. As it is revealed later in the novel, Mayla's baby is from a white government official Curtis Yeltow, who gives money to Mayla to keep the baby a secret. Linden Lark, another white man, claims that he loves Mayla and pursues her that day to the round house where she would meet Geraldine. Linden comes from a family which is formerly found guilty of trying to deceive Ojibwe customers by overcharging them at the gas station they manage on the reservation land. Linden gets angry with Geraldine for helping Mayla and attacks the two women, raping Geraldine and murdering Mayla. This brutal act committed against Native American women serves as a metaphor for the larger historical violence inflicted upon Native American lands and people. This personal violation symbolizes the metaphorical rape of the continent through settler colonialism. Just as Geraldine's assault represents personal and cultural trauma, the colonization and exploitation of Native American lands by European settlers constitute a collective violation of Native American sovereignty, culture, and identity. Settler colonialism, characterized by the forceful taking of land and resources, reflects the dynamics of power, control, and dehumanization inherent in rape. This parallel underscores the ongoing legacy of violence and domination that affects both individual lives and Native American tribes, highlighting the enduring impact of settler colonialism on Native American people.

The round house—which gives the novel its title—as the place where the crime took place is a significant religious site for the Ojibwe built by Joe's ancestors "to keep their people together and to ask for mercy from the Creator, since justice was so sketchily applied on earth" (Erdrich *The Round House* 315). It symbolizes a spiritual and communal shield for the Ojibwe people away from the settler colonizers. The violation

of this sacred space through Geraldine’s rape and Mayla’s murder reflects the broader historical pattern of settler colonialism, under which Native American sacred sites have often been targets of destruction. Historically, settler colonizers have frequently attacked and appropriated these sites to undermine Native American cultures and assert dominance over their lands. This strategy was not just about physical conquest but it also aimed at annihilating the spiritual and cultural foundations of Native American tribes.

Geraldine, suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder after the event, is reluctant to reveal the details of the assault. Her being unavailable as a testimonial source and the slow progress of the official federal investigation causes Joe and Antone to embark on a simultaneous individual investigation which paves the way for Joe’s awakening to the entanglement and complexities of the American legal system in handling Native American rape incidents. In an interview, Erdrich remarks that she was “haunted for years by … the political background of this book” (“Conversation: Louise Erdrich on Her New Novel, ‘The Round House’”), which Joe summarizes in the novel: “The problem with most Indian rape cases was that even after there was an indictment the U.S. attorney often declined to take the case to trial for one reason or another” (Erdrich *The Round House* 41). The judicial process that follows Geraldine’s rape and Mayla’s murder in the novel uncovers the complexities inherent to the Native American rape and disappearance cases. Its insufficiency reiterates the disparities in Native Americans’ access to justice. While Mayla’s disappearance is completely ignored by the officials, the entangled journey of seeking justice for Geraldine’s rape begins when she is brought to the hospital. As the place where the crime occurred and who the perpetrator are not known, yet the authorities cannot determine whether the case falls under the jurisdiction of the tribal, federal, or state court (12). Geraldine’s inability to testify due to her post-traumatic stress disorder adds to the turmoil of the situation. Even if she had been able to testify that she was raped by a white man on the reservation land, the tribal court would not be able to prosecute him because of the myriad of laws that the U.S. government enacted limiting its jurisdiction over white people. Lisa M. Poupart outlines how Native American cases are being handled in the American legal system:

> Those living on reservations are required to notify federal or state officials (depending on jurisdiction) when ‘serious’ cases of domestic and sexual abuse are reported. After a report is made, system officials have directionary authority over whether to investigate and process a case. … If a case is taken up by officials, it is processed in the Anglo-judicial system—an institution that historically serves as an instrument of cultural genocide. (95)

A similar procedure has been followed in Geraldine’s case. After Antone informs federal officials, an FBI agent, Soren Bjerke, is appointed to the case. Along with the official investigation carried out by Bjerke, Joe and his father look for the traces through Antone’s case files that may be related to Geraldine’s case. The traces they find in the files lead them to the crime scene, to the round house—a tribal ceremonial site within the boundaries of the reservation. Joe investigates the crime scene and he finds a gas can that Linden uses to pour on and burn Geraldine explaining the smell of gasoline coming from his mother when Joe and Antone get to her after the incident. The fact that it is him—rather than the officials—who is able to find a tangible evidence that would be important for the course of the lawsuit proving the perpetrator’s intention and that the crime was committed on Native American land intensifies his skepticism about the reliability of the official channels of justice. The slowness of the official investigation escalates his frustration and frequently gets him involved in quarrels with his father, questioning his authority as a judge. When his father instructs him to leave the rest to the police, he rhetorically asks: “Who? Tribal? Smokies[1]? FBI? What do they care?” (Erdrich *The Round House* 93). Antone tries to convince Joe that Bjerke is working on the case, but Joe seems to distrust him. Joe asks, “So, why didn’t he find the gas can?” “I don’t know, said my father,” “I know. Because he doesn’t care about her. Not really. Not like we do” (93).

Knowing that the officials are not going to handle the case properly upsets Joe. He reaches the conclusion that he has to do something about it. Geraldine reveals Linden’s identity as the perpetrator after she makes sure Mayla’s baby is safe in the hands of an adoption agency so that Linden cannot pose a threat to the baby. Linden, then, gets arrested. Although the news of his being taken into custody creates an illusion that justice is achieved, Linden’s internment does not last long. This heightens the tension

[1] It is a slang word used for state police officers, shortened from Smokey Bear—a cartoon character featured in the U.S. Forest Service’s fire prevention campaign in 1944, wearing a hat resembling those of state police officers (“Story of Smokey | Smokey Bear”).

between Joe and his father. Joe challenges his father asking him why he bothers to be a judge if he has “zero authority” (226). Antone tells Joe that the Native American Law is laid on the “rotten decisions” made by the U.S. government (228). He dives into the history of American legal system and dissects the court decisions that slowly and sneakily wear down Native American tribal sovereignty. Antone uses knives and forks and stacks them in an unbalanced way to help Joe visualize the ex parte system of justice in the United States. Each knife or fork signifies a court decision or law enacted by the U.S. government that laid the foundation for the current malfunctioning justice system. These are the court decisions because of which “the sovereignty of Native American tribes today is limited by what the tribes surrendered by treaty, what Congress has imposed on tribes by legislation, and what the courts consider to be inconsistent with their status” (Wishart 193). Antone starts with *Johnson v. McIntosh*, a 1823 landmark decision that established the legal precedent which states that Native American tribes did not possess full title to their lands and that the U.S. government held a superior title by basically upholding “the medieval doctrine of discovery” (“Johnson & Graham’s Lessee v. McIntosh, 21 U.S. 543 (1823)”; Erdrich *The Round House* 228).

Establishing the federal government’s jurisdiction over Native American lands, this verdict had violated Native American land rights and sovereignty and influenced Native American politics. He continues with another Supreme Court decision: *Lone Wolf v. Hitchcock*, which “abrogated Native American treaty rights and underscored congressional supremacy (called plenary power) over Indian affairs” in 1903 (Wishart 119). The court decision also undermined tribal sovereignty giving the government the right to cancel treaties with Native American tribes unilaterally. Joe learns that the American justice system allowed white people to commit crimes against Native Americans on Native American land and get away with it with the 1978 Supreme Court decision of *Oliphant v. Suquamish.* The verdict stripped Native Americans of their “right to prosecute non-Indians who commit crimes” on Native American land (Erdrich *The Round House* 229). Each court decision adds to the jurisdictional conflicts which leave Native Americans vulnerable for any kind of attack that may come from white people (Casselman). Although Joe sees no sense in his father’s choice of occupation if he is inevitably helpless, Antone explains that each case in which he prevails as a Native

American judge matters as it serves as a legal precedent and helps lay a solid foundation for future cases that would concern Native Americans (Erdrich *The Round House* 228).

Cielo Festino describes postmemory as a structure that "is indirectly formed by traumatic historical events that happened in the past, but which still produce effects in the present" (216). Festino's description effectively encapsulates the basic premise of the concept of postmemory as "a structure of inter- and transgenerational return of traumatic knowledge and embodied experience. It is a consequence of traumatic recall but (unlike post-traumatic stress disorder), at a generational remove" (Hirsch *The Generation of Postmemory* 6). In her description, Festino highlights postmemory as an indirect, inherited form of memory passed down through familial and cultural narratives, acknowledging that one can "not have literal 'memories' of others' experiences, and certainly, one person's lived memories cannot be transformed into another's" (31). As Hirsch suggests, the prefix "post-" in postmemory "approximates memory in its affective force and its psychic effects" (31). Even though these events may have occurred in the past, for Joe their effects continue to resonate in the present, influencing his perspective, identity, and actions. As a 13-year-old child, Joe has a very limited scope of personal experience which can shape his understanding of and expectations from justice. Thus, the postmemories he acquires from his tightly knit community play a determining role in shaping his perceptions of justice and influencing the actions he endeavors accordingly. The postmemory of the 1911 lynching, which, as discussed in Chapter One, affects Evelina's life by shaping her perceptions of race, identity, and justice in *The Plague of Doves*, shapes Joe's perception of justice and ignites his individual efforts to redress justice in *The Round House* as well. Although Joe does not remember how he received the postmemory of the lynching from whom—most probably from Mooshum as he is the living source of the event as well as the Ojibwe knowledge—he seems to know the details of it as he is able to identify, "the tree where [his] ancestors were hanged" (Erdrich *The Round House* 140). The oak tree serves as a tangible link to the past that is not disconnected from Joe's present in spite of his temporal distance from the event itself. Hirsch claims that "[m]emory is mediated, cultural, but it has also escaped through the open doorway in the photograph to haunt the natural landscapes of the present" (Hirsch *The Generation of Postmemory* 25).

The hanging tree, in both *The Plague of Doves* and *The Round House*, as an object like a photograph, serves the same effect Hirsch notes. Joe knows that "[n]one of the killers ever went on trial" and he realizes that "the land of their descendants [is] already full of row crops[,]" which adds to his frustration with the disparities in the conditions of the two groups (Erdrich *The Round House* 140). Soon Antone provides him with more information on the lynching. He suggests that they "know the families of the men who were hanged," "the families of the men who hanged them," and that the Native American men "were innocent of the crime they were hung for" (211). This explains Linden's attack on the two Native American women in cold blood as he "[k]nows [they] can't hold him. Thinks he can get away. Like his uncle" (211). As Geraldine also reveals later, before committing the crime Linden knew "he won't get caught" for it (161) like his great-uncle who was in the lynching party (211). It teaches Joe that injustice is not something unique to his mother's case, but a pattern, in which it is constantly used as a weapon against Native Americans to diminish their power. Postmemory sheds light on to the motivations that made Joe feel like he has to seek and restore justice through his individual efforts.

Erdrich asserts that "the long history of injustice in a community has enormous repercussions for how people function as a whole, and … when people believe there's no justice to be obtained, they behave in ways that are either defeated or vengeful" ("Louise Erdrich: A Reading and a Conversation"). Although the postmemory of past injustices urges Joe to act vengeful, Joe manages to use postmemory as a motivation for his journey towards survivance since it encourages him to break the chain of injustice he has observed through postmemory. Joe, as a postmemory subject, "become[s] [an] avid [reader] of silences and memory traces hidden in a face" (Schwab 14). This correlates with Hirsch's definition of postmemory as,

> …the relationship that the "generation after" bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before to experiences they "remember" only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right. (Hirsch *The Generation of Postmemory* 5)

Joe seeks for more information from the conversations he has with the elders of his community since Geraldine exhibits an avoidant attitude towards the church and

remains silent about her experiences at the boarding school. After the incident, Edward suggests that Clemence should bring Geraldine to church, which he thinks would help her recover from the traumatic event that caused her to turn into a living corpse. Yet, Clemence does not believe that "Geraldine would find comfort there after all these years" (Erdrich *The Plague of Doves* 76). She implies that it may trigger the trauma resulting from her boarding school experience which is not revealed in the novel. Yet, Joe infers that these experiences were not pleasant because he knows that boarding schools were where "[e]ven the most traditional Indians, the people who'd kept the old ceremonies alive in secret, … had Catholicism beaten into them" (249). Joe observes a similar response in Grandma Ignatia who, as Joe remarks, "had been to Catholic boarding school but it just hardened her" against assimilation and she continued to stick to the Ojibwe culture by carrying out its practices and speaking Ojibwe (65). Grandma Ignatia's and his mother's resistance against the assimilationist efforts of the boarding schools inspires Joe to work towards maintaining survivance amidst desperate situations.

Their disadvantaged position in legal terms convinces Joe to embark on a quest to redress justice. During his stay at his aunt Clemence's house for a while—so that he can be taken care of since Geraldine barely leaves her room after the rape—Joe shares the same bedroom with Mooshum, who, similar to his role in *The Plague of Doves*, is the repository of tribal and familial history. By means of Mooshum's storytelling, Joe starts to gather information about the old Ojibwe law of wiindigoo justice. According to Ojibwe belief, the wiindigoo is a human possessed by a monstrous cannibalistic spirit, which can be killed if the community arrives at a consensus. The story Mooshum tells, is about a boy, Nanapush, and his mother, Akii. According to the story, Akii is able to see the prey in her dreams and guides her husband to hunt. When the prey becomes scarce, her husband accuses her of being possessed by wiindigoo. Thus, he gathers the townspeople to persuade them she should be killed. He commands Nanapush to kill his mother. Nanapush refuses to kill her and in the end he turns out to be right because he cannot carry such a burden and he does not believe his mother is a wiindigoo.

The story demonstrates the dangers of wiindigoo justice when not carried out with care. However, Joe is not patient enough to consider the dangers of wiindigoo justice that the

story lays out. He kills Linden with the aid of his best friend Cappy. Erdrich comments on this: “Wrong or right, for many families this is the only option when justice is unobtainable” (Erdrich, “The Burden of Justice”). As Erdrich also alleges, “[r]evenge is a sorrow for the person who has to take it on. And the person who is rash enough to think it’s going to help a situation is always wrong” (“In ‘House,’ Erdrich Sets Revenge on a Reservation”). Similarly, the guilt of killing the perpetrator—a hurried, half-baked decision—haunts Joe for years without giving him the satisfaction that he expected.

Joe’s desire to secure justice through retributive justice fits in the postmemory subject’s wish to avenge parents’ victimization. The historical legal precedents—Joe acquires in the form of postmemories—in which white men always got away with the crimes they commit against Native Americans, pushes Joe to appeal to vigilante justice because it seems to be the only way out from the maze of injustice. According to Harris, postmemory subjects show,

> …tendencies towards isolation, persistent feelings of responsibility for parents’ happiness and for what is owed to them given their enormous suffering, a silent pact with parents to either keep the past a secret or to avenge parents’ victimization, over-identification with martyrdom, and bottled up anger and aggression. The most salient disorder arose from a sense of impending danger that might explain their parents’ overprotectiveness; concurrently, children sought to protect their parents who survived [a massive traumatic event]. (70)

As a postmemory subject, Joe exhibits some of the behaviors Judith Harris calls “maladaptive” (70). He exhibits the fear of impending danger, which is conceptualized as hypervigilance, a common symptom of trauma described as a heightened state of awareness (Doctor and Shiromoto 101). Both Joe and his father are unsettled by the disappearance of Geraldine, even though they have yet no idea about the rape incident. Their concern about Geraldine escalates within minutes. The concerning thoughts that resurfaced in them in Geraldine’s absence indicate that it is expected that something can happen to a Native American anytime on the reservation. Joe tries to console himself in his father’s determination to go and “find her, not just look for her, not search” (Erdrich *The Round House* 3). While he naively believes that his father’s position as a judge can shield their family from such tragedies, his hypervigilance reveals his underlying awareness of the real and present dangers on the reservation. This illustrates the

pervasive anxiety and fear that result from a history filled with violence and injustice. Joe comes up with the first possible thing that could have happen to his mother: to go missing. This points to the frequency of missing cases happen. He immediately gets into a state of denial that such a thing cannot "happen to the son of a judge, even one who lived on a reservation" (5). While he attributes a kind of authority to his father's position as a judge, naively believing that his father can prevent such terrible things from happening to their family, Joe is aware that things he fears can happen on a reservation.

Louise Erdrich provides a realistic and unromanticized portrayal of life on Native American reservations in *The Round House*. Mooshum's personal anecdotes from the time when he and his people were first settled on a reservation back in the nineteenth century reveal the realities of reservations: "Ah, those first reservation years, when they squeezed us! Down to only a few square miles. We starved while the cows of settlers lived fat off the fenced grass out of our old hunting grounds. In those first years our white father with big belly ate ten ducks for dinner and didn't even send us feet" (184). Although Joe currently lives in relatively more comfortable conditions than those of Mooshum. He reveals the not-so-pleasant other side of reservation life by depicting the lives of people who do not live as comparatively comfortably as he does. For example, he states that one of his friends, Angus,

> …was from a part of the reservation that was hardcore poor. The tribe acquired the money to put in subsidized project housing—large, tan city—style apartment buildings just outside of town. They were surrounded by hummocks of weedy earth, no trees or bushes. The money had run out before steps were built, so people used ramps of plywood or just hoisted themselves in and jumped out of their houses. His aunt Star had moved Angus, his two brothers, her boyfriend's two children, and a changing array of pregnant sisters and bingeing or detoxing cousins into a three-bedroom unit. (19)

Angus' living conditions are exemplary of that of many people living on reservations. Even though the government has provided housing assistance for the reservations, the fact that Angus's aunt had to squeeze in a lot of family members into a small apartment illustrate it was inadequate.

While reservations cannot offer a nurturing environment for it, the Ojibwe tribe manages to remain as a supportive and nurturing social organism, where its members cherish Native American cultural values and carry on its traditions. Joe finds the support he seeks in his tribal community. After the rape, Geraldine understandably has not been psychologically and physically available to parent. Joe and Antone have been taking care of Geraldine. During this time, the tribe substitute as his parents and provide care for him. He has been taken care of by Whitey and Sonja—his uncle from mother's side and his wife—and his aunt Clemence in turn. Joe depicts Sonja protecting him and accompanying him as if she were his mother. Grandma Ignatia, who does not have a blood-relation with Joe, also provides food for him when he visits her with his friends. The juxtaposition of the portrayals of the reservation and the Ojibwe tribe highlights that survivance can be achieved in spite of the difficult conditions of the reservations.

Joe describes himself as a boy who is "never like so many Indian boys, who'd look down quiet in their anger and say nothing" because his mother "taught [him] different (8). The way Geraldine raises him allows Joe to defy the racism directed at him in his most despair moment, contributing to his survivance. When waiting for his mother who was rushed into the emergency ward, Joe was identified as a Native American by a pregnant woman who asks him: "Don't you Indians have your own hospital over there?" (8). The woman's question indicates that Native Americans are not welcomed here and her emphasis on "there," referring to the reservation as some kind of a threshold that keeps Native Americans from trespassing on land outside of the reservation border, mirrors how settler colonists view the reservation lands. Joe calmly informs the woman that the emergency room of the reservation hospital is under restoration at the moment. The woman continues provoking Joe with a sarcastic undertone saying: "Still," and Joe responds back, "Still what?" (8). Joe's stance in this interaction is a defiance against the white woman's racist attitude. It reflects how racism is being frequently encountered in the everyday lives of Native Americans.

Joe describes being Native American as "a tangle of red tape" (30), reflecting on the struggles and challenges that often accompany his Native American identity because of unjust governmental regulations and policies. Although these inequalities force him to take an action that would traumatize him, Joe chooses to work towards untangling that

red tape for future generations of Native Americans. Like Evelina, whose inheritance of the postmemories of losing land, people, and sovereignty, as well as the postmemory of the lynching connects her to her ancestors and allows her to grow a positive sense of identity, postmemories also connect Joe to his racial identity. Despite witnessing racial bias in the U.S. justice system that legalized the victimization of his mother along with millions of other Native Americans in the past and the present, he remains committed to his father's goal of strengthening Native Americans' position within the justice system and regaining sovereignty.

From the moment he and his father learn that Geraldine was raped, unlike what would be expected from a 13-year-old child, Joe, seemingly for the first time, defying his father's instruction to go to aunt Clemence and tell them they are going to the hospital, chooses to stay with his mother (Erdrich *The Round House* 7). His calm and mature behavior during a time of crisis when they found his mother covered up with blood, vomit, and gasoline reflected in his suggestion: "No, I'm coming too. I've got to hold on to her. We'll call from the hospital" (7). Joe's description of the glance between him and his father, after Joe challenges him, as one "between two grown men" (7) foreshadows his impending maturation before his age. Starting from this short moment, Joe takes an active role in following the updates in his mother's case.

Survivance requires "doing what is necessary to keep [Native American] cultures alive" (Vizenor *Manifest Manners*). Joe uses his interest in law to reconnect with his ancestors and culture. Felix S. Cohen's *Handbook of Federal Indian Law* that Joe ritually filches from his father's library works as a tangible connection to his ancestors as it includes the notes of his late grandfather (Erdrich *The Round House* 2). His willingness to engage in issues regarding Native American law at a relatively very young age shows his desire to link with his Native American identity and heritage. His pursuit of knowledge within the relics of his ancestors, as he remarks it was given to his father by his grandfather, reflects his efforts to connect with and be part of the Native American community he lives in. Joe slowly starts to explore and question the scope and validity of the treaties made between Native American tribes and the U.S. government.

Gerald Vizenor states that survivance is "the continuance of native stories" (*Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence* 1). Joe by choosing to tell the story of his mother and

weary Native American experience to achieve justice provides continuance and a Native American perspective. Telling it from a Native American perspective, signifies postmemory "as a form of resistance against the self-satisfied presumption that the past can ever be laid to rest" (O'Donoghue "Postmemory as Trauma"). The postmemory of injustices and his experience with the justice system do not deem Joe a passive and dependent Native American. Instead, taking his father who believes that each Native American triumph in the court will set a legal precedent that would empower tribal sovereignty, as an example, he chooses to become a tribal judge (Erdrich *The Round House* 246). His choice of profession resonates in his "productive attitudes toward the past" (O'Donoghue "Postmemory as Trauma") as he is now able to use the system to reform it. His choice to be productive for his community and not to let the system confine him to victimry, he stands as an embodiment of survivance. His choice to reclaim agency to provide his perspective on the story of his mother's rape and on the incapacity of the justice contributes to his survivance. Joe's personal memories of his experience with injustice and the postmemories of a past that is inaccessible to him without the help of the stories his elders told, not only reconnects him with the customs and beliefs of Ojibwe. Cielo G. Festino and Andréa Machado de Almeida Mattos, two Brazilian scholars, in their article, which discussed the role of memory and postmemory in works of three Indian—a South Asian country—writers. Mattos and Festino argue that these three Indian writers, through their narratives in which they lay out the postmemories of their traumatic cultural experiences,

> not only reconnected themselves with the customs and beliefs of their own communities but also re-signified them since, rather than understanding them as marks of discrimination that had to be veiled or forgotten, they came to consider them as the true marks of their culture which had helped their ancestors survive and remain together through generations, and help present generations to proudly re-define their own cultural identity. (226)

The same can be said about Joe as the postmemories allow him to have a strong affiliation to his culture as well as heightening his sense of cultural identity. Inge Melchior, in the chapter named, "Postmemory: The Inherited Obligation to Secure the Future," of her 2019 book, suggests that affiliation is a necessary component of intergenerational memory transfer:

> …The precondition for passing on these tears to the second generation relies completely on the affective bond between generations. Without affection there will be no transmission. … Without affection the wounds would continue to bleed. It is the affection that creates a sense of solidarity and implies a moral obligation to repair the loss of others. (Melchior 198)

Melchior emphasizes that the transmission of second-hand memories as well as historical wisdom from one generation to the next relies heavily on the emotional connection between the two generations. In the novel, this emotional connection is exemplified in the relationship between Joe and his elders in his familial and communal circles within the Ojibwe reservation. Aleksandra Szczepan and Karolina Kolenda, in their 2016 article, argue that "[w]hen [postmemory subject] is denied access to family history, they experience [the] exclusion in the spatial realm as well" (Szczepan and Kolenda 261). Mooshum allows Evelina and Joe access not only to familial history but also to tribal history through storytelling in both *The Plague of Doves* and *The Round House*. His storytelling also offers,

> …a means to uncover and to restore experiences and life stories that might otherwise remain absent from the historical archive. As a form of counter-history, "memory" offered a means to account for the power structures animating forgetting, oblivion, and erasure and thus to engage in acts of repair and redress. It promised to propose forms of justice outside of the hegemonic structures of the strictly juridical. (Hirsch *The Generation of Postmemory* 15-16)

Made possible through Mooshum's storytelling, postmemory gives voice to the narratives that have been intentionally ignored in mainstream historical narratives, as exemplified in *The Round House* as well. It challenges dominant power structures that perpetuate erasure, which makes it an important tool for Native American survivance.

While postmemory carries a negative connotation that it may manifest itself in violence and destruction, which is exemplified through the experiences of various characters in *The Plague of Doves*, and Joe's initial, half-baked action to redress justice in *The Round House,* it is crucial for the postmemory subject to bond with a past that is temporally distant. Postmemory, as O'Donoghue and Melchior agree, allows postmemory subjects to learn how their ancestors survived traumatic events not just by surviving but also by continuing to cherish their cultures (O'Donoghue "Postmemory as Trauma"; Melchior 198). In Joe's case, the postmemories he inherits from his elders shape his perceptions

of justice and his identity and introduce him to parts of his culture previously unknown to him. Joe embraces his culture and he works for its continuity. His ability to sustain survivance expresses Erdrich's assertion that in the face of settler colonial trauma: "Ojibwe culture is and will remain unkillable" (Carden 113).

# CHAPTER 3
# REPARATIVE OJIBWE JUSTICE IN *LAROSE*

Louise Erdrich concludes the Justice Trilogy with *LaRose* in 2016. Like *The Plague of Doves* and *The Round House*, *LaRose* is also a critically well-received novel winning Erdrich the 2016 National Book Critics Circle Award and being a finalist for the 2017 PEN/Faulkner Award. Makayla Steiner describes *LaRose* as "a book that addresses serious historical injustices heaped upon Native communities by Euro-American settlers" (4). The novel shares the theme of justice with the preceding two novels. Yet, unlike them, which deal with retributive justice driven by the conflicts between white people and Native Americans, *LaRose* deals with restorative justice encouraged by the Ojibwe law and tradition. In an interview, Louise Erdrich expresses her desire "to explore if an act of traditional justice that is carried out in contemporary life could work in *LaRose*" (Tedrow "The Sunday Rumpus Interview"). Although the novel does not offer a merely optimistic solution for injustice, it shows that the act of traditional justice, driven by compassion and desire to repair, alleviates the destructive effects of an unalterable damage, which might have been worse.

The novel opens with the tragic, accidental death of a five-year-old boy, Dusty Ravich, at the hands of his neighbor, Landreaux Iron, who in fact aims to shoot a deer that he has been following for a while. Landreaux has been released after a short investigation by the federal police. Yet, overwhelmed with the feelings of sorrow and remorse, Landreaux consults Ojibwe law with his wife, Emmaline, and gives their five-year-old son, LaRose, to the Ravich family not as a compensation or substitution for their loss but as an attempt to share and alleviate their suffering (Steiner 31). LaRose inherits a heavy burden of history from four generations of LaRoses in his parents' lineage along with his name. This legacy sheds light on some of the trauma inflicted on Native Americans by the settler colonizers, but also grants LaRose the gift of spiritual healing like his ancestors.

Still a child, LaRose understands the responsibility of the task assigned to him. Although the separation from his family was traumatic and incomprehensible for him at first, he succeeds in easing the Ravich family's pain and manages to rekindle the bonds

of friendship and neighborhood between the two families, who have been close until the event. This chapter argues that while the postmemories LaRose inherits from his ancestors place a responsibility on his shoulders beyond his age and cause him to grow up before his age, they also contribute to his survivance. These postmemories, although adding to the traumatic baggage LaRose already carries, show that his ancestors were able to sustain survivance even in the most adverse circumstances and encourage him in his efforts toward survivance by channeling the trauma to empower his spiritual healing ability and to connect with his ancestors. Through conducting traditional healing ceremonies, LaRose succeeds in healing himself, which enables him to protect his tribe's social integrity by reuniting the two families.

*LaRose* takes place on the same unnamed Ojibwe reservation adjacent to Pluto like the trilogy's first two novels. Louise Erdrich utilizes the third-person omniscient point-of-view in this novel. Similar to the preceding novels of the trilogy. She structures *LaRose* in a way that weaves together multiple narratives, including the stories of the Ojibwe ancestors. *LaRose* mainly covers the four years between 1999 and 2003—dealing with the tragic accident and its aftermath—with sections interrupting the narrative reaching back to the years 1839 and the end of the 1960s providing short glimpses into the experiences of LaRose's ancestors, which help contextualize the pain he inherits. Erdrich reveals the interwoven intergenerational bonds through interwoven narratives of the past and the present (Noble "Louise Erdrich's *LaRose*").

After the incident the troublesome feelings of regret and sorrow push Landreaux to make "fierce attempts to send himself back in time and die before he went into the woods. But each time he closed his eyes the boy was still ruined in the leaves" (Erdrich *LaRose* 11). The incident immediately affects the relationship between the two families, estranging two friends, Landreaux and Peter Ravich—Dusty's father—and alienating the two half-sisters, Emmaline Iron and Nola Ravich, who used to plant their garden together and even spent their last pregnancy together. Landreaux is depicted as "a devout Catholic who also followed traditional ways, a man who would kill a deer, thank one god in English, and put down tobacco for another god in Ojibwe" (3). So, he seeks help in both beliefs to alleviate his excessive grief and the devastation he has caused to the Ravich family. At first, he consults the reservation priest, Father Travis Wozniak.

Under his guidance, Landreaux attends a prayer session at church but it does not help to ease his intense remorseful feelings (9). Landreaux and his wife, Emmaline, decide to consult Ojibwe knowledge. So by sundancing and conducting a sweat lodge ceremony, which is a common and significant spiritual practice of purification and prayer which the characters in *The Round House* frequently resort to (12; "Sweat Lodge"). What Landreaux and Emmaline make of the visions that conjured up while they are in a trance is to give their son to the bereaved family (Erdrich *LaRose* 13). Although it is extremely hard for them as a family to make this decision, Landreaux and Emmaline bring LaRose to the Ravich family, with a simple explanation: "Our son will be your son now. … It's the old way" (18).

LaRose's being given to the Raviches is not an unmerciful abandonment by his family as it is apparent that he is secretly the "favorite child" and is adored by his siblings—Josette, Snow, Coochy, and Hollis (11). It is an attempt at achieving justice through restoration and reparation in contrast with attempts at retributive justice in the other two novels. Retributive justice attempts to balance the harm done to one person with an equivalent harm to the perpetrator (Wenzel et. al 375). Restorative justice attempts to reset balance by repairing the harm with some type of restitution (377). In the trilogy, attempts at retributive justice are rarely satisfying and rarely, if ever, lead to healing. In *The Plague of Doves*, it causes the angry mob of white men to kill the innocent Native Americans including a thirteen-year-old boy, leaving their progeny consumed by the burden of it, while Joe's attempt at retribution in *The Round House* haunts him into his adulthood. Makayla Steiner classifies what the Iron family has conducted as a kind of "justice that is not born of revenge or the impulse to equalize suffering," which is exemplified in *The Plague of Doves* and *The Round House*, "but a justice located in mercy and charity—designed to restore balance and heal relationships through a willingness to share suffering without trying to measure grief" (31). It is a form of justice which is shaped by the reciprocated feelings of compassion, empathy, and a desire to heal between the Iron and Ravich families rather than punish or retribute, which perpetuates the suffering as seen in the trilogy's first two novels.

Although it may seem like a more promising solution than retributive justice, restorative justice has its own shortcomings since it demands sacrifice to help alleviate sorrow felt

by the harmed. For LaRose, losing his playmate and then being separated from his family for a reason he cannot comprehend is both traumatic and devastating. The adaptation process is understandably challenging for him. He questions why he has to live away from his loving family and cries himself to sleep for days at the Raviches. Although Nola and Peter do not protest the Irons' giving LaRose, their daughter Maggie who is eight years old when the accident happened, does not immediately welcome LaRose to the family as she thinks he would never replace her brother (22). As one would expect from a child, when LaRose first meets his own family at the market after being given to the Raviches, he runs to his mother (40). Eventually realizing the pain and sadness this causes LaRose, the two families decide to share him. This decision signifies a shared understanding between the two families thanks to LaRose.

Naming, which may bear "positive and negative powers" is an important process in Native American cultures (Roemer 115). Louise Erdrich is specifically fascinated with naming and she has access to the "rich naming history of the Ojibwe" (116). It is no surprise that in *LaRose*, the naming of LaRose has been a debate between Emmaline and Landreaux because they were aware that he would also be inheriting the history that his name carries as well as the power to heal:

> Before they took LaRose to the Ravich house last fall, Landreaux and Emmaline had spoken his name. It was the name given to each LaRose. Mirage. Ombanitemagad. … That name would protect him from the unknown, from what had been let loose with the accident. Sometimes energy of this nature, chaos, ill luck, goes out in the world and begets and begets. Bad luck rarely stops with one occurrence. All Indians know that. To stop it quickly takes great effort, which is why LaRose was sent. (Erdrich *LaRose* 121-122)

Their discussion over LaRose's naming illustrates their belief in the power of names. Makayla Steiner argues that his name "connects him both to the suffering of his ancestors and to the healing practices of the LaRoses who preceded him" (32). By choosing LaRose as their son's name, his parents put the responsibility of stopping the ill fate on his shoulders.

The historical roots of LaRose's name run deep: "[t]here had been a LaRose in each generation of Emmaline's family for over a hundred years. … [T]he LaRoses of the generations were related to them both. They both knew the stories, the histories"

(Erdrich *LaRose* 13). LaRose is named after the four generation of LaRose women in his ancestry. His name comes with "the burden of a turbulent history" the effects of which infiltrate into the present affecting how LaRose behaves and handles the situation like a grown-up while it could have traumatic effects on a child of his age (Ibarrola-Armendariz 50). Both Emmaline and Landreaux inherited this history that their last child, LaRose would later inherit as well. Marianne Hirsch alleges that "descendants … connect so deeply to the previous generation's remembrances of the past that they identify that connection as a form of *memory*, and that, in certain extreme circumstances, memory *can* be transferred to those who were not actually there to live an event" (Hirsch *The Generation of Postmemory* 3). His name signifies his connection to his ancestors who "had passed around tuberculosis, diphtheria, sorrow, endless tea, hilarious and sacred, dirty, magical stories. They had lived and died in what was now the living room, and there had always been a LaRose" (Erdrich *LaRose* 101).

Louise Erdrich skillfully weaves "historical facts and experiences of colonization into her characters' lives" (Medero "Lovely LaRose"). She uses the intergenerational power of naming to show the connection between the past and the present. She integrates "The Flower," her 2015 short story published in *The New Yorker* magazine, as the first LaRose's story in the novel. The depiction of the immediate aftermath of the tragic accident is followed by the interrupting narrative that goes back to 1839 to a trading post where the first LaRose, who is also named Mirage and Ombanitemagad, is brought to be sold by her mother in exchange for a keg of rum when she was eleven years old (Erdrich *LaRose* 13). A white trader, Mackinnon, and his assistant, Wolfred Roberts, accept the exchange in order to silence the woman's screech. In time, Wolfred falls in love with the girl and once he realizes that Mackinnon has been molesting her, he orchestrates his death by poisoning him with the herbs in cooperation with LaRose whose abilities and knowledge about edible and poisonous plants as well as healing help both survive (137). The two, then, run away. However, Mackinnon's head, severed from his body, follows after them. Makayla Steiner interprets his rolling head "as a device to help readers understand the nature of historical trauma and its role in contemporary events" (42).

Mackinnon's is not the only chasing head that is present in the novel, which "later metamorphoses into the spirit of the boarding schools" (Martínez-Falquina 117). After Landreaux escapes from the boarding school with Romeo Puyat whom he befriended in the boarding school in the late 1960s, they see the head of Mrs. Vrilchyk, the matron of the school whom they nicknamed, Bowl Head, everywhere. Landreaux thinks that his head "was a spirit, a force, an element set loose by the boarding school to pursue them to the end of time" (Erdrich *LaRose* 173). This is evidenced in the story Grandma Ignatia, who is one of LaRose's grandmother Mrs. Peace's friends at the Elders Lodge, tells. Like the reversed version of Billy Peace and Marn Wolde's story in *The Plague of Doves*, in which Marn commands her snakes to kill Billy because he starts to torment their kids physically and psychologically, the story Grandma Ignatia tells is about a woman who is killed by her husband because she cheated on him with a snake. The head of the woman, like the heads of Mackinnon and Mrs. Vrilchyk do, chases and talks to her children until it becomes a sturgeon. The story startles LaRose and he asks Grandma Ignatia what to make of this story. She replies, "[i]t is *about* getting chased … We are chased into this life. The Catholics think we are chased by the devils, original sin. We are chased by the things done to us in this life" (Erdrich *LaRose* 345). Her response summarizes a perspective on the Native American experience, in which the traumas of settler colonial policies are still in effect for Native Americans.

Being chased into this life points to the inevitability reflecting that Native Americans have been forced to live under challenging conditions and they were forced to abandon their sacred lands, practices, and ways of life by Euro-American settlers beyond their control. Grandma Ignatia's statement teaches LaRose that the challenges faced by Native Americans still haunt them. Being chased by the things that have been done to Native Americans also resonates in Maggie's experience. She is chased by the faith of the first LaRose who was sexually attacked when she was a child. Before she convinces Peter to go to the reservation school where LaRose and his full siblings go, Maggie goes to the school in Pluto, where almost all of the pupils are white with a few exceptions as Maggie who is a half-blood Ojibwe. She wants to transfer to the school in the reservation because the kids known as the Fearsome Four tease her in Pluto and in the end it reaches out to sexual assault (159).

Postmemories turn LaRose into a little adult who feels responsible for the well-being of everyone around him, forgetting his needs as a child. This is evidenced in Maggie's choice to seek help from LaRose about the brutal assault rather than sharing it with an adult, after keeping her silence for a long time. It highlights the bonding and trust between Maggie and LaRose, through the unique connection they share despite what have happened between the two families. Maggie's decision to confide in LaRose also points to the parenting dysfunctions within her family, which makes her rather an isolated child who is used to be silenced or ignored.

LaRose's premature adulthood resonates with Judith Harris' assertion which illustrates the tendencies among postmemory subjects towards isolation and feelings of responsibility for their parents' happiness and suffering (70). As a member of the Ojibwe tribe, LaRose is born into a legacy of intergenerational trauma, including that of settler colonization, forced assimilation, and the boarding school experience. These collective traumas shape the behaviors and relationship dynamics of the people around LaRose. LaRose is aware of the implications of these traumas for the people around him and he attempts to reconcile the past with the present with his role as a healer. He works toward helping the people around him by trying to alleviate their sufferings and bridging the divide between his blood family, the Irons, and his foster family, the Raviches after the accident. LaRose is able to find resilience in these postmemories to fulfill the responsibility that has been placed on his shoulders, which is beyond him, and to sustain survivance through the gift of spiritual healing and the stories of survivance he has sort out of the traumatic events he has inherited. He observes the consequences of the boarding school experience that are still in effect in people's lives. LaRose inherits the postmemories of his ancestors and also observes that many of the adults he knows are traumatized by the boarding school experiences which include being separated from their families and losing access to the language, knowledge, and culture of their tribes.

After her escape with Wolfred, the first LaRose of four LaRoses in LaRose Iron's lineage, the mother of his grandmother's grandmother, is taken by missionaries to a boarding school in Michigan, where "everything [is] taken from her" (Erdrich *LaRose* 170). The school severs her connection to her Ojibwe heritage as she loses her ability of

healing which she has inherited from her mother. She gets used to children around her dying "of measles, scarlet fever, flu, diphtheria, tuberculosis, and other diseases that did not have a name. But she was already accustomed to everybody around her dying" (172). Eventually, she gets tuberculosis. After graduating from the boarding school, she returns home to Wolfred with whom she marries when she is eighteen years old. They have children, one of whom is called LaRose, who becomes the second LaRose. Wolfred takes his wife to a sanitarium with the hope that she can be treated. At first, she seems to be recovering but shortly after she starts to see Mackinnon's head again, she dies. Before dying, the first LaRose "taught her daughter how to find guardian spirits in each place they walked, how to heal people with songs, with plants" and plenty of other things that help the second LaRose to literally and culturally survive and thrive (252). The second LaRose struggles to learn more about her mother with whom she was not able to spend time. When the first LaRose dies the doctor who is in charge of treating her, Dr. Haniford Ames, takes the possession of her bones without permission for so-called research purposes, but instead he exhibits them in a museum where lots of other Native American bones are also being exhibited. Wolfred, who could not have his wife's bones to commemorate or to build a tomb for her so that their children could mourn for their mother, writes letters to Dr. Ames to get the bones back. After Wolfred's death, the second LaRose picks up the endeavor where her father has left off. She is sent to Carlisle Indian Boarding School where she learns to behave and think like white people and also contracts tuberculosis like her mother. She marries and has children, one of whom she names LaRose, who becomes the third LaRose in the story.

The third LaRose is Geraldine's briefly mentioned friend in *The Round House*. She also goes to boarding school where she gets tuberculosis. She manages to become a teacher before dying and she carries on the tradition of naming one of her children LaRose who also dies of tuberculosis like her mother and grandmother before her. The struggle of getting back the bones continues and gets transmitted through generations and it continues until the fourth LaRose, mostly referred to as Mrs. Peace, succeeds in getting them back. Mrs. Peace is one of the many wives of Billy Peace, who is the frantic religious cult leader who establishes a reversed version of boarding schools in *The Plague of Doves*. This reveals how Emmaline and Mrs. Peace's daughter, Nola, were related. It is shortly mentioned in the novel that, Nola who was named Lilith and her

name was changed by her mother so that her past would not follow her, in which she was physically and psychologically abused by her erratic and frantic father (77). She is the daughter of Marn Wolde, who is the first wife of Billy Peace in *The Plague of Doves* (65).

Becoming a teacher at the boarding school can be explained as Mrs. Peace's attempts at survivance. Having had first-hand experience of the boarding schools, she acknowledges that Native American children at the boarding schools need some compassion from their teachers. Although neither she nor her ancestors have pleasing memories, she chooses to help the kids at boarding schools so their experiences would not be as traumatizing as hers are. The conversation between Mrs. Peace and her mother's spirit reveals her motivation to become a teacher:

> It was good we became teachers so we could love those kids.
> There was good teachers, there was bad teachers. Can't solve that loneliness.
> It sets deep in a person.
> Goes down the generations, they say. Takes four generations.
> Maybe finally worked itself out with the boy. (Erdrich *LaRose* 83)

Mrs. Peace also struggles with tuberculosis, which is used as both a metaphor and a concrete reality of settler colonial subjugation, throughout the novel. Like the illness itself, the trauma is a legacy that boarding schools bestow upon its pupils, which is transferred across generations: "[i]t was a disease of infinite cruelty that made a mother pass it to her children before she died. Mrs. Peace had not died of her mother's tuberculosis" (83) because that "year isoniazid and its various iterations astonishingly cured the incurable" (83). Mrs. Peace inherits the spiritual powers of the first LaRose, which allows her to communicate with the dead. She is seen communicating with the spirit of her mother "who had died of tuberculosis like her mother and grandmother" (83). In one of those episodes, Mrs. Peace, and her mother, the third LaRose reminisce about their experiences at the boarding schools whose aim was to "kill the Indian and save the man" (81). They talk about the haunting and disturbing sound of the boarding school bells, which they claim still tinkle in their ears:

> I still hear them.
> Bang around in your head, eh?
> …

> Goodness, my girl. I feel that heat coming on. The cold sinks into my bones down there, like always. That first year, they took away my blanket, my little warm rabbit blanket. They took away my fur-lined makazinan. My traditional dress and all. My little shell earrings, necklace. My doll. She's still down there in that souvenir case, eh? They sold things our family sent along with us for souvenirs. Traded them. (81)

The third LaRose in this reminiscence touches upon one of the brutal practices in boarding schools, shedding light on the psychological, cultural, and emotional burden it causes for Native Americans. She reveals how she was torn apart from everything that was authentic to her Native American identity and comforted her. She resents that her cultural and personal belongings have been taken away by the boarding school officials in a direct attempt of cultural erasure and identity suppression. Destroying these items not only severs students' tangible ties to their Native American heritage, but also causes trauma, exacerbating the feelings of isolation and displacement among Native Americans. This exemplifies only one of the many ways in which Native American identity has been attacked. The mother and daughter's continuing reminiscence shed light on another traumatizing boarding school practice which is the cutting Native American children's hair:

> With all the braids they cut off, boys' and girls', across the years.
> There was hundreds of children from all over as far as Fort Berthold, so hundreds and hundreds of braids those first years. Where did the braids go?
> Into our mattresses? We slept on our hair, you think?
> Or if they burned our hair you would remember the smell.
> But with our hair off, we lost our power and we died. (81)

The cutting of children's braids at boarding schools was a direct attack on Native Americans as the braids symbolize their bond to their culture. It is a deliberate attempt to strip them of their Native American identities and assimilate them into Euro-American culture. Mrs. Peace brings out a photograph of Native American pupils lined up in front of a boarding school building, looking distressed in clothes that are not familiar to them. This brings to mind Marianne Hirsch's reflections about memory that "is mediated, cultural, but it has also escaped through the open doorway in the photograph to haunt the natural landscapes of the present" (Hirsch *The Generation of Postmemory* 25):

> Look at this picture, said Mrs. Peace. Rows and rows of children in stiff clothing glowered before a large brick building.
> Look at those little children. Those children sacrificed for the rest of us, my view. Tamed in itchy clothes.
> These kind of pictures are famous. They used them to show we could become human.
> The government? They were going for extermination then. (81)

The photographs have the ability to transcend the limits of time and place. Their ability to infiltrate into the present can be observed in this instance. The haunting experiences and memories at the boarding school find an escapeway into the present through photograph. Characters such as Landreaux, his friend, Romeo Puyat, and Nola are also haunted by their memories of the boarding school experience. They show trauma responses such as substance addiction, tendency towards suicide, and dysfunctional parenting. In the novel it is stated that "[p]eople didn't want to think about boarding schools—the era of forced assimilation was supposed to be over. But then again, kids from chaotic families didn't get to school, or get sleep, or real food, or homework help. And they'd never get out of the chaos—whatever brand of chaos, from addictions to depression to failing health" (122). In her article, Judith Harris touches on the inconsistent parenting and familial dysfunction as a response to trauma which negatively affect children's mental health. Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart, in her 2005 article, lists "[l]ow self-esteem, victim identity, anger, self-destructive behavior, and substance abuse" and "[d]epression and psychic numbing" as some of the negative consequences of prolonged trauma on Native Americans' lives ("From Intergenerational Trauma" 6-7). She continues arguing that "[p]reoccupation with death, death identity, and loyalty to the ancestral suffering and to the deceased are other features. That loyalty will cause [individuals] to create suffering in [one's] own life" (7). These responses to trauma, both as a result of their experiences and a history of having been subjugated and discriminated, can be seen in Landreaux, Romeo, and Nola.

The boarding school experience, later compounded with the loss of her son to a tragic accident, drags Nola to struggle with severe depression in which she continually tries to kill herself (Erdrich *LaRose* 130, 292). She is unable to functionally parent Maggie until LaRose comes and prevents her suicide by collecting everything that she could wound herself with. Nola is depicted as a woman with a quick temper who exhibits violent

behavior towards herself as well as to her daughter, Maggie. Father Travis catches her striking Maggie at the church. Their turbulent relationship often leads Maggie to blame herself both for their mother-daughter relationship and Nola to have suicidal thoughts. Although Maggie deals with the serious traumatic experience of being sexually abused by the kids at school, Nola, perhaps the only person she can get the support and help she needs, is unavailable to her as a parent. Until she witnesses that LaRose is communicating with the deceased Dusty, which brings some kind of consolation for her, Nola continues her self-destructive behavior as well as her tumultuous relationship with her daughter.

Romeo Puyat is haunted by the legacy of the boarding school experience. He lets his traumatic experiences of the boarding school handicap him in life. He is an insecure man who struggles with substance addiction. He uses his job as a janitor at the Indian Health Service as a tool to steal drugs from people. He also engages in thievery by vacuuming up the gasoline from people's cars. He is prone to blame others for the fact that he cannot live a fulfilling life. He is befriended by Landreaux at the boarding school, who planned their escape. While they were escaping from the bus that was taking them to the boarding school, Romeo stumbles and falls, breaking his leg. For the rest of his life, he blames Landreaux for his crippled leg. He fails to parent his only child, Hollis, whom he adopts out to the Irons. Trauma strips him of his social role as a parent as he abandons his son, Hollis Puyat, when he was five years old. Landreaux adopts and raises Hollis. Although Romeo does not seek to rekindle his relationship with his son, he blames Landreaux for stealing his son's affection. Although he lets his memories and postmemories of bitter experiences handicap him in life and hinder his survivance, Romeo is included in the reconciliation of the Iron and Ravich families at Hollis' graduation party at the end of the novel. The fact that he starts to enhance his life after this reunion shows the importance of community and connection to heal from trauma.

Landreaux's experience is no better than those of Nola and Romeo. His parents are described as "alcoholics with short lives[,]" who have been unavailable to him as nurturing and caring parents (104). As a consequence, Landreaux ends up in the boarding school. He gives into alcoholism to numb the trauma caused by bitter life

experiences as well as the boarding school experience. He seems to be triggered by what reminds him of his boarding school experience. When he visits Peter and Nola after the incident, he is triggered by the neatness of their house and filled with "[a]n itchy claustrophobic feeling" that arises in him "whenever he enter[s] a house or building that was aggressively neat. … in Landreaux's past there were the buzzers, bed checks, whistles, bells, divided trays, measured days of boarding school. There was the unspeakable neatness of military preparation for violence" (87). Although he is haunted by the legacy of a similar turbulent past, like Nola and Romeo, he manages to turn out as a nurturing parent who is loved by his children and accepted by them although the unintended accident caused them a lot of pain as well.

Landreaux manages to preserve Ojibwe knowledge, which has come under attack by the boarding schools and laws against people performing traditional Native American religious practices. These practices that are hard-fought to be preserved lead the way for him to make up for the pain he caused. He is frequently seen consulting his close friend Randall, who also appears in *The Round House* as one of Joe's closest friends, who also helps him with conducting traditional practices. When they talk about giving LaRose to the Ravich family, Randall assures him that he did the right thing because he knows that LaRose inherits the power of spiritual healing from his ancestors, which would help them heal: "Remember what all the elders said? They knew the history. Who killed the mother of the first one, Mink, and what she could do. Then her daughter, her granddaughter, the next one, and Emmaline's mom. Evil tried to catch them all. They fought demons, outwitted them, flew" (Erdrich *LaRose* 60). It can be seen through the other storylines in the novel that this knowledge has been handed down through generations.

Unresolved grief over the loss of land and sovereignty also lingers on the lives of the novel's characters. In the novel 1798 is given as the year when "white people covered the earth like lice" (Erdrich *LaRose* 291). It points to the intrusion of white settlers into Native American land, breaking treaties and introducing laws that disadvantaged Native American people, leading to the compulsory surrender of more of Native American land. Aitor Ibarrola-Armendariz muses that "the fact that Native American cultures are keen on finding continuities between past and present, and that they are also closely

attached to the land, may in fact have made them more vulnerable to intergenerational trauma" (44). As mentioned in the novel, "[l]oss, dislocation, disease, addiction, and just feeling like the tattered remnants of a people with a complex history" (Erdrich *LaRose* 59). Sorrow, as a result of the loss of land, shows itself among the young characters. Josette asserts that "maybe [her] people had these powers before the whiteman came" (49). The conversation between Josette and Snow as they prepare the garden for Hollis' graduation party that will bring the two families together suggests that the loss of Native American lands causes resentment among the children as well:

> We're hunter-gatherers by nature … Farming's not our tradition, said Josette.
> Wrong, said Snow. Historically, we grew potatoes, beans, pumpkins. We had our own seeds and stuff. Invented corn.
> We called it maize, said Josette, significantly. … So we lost our traditions, then. (409)

The loss of traditions and ways of life as a consequence of losing land reverberates even in the children's psychologies as resentment in present. She goes to the school at the reservation where "[e]verybody … had something awful happen someplace in their family. Everybody just got sad for everybody" (50). This shows how common traumatic incidents happen in the lives of Native Americans.

LaRose owes his affection with and proximity to his Ojibwe identity to his interest in stories about the past told by his elders at a young age. He likes spending time with the elders. He frequently goes to the Elders Lodge to listen to the stories about Ojibwe history, ancestors, and legends. LaRose is known among the elders, whom "spoke to [him] in Ojibwe," as "[t]he boy who wants the stories" (126). One of the elders, Sam Eagleboy, teaches him the spiritual Ojibwe practices, such as "how to make a spirit dish and how the spirits appreciated when a person noticed them. How the spirits were there in things, all things, and would talk with the Ojibwe. How they came in dreams, and also in the ordinary world" (127). Grandma Ignatia also realizes his interest and tendency to conduct Ojibwe practices, "[t]his boy should get teachings. He wants to learn. He wants the story" (127). This closeness or curiosity to Native American identity is not observed in LaRose's blood siblings Josette, Snow and Coochy, nor in Hollis, whom his family adopted, nor in Maggie, LaRose's half-sister in his adoptive family. This is in line with Inge Melchior's suggestion that "[w]ithout affection there will be no

transmission" and "[w]ithout affection the wounds would continue to bleed. It is the affection that creates a sense of solidarity and implies a moral obligation to repair the loss of others" (198). Postmemories, the transmission of which is made possible through LaRose's affection towards stories told by his elders, offer LaRose a way to connect with his ancestral heritage and promote his survivance.

LaRose learns to communicate with the spirits of his ancestors for guidance through sweat lodge ceremonies. He occasionally goes to the tree where Dusty fell off after being shot to carry out sweat lodge, which enables him to communicate with Dusty and his ancestors who came in as a group of ghostly presences. They "looked like from history, wearing the old kind of simple clothing. They spoke Ojibwe" (248). The connection between the past and the present, made possible by LaRose, leads to cultural and traditional continuity. The responsibility to heal the two families is given to LaRose, because he is gifted with the ability to do so which came to him by his ancestral name—a name Erdrich describes as "both innocent and powerful, and had belonged to the family's healers … it was as though LaRose had come into the world with that name" (qt. in Steiner 32). Reconnection, especially with the ancestors, paves the way to repair the injuries of cultural erasure attempts of settler colonialism and provides a sense of cultural identity.

LaRose's siblings—Snow, Josette, Coochy, and Hollis—do not have access to the postmemories that LaRose inherited. Although they are not totally disconnected from the past, the stories that are made available for LaRose are not available to them, which is because they are not as much engaged in getting these stories as LaRose. This disconnection is exemplified in Hollis' relationship with his father. Ernest van Alphen suggests that "the more children feel disconnected from the past of their survivor parents—the less they are able to understand it—the deeper they feel personally connected to them or the more they need that connection" (488). When Romeo apologetically confesses that he was not an ideal parent for Hollis and has not been there for him (Erdrich *LaRose* 252). Hollis' response reveals how much they have been disconnected from each other: "I know you went to boarding school. People say that fucked you up" (253). It can be said that the connection with the ancestral or parental past constitutes the postmemory subject's sense of belonging, made possible by

postmemory, which is offered to Evelina in *The Plague of Doves*, Joe in *The Round House*, and LaRose in this novel, has not been provided for Hollis as he seems to collect bits and pieces about his father's past from other people:

> Ever since they hit the Towers, said Hollis, I've been thinking. My country has been good to me.
> What? Romeo was scandalized. You're an Indian.
> I know, sure, they wiped us out almost. But still, the freedoms, right? And we got schools and hospitals and the casino. When we fuck up now, we mostly fuck up on our own. (252)

The connection Hollis lacks causes self-loathing. He blames his racial identity as a defect and blames it for the shortcomings accompanied by it. However, his father, who has been to boarding school that was designed to deprive him of his authentic Native American identity, knows that the reason why Native Americans cannot live up to American dream is a history of subjugation: "Are you crazy! That's called intergenerational trauma, my boy. It isn't our fault they keep us down; they savaged our culture, family structure, and most of all we need our *land* back" (252). Although Romeo himself is seen struggling with the trauma of settler colonial policies, he does not seem to blame it on his racial identity, while Hollis does. The reason behind Hollis' bitter feelings towards his race stem from a lack of connection to and understanding of his race. This late reconciliation of father and son shows that it is important for subsequent generations to engage in conversations with elders who hold knowledge about their ancestral past in order to gain a better understanding of their racial identity and to form a healthy relationship with it.

In *LaRose*, Louise Erdrich presents a relatively hopeful vision of healing which is possible through LaRose's practicing Native American healing ceremonies, which is an act suggested by Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart and Lemyra DeBruyn to heal from historical trauma. According to them, "[t]ribes need to conduct specific grief ceremonies, not only for current deaths, but for historical traumas: the loss of land, the loss of right in the past to raise our children in culturally normative ways at home, and mourning for the human remains of ancestors and sacred objects being repatriated" (74). Thanks to LaRose, who confides in his cultural heritage, using it as an empowering source for his journey towards healing, the novel ends with a hopeful and hard-fought reconciliation. The two families reunite at Hollis' graduation party, which is attended by

the ancestral spirits and Dusty, whom can only be seen by LaRose. They advise him, in chorus,

> *We love you, don't cry.*
> *Sorrow eats time.*
> *Be patient.*
> *Time eats sorrow.* (Erdrich *LaRose* 435)

It is a sad but also a hopeful advice. It encourages LaRose to believe that the sadness will fade away in time, pointing out that his survivance is supported by his connection and affiliation to his ancestors.

Maria Rascón calls the federal law useless and argues that a mixture of different understandings of justice would lead to a functional and viable justice system. She calls for action to reform the systems that work in favor of the people who have the upper hand. She notes that,

> …as the Ojibwe deliver justice that is restorative, not punitive; this only happened when justice was served by the community as a whole, not by the application of blind justice. Perhaps it is time to scrutinize the Western style of seeking justice, rethink it, and combine it with traditions that have been on this land hundreds of years before Native Americans were acculturated, subjugated, exploited, and subjected. (Rascón 64-65)

The governmental institutions of justice and Catholicism fail to offer a viable solution to alleviate Landreaux's feeling of guilt in *LaRose*. He finds solace in Ojibwe law which encourages acts of kindness and forgiveness to offer reparation. As portrayed in *LaRose,* Landreaux's willingness to do whatever needs to be done to share the pain he unintentionally caused to the Ravich family and LaRose's cooperation with his spiritual healing ability and mature acts lead to a reconciliation of families, including friends, relatives, and the spiritual presence of ancestors. By empowering himself through a connection to his ancestral legacy, LaRose uses the postmemories of his ancestors' traumatic experiences as a catalyst for his survivance efforts. He succeeds in dealing with ancestral traumas as well as the trauma of losing his friend and having to be separated from his family through his adherence to Native American healing practices. He manages to alleviate both Landreaux's guilt and Nola's pain resulting from the loss of Dusty, which drive them towards suicidal thoughts. Although Dusty's death cannot be retrieved or repaired in any way, LaRose manages to prevent the serious

consequences that Dusty's loss may have caused and contributes to their tribe's integrity by reuniting the two families. Through LaRose's journey towards survivance, *LaRose* highlights postmemory's role in leading Native Americans towards healing and survivance by enabling the perseverance of tradition and resilience through a transmission of ancestral memories.

# CONCLUSION

In her Justice Trilogy, Louise Erdrich touches on issues of justice—mostly on the serious consequences of its absence—in a Native American setting. The novels of the trilogy demonstrate the Ojibwe quest for justice which is often thwarted by racial biases and legal complexities that arise from a turbulent history of living under Euro-American law. The novels show how the obstruction of justice has serious consequences on Native Americans both on individual and collective levels. Although they were published almost a decade ago, the novels of the trilogy remain relevant because they draw attention to the problems that continue to plague Native Americans.

*The Plague of Doves* deals with the neglected issue of Native American lynching, inspired by an actual lynching that happened in 1897. The members of the lynching mob had not been prosecuted. Similarly, *The Round House* focuses on the jurisdictional gaps that often lead to inadequate legal sanctions through the rape case of a Native American woman by a white man. In both novels, white people get away with impunity. *LaRose* also sheds light on the unjust and often traumatizing settler colonial practices and their long-lasting consequences in Native Americans' lives. These novels provide the historical background to the conflicts that still disadvantage Native Americans. For example, they elucidate the underlying reason for the current crisis of missing and murdered Native American people in the United States. A 2021 report by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reveals that murder remains as the third leading cause of death for Native Americans (Petrosky et al.). Inadequate legal sanctions for white people and limited jurisdictional rights of Native Americans on them leave Native Americans vulnerable to the crimes perpetrated by the white people. The 2016 murder of Lonette Keehner recently resurfaced debates around the racial biases in the U.S. justice system (Bleir and Zoledziowski). Despite clear racial motivations reported by the court—evidenced through murderers' testimonies, social media posts, and swastika tattoos—the crime was not prosecuted as a hate crime (Bleir and Zoledziowski).

Rhea Shinde points to another problem that prevents Native Americans from seeking for justice that is the inadequate record-keeping which obscures the visibility of the

crisis. According to the data that the Federal Bureau of Investigation provided, solely in 2020, 1,496 Native American/Alaska Native people were reported missing ("2020 NCIC Missing Person and Unidentified Person Statistics"). Shinde reports that only 116 of the 5,712 reported cases were included in the U.S. Department of Justice database in 2016, which means the numbers provided in reports are presumably much higher (Shinde). In 2013, a 21-year-old Native American woman, Hanna Harris, was reported missing and it was ignored by the local law-enforcement. Her body was found raped and murdered a few days later, by a volunteer team ("Say Her Name"). To pay tribute to her case, the United States recognized May 5 as the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Persons Awareness Day, in 2017. Promising legislations were proposed to the U.S. Congress in 2019 as well, but none of them have been approved yet (National Indigenous Women's Resource Center).

The U.S. government has been undermining Native American tribal sovereignty as well, by violating the treaties, restricting their judicial rights, and exploiting natural resources. Such practices continue to threat Native American lands, resources, and cultural heritage. An example is the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline, which was widely protested in 2016, since it crosses under the Missouri River contaminating it (Fitterman). The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe took legal action against the construction of the pipeline, which threatens their access to clean water, on the grounds that it violates an article of the Fort Laramie Treaty, an 1868 pact signed between the Sioux tribes and the U.S. government supposedly guaranteeing the tribes' "undisturbed use and occupation" of reservation lands ("Standing Rock Sioux and Dakota Access Pipeline"). However, in 2021, the Biden administration declared its intention to maintain the pipeline's operation ("Standing Rock Sioux and Dakota Access Pipeline").

In Erdrich's Justice Trilogy, postmemory serves as a useful vehicle for revealing the historical implications of settler colonial history for Native Americans. In *The Plague of Doves*, postmemories bring up the highly disregarded issue of Native American lynching through Mooshum's two attempted lynching memories as well as the settler colonists' unfair seizure of Native American lands by providing the historical background of Pluto's establishment. The familial postmemories have unique repercussions for different characters in the novels. For example, Billy Peace's anger

towards white people for taking over Native American lands in the past, manifests itself in destruction. He uses his marriage as a tool to reclaim a piece of land that originally belongs to his ancestors. He establishes a religious cult on the land, followed by white people as well and begins to physically and psychologically abuse his followers, not excluding his wife and children. His cult is operated by a system that resembles to that of boarding schools, in which religion was used as a tool to legitimize that oppression and violence. His actions signifies his desire to avenge injustices done to Native Americans in the past. Although not as violently as they did in Billy's example, the postmemories of the past injustices have negative repercussions on his nephew Corwin Peace's life. Sister Mary Anita, as a white person whose ancestors victimized that of Corwin's, becomes the subject of his anger. Corwin does not abstain from showing that he is irritated by her. He becomes a school drop-out, drug addict, and thief. In the examples of Corwin and Billy, postmemories of the past injustices manifest themselves in ways that prevent their survivance, while they lead Evelina to survivance. The familial postmemories she inherits from Mooshum through storytelling awakens her to her racial identity. Although bitter, these postmemories do not lead her to resent her identity, instead it paves the way for her to connect with her heritage and obtain a sense of belonging. Instead of following her initial dream to live in France, she chooses to stay and be a psychiatric nurse in a mental health institute near her reservation.

In *The Round House*, postmemory helps reveal the historical background of Native Americans' diminished tribal sovereignty and restricted jurisdictional rights. After Joe realizes that the U.S. justice system offers them nothing but an inescapable maze of injustice in his mother's rape case, he undertakes the mission of securing justice. While postmemory first leads him into the rash decision to kill the rapist, which haunts him for years, it also lets him maintain survivance by becoming a tribal judge to serve for the well-being of his community following his father's example to work to set precedents that would empower his people in legal terms and help laying the basis for a more effective justice system.

Unlike the preceding two novels, *LaRose* focuses on a justice conflict within the Ojibwe community which searches for a solution for an tragic irreversible accident in Ojibwe law without the intervention of the U.S. legal system. Yet, through postmemory, the

novel sheds light on traumatic Native American experiences. The novel's postmemory subject, LaRose, is assigned to the mission of restoring justice by alleviating the pain of the Ravich family and the regret of his father, resulting from Dusty's death. He inherits his name along with postmemories of traumatic experiences from four LaRose women in his parents' lineage. These postmemories shed light on violent assimilationist policies and practices of settler colonists—such as abusing Native American children in the boarding schools and using rape as a subjugation tool. Postmemories—along with personal memories—of traumatic events affect characters such as Nola Ravich, Landreaux Iron, and Romeo Puyat negatively, manifesting themselves in these characters as substance addiction, suicidal thoughts, and in Nola's and Romeo's examples, as dysfunctionality in parenting. Therefore, postmemory prevents their survivance, while for LaRose, as the novel's postmemory subject, it contributes to his survivance. He heals himself by conducting Native American healing ceremonies and then he remedies the people around him by alleviating their feelings of sorrow and regret and by reconciling the two families that are estranged after the tragic incident.

Postmemory causes characters such as Billy and Corwin Peace in *The Plague of Doves*, Cappy in *The Round House*, Romeo Puyat, Nola Ravich, and Landreaux Iron, in *LaRose* to exhibit similar self-destructive behaviors and social dysfunction. Yet, it serves as a catalyst for the survivance of the postmemory subjects of the trilogy—Evelina, Joe, and LaRose. These postmemory subjects are loaded with responsibilities beyond their young age. They are forced to face the harsh realities that come with their Native American identities. Yet, these characters do not yield to the victim position which settler colonialists have used to marginalize Native Americans with. Although they head towards different areas where they can be helpful, in essence, they chose to work towards the well-being of their community. Erdrich centers her novels around these characters because their experiences demonstrate survivance through resilience and advocacy for justice. Through their personal attempts at justice, which almost always go fruitless, Erdrich shows that justice is way more complicated than seeking remedy in single and simple actions in either Euro-American or Native American understandings of justice. She highlights that if there is a sliver of hope towards healing, it is possible through embracing Native American cultural traditions.

Grace Leksana asserts that “postmemory exists in a highly political context, where the dominant power decides what can be remembered and what cannot” and it gives voice to the silenced (190). Silencing Native American stories, histories, and knowledge is one of the many atrocities that the United States has perpetrated against Native Americans. Postmemory enables characters in the Justice Trilogy to unearth the historical injustices experienced by Native Americans and gives them agency to provide their perspectives. It offers a path towards healing and maintaining survivance while allowing the trilogy to raise important ethical questions to deal with for both Native American and white audiences.

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# APPENDIX1. ORIGINALITY REPORT

| | HACETTEPE ÜNİVERSİTESİ SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ | Doküman Kodu *Form No.* | FRM-YL-15 |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | Yayım Tarihi *Date of Pub.* | 04.12.2023 |
| | **FRM-YL-15** **Yüksek Lisans Tezi Orijinallik Raporu** *Master's Thesis Dissertation Originality Report* | Revizyon No *Rev. No.* | 02 |
| | | Revizyon Tarihi *Rev.Date* | 25.01.2024 |

**HACETTEPE ÜNİVERSİTESİ**
**SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ**
**AMERİKAN KÜLTÜRÜ VE EDEBİYATI ANABİLİM DALI BAŞKANLIĞINA**

Tarih: 12/07/2024

Tez Başlığı: Louise Erdrich'in Adalet Üçlemesi'nde Postbellek, Yerli Amerikalı Kimliğinin Olumlanması ve Adalet

Yukarıda başlığı verilen tezimin a) Kapak sayfası, b) Giriş, c) Ana bölümler ve d) Sonuç kısımlarından oluşan toplam 91 sayfalık kısmına ilişkin, 12/07/2024 tarihinde şahsım/tez danışmanım tarafından Turnitin adlı intihal tespit programından aşağıda işaretlenmiş filtrelemeler uygulanarak alınmış olan orijinallik raporuna göre, tezimin benzerlik oranı % 8'dir.

Uygulanan filtrelemeler*****:

1. ☐ Kabul/Onay ve Bildirim sayfaları hariç
2. ☒ Kaynakça hariç
3. ☒ Alıntılar hariç
4. ☐ Alıntılar dâhil
5. ☒ 5 kelimeden daha az örtüşme içeren metin kısımları hariç

Hacettepe Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Tez Çalışması Orijinallik Raporu Alınması ve Kullanılması Uygulama Esasları'nı inceledim ve bu Uygulama Esasları'nda belirtilen azami benzerlik oranlarına göre tezimin herhangi bir intihal içermediğini; aksinin tespit edileceği muhtemel durumlarda doğabilecek her türlü hukuki sorumluluğu kabul ettiğimi ve yukarıda vermiş olduğum bilgilerin doğru olduğunu beyan ederim.

Gereğini saygılarımla arz ederim.

Semanur Işık

| Öğrenci Bilgileri | | |
|---|---|---|
| | **Ad-Soyad** | SEMANUR IŞIK |
| | **Öğrenci No** | N21132201 |
| | **Enstitü Anabilim Dalı** | AMERİKAN KÜLTÜRÜ VE EDEBİYATI |
| | **Programı** | YÜKSEK LİSANS |

**DANIŞMAN ONAYI**

UYGUNDUR.
Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Merve ÖZMAN

* Tez **Almanca** veya **Fransızca** yazılıyor ise bu kısımda tez başlığı **Tez Yazım Dilinde** yazılmalıdır.
**Hacettepe Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Tez Çalışması Orjinallik Raporu Alınması ve Kullanılması Uygulama Esasları İkinci bölüm madde (4)/3'te de belirtildiği üzere: Kaynakça hariç, Alıntılar hariç/dahil, 5 kelimeden daha az örtüşme içeren metin kısımları hariç (Limit match size to 5 words) filtreleme yapılmalıdır.

| | HACETTEPE ÜNİVERSİTESİ<br>SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ | Doküman Kodu<br>*Form No.* | FRM-YL-15 |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | Yayım Tarihi<br>*Date of Pub.* | 04.12.2023 |
| | **FRM-YL-15**<br>**Yüksek Lisans Tezi Orijinallik Raporu**<br>*Master's Thesis Dissertation Originality Report* | Revizyon No<br>*Rev. No.* | 02 |
| | | Revizyon Tarihi<br>*Rev.Date* | 25.01.2024 |

**TO HACETTEPE UNIVERSITY**
**GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES**
**DEPARTMENT OF AMERICAN CULTURE AND LITERATURE**

Date: 12/07/2024

Thesis Title (In English): Postmemory, Survivance, and Justice in Louise Erdrich's Justice Trilogy

According to the originality report obtained by myself/my thesis advisor by using the Turnitin plagiarism detection software and by applying the filtering options checked below on 12/07/2024 for the total of 91 pages including the a) Title Page, b) Introduction, c) Main Chapters, and d) Conclusion sections of my thesis entitled above, the similarity index of my thesis is 8 %.

Filtering options applied**:

1. ☐ Approval and Decleration sections excluded
2. ☒ References cited excluded
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5. ☒ Match size up to 5 words excluded

I hereby declare that I have carefully read Hacettepe University Graduate School of Social Sciences Guidelines for Obtaining and Using Thesis Originality Reports that according to the maximum similarity index values specified in the Guidelines, my thesis does not include any form of plagiarism; that in any future detection of possible infringement of the regulations I accept all legal responsibility; and that all the information I have provided is correct to the best of my knowledge.

Kindly submitted for the necessary actions.

Semanur Işık

| Student Information | | |
|---|---|---|
| | **Name-Surname** | SEMANUR IŞIK |
| | **Student Number** | N21132201 |
| | **Department** | AMERICAN CULTURE AND LITERATURE |
| | **Programme** | MASTER OF ARTS |

**SUPERVISOR'S APPROVAL**

APPROVED
Assist. Prof. Dr. Merve ÖZMAN

**As mentioned in the second part [article (4)/3 ]of the Thesis Dissertation Originality Report's Codes of Practice of Hacettepe University Graduate School of Social Sciences, filtering should be done as following: excluding refence, quotation excluded/included, Match size up to 5 words excluded.

# APPENDIX2. ETHICS BOARD WAIVER FORM

| HACETTEPE ÜNİVERSİTESİ SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ | Doküman Kodu *Form No.* | FRM-YL-09 |
|---|---|---|
| | Yayım Tarihi *Date of Pub.* | 22.11.2023 |
| **FRM-YL-09** **Yüksek Lisans Tezi Etik Kurul Muafiyeti Formu** *Ethics Board Form for Master's Thesis* | Revizyon No *Rev. No.* | 02 |
| | Revizyon Tarihi *Rev.Date* | 25.01.2024 |

**HACETTEPE ÜNİVERSİTESİ**
**SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ**
**AMERİKAN KÜLTÜRÜ VE EDEBİYATI ANABİLİM DALI BAŞKANLIĞINA**

Tarih: 09/07/2024

Tez Başlığı (Türkçe): Louise Erdrich'in Adalet Üçlemesi'nde Postbellek, Yerli Amerikalı Kimliğinin Olumlanması ve Adalet

Yukarıda başlığı verilen tez çalışmam:

1. İnsan ve hayvan üzerinde deney niteliği taşımamaktadır.
2. Biyolojik materyal (kan, idrar vb. biyolojik sıvılar ve numuneler) kullanılmasını gerektirmemektedir.
3. Beden bütünlüğüne veya ruh sağlığına müdahale içermemektedir.
4. Anket, ölçek (test), mülakat, odak grup çalışması, gözlem, deney, görüşme gibi teknikler kullanılarak katılımcılardan veri toplanmasını gerektiren nitel ya da nicel yaklaşımlarla yürütülen araştırma niteliğinde değildir.
5. Diğer kişi ve kurumlardan temin edilen veri kullanımını (kitap, belge vs.) gerektirmektedir. Ancak bu kullanım, diğer kişi ve kurumların izin verdiği ölçüde Kişisel Bilgilerin Korunması Kanuna riayet edilerek gerçekleştirilecektir.

Hacettepe Üniversitesi Etik Kurullarının Yönergelerini inceledim ve bunlara göre çalışmamın yürütülebilmesi için herhangi bir Etik Kuruldan izin alınmasına gerek olmadığını; aksi durumda doğabilecek her türlü hukuki sorumluluğu kabul ettiğimi ve yukarıda vermiş olduğum bilgilerin doğru olduğunu beyan ederim.

Gereğini saygılarımla arz ederim.

Semanur Işık

| Öğrenci Bilgileri | | |
|---|---|---|
| | **Ad-Soyad** | SEMANUR IŞIK |
| | **Öğrenci No** | N21132201 |
| | **Enstitü Anabilim Dalı** | AMERİKAN KÜLTÜRÜ VE EDEBİYATI |
| | **Programı** | YÜKSEK LİSANS |

**DANIŞMAN ONAYI**

Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Merve ÖZMAN

UYGUNDUR.
(Unvan, Ad Soyad, İmza)

* Tez **Almanca** veya **Fransızca** yazılıyor ise bu kısımda tez başlığı **Tez Yazım Dilinde** yazılmalıdır.

| | HACETTEPE ÜNİVERSİTESİ<br>SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ | Doküman Kodu<br>*Form No.* | FRM-YL-09 |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | Yayım Tarihi<br>*Date of Pub.* | 22.11.2023 |
| | **FRM-YL-09**<br>**Yüksek Lisans Tezi Etik Kurul Muafiyeti Formu**<br>*Ethics Board Form for Master's Thesis* | Revizyon No<br>*Rev. No.* | 02 |
| | | Revizyon Tarihi<br>*Rev.Date* | 25.01.2024 |

**HACETTEPE UNIVERSITY**
**GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES**
**DEPARTMENT OF AMERICAN CULTURE AND LITERATURE**

Date: 09/07/2024

Thesis Title (In English): Postmemory, Survivance, and Justice in Louise Erdrich's Justice Trilogy

My thesis work with the title given above:

1. Does not perform experimentation on people or animals.
2. Does not necessitate the use of biological material (blood, urine, biological fluids and samples, etc.).
3. Does not involve any interference of the body's integrity.
4. Is not a research conducted with qualitative or quantitative approaches that require data collection from the participants by using techniques such as survey, scale (test), interview, focus group work, observation, experiment, interview.
5. Requires the use of data (books, documents, etc.) obtained from other people and institutions. However, this use will be carried out in accordance with the Personal Information Protection Law to the extent permitted by other persons and institutions.

I hereby declare that I reviewed the Directives of Ethics Boards of Hacettepe University and in regard to these directives it is not necessary to obtain permission from any Ethics Board in order to carry out my thesis study; I accept all legal responsibilities that may arise in any infrigement of the directives and that the information I have given above is correct.

I respectfully submit this for approval.

Semanur Işık

| Student Information | | |
|---|---|---|
| | **Name-Surname** | SEMANUR IŞIK |
| | **Student Number** | N21132201 |
| | **Department** | AMERICAN CULTURE AND LITERATURE |
| | **Programme** | MASTER OF ARTS |

**SUPERVISOR'S APPROVAL**

Assist. Prof. Dr. Merve ÖZMAN

APPROVED
(Title, Name Surname, Signature)