

# Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in The Round House by Louise Erdrich and Ceremony by Leslie Marmon Silko

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Sveučilišni preddiplomski dvopredmetni studij Engleski jeziki i književnosti i  
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Mentor: doc. dr. sc. Jasna Poljak Rehlicki

Osijek, 2024.

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## **Abstract**

Traumatic experiences, such as wars, rape, environmental disasters, car crashes, witnessing crimes, or being a victim of a crime, can permanently alter one's perception of reality and change the course of one's life. Modern diagnosis of post-traumatic stress allows for a variety of situations and experiences to be perceived as traumatic. Though some may question the legitimacy of diagnosis regarding traumatic events citing different thresholds to traumatic events, the impacts that traumatic experiences have on the victims' lives are undeniable. Native American literature is, due to their histories, fueled with various traumas that inspire authors to represent their heritage uniquely. Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* and Louise Erdrich's *The Round House* give a voice to Native Americans and their communities who have faced war and sexual traumas. This paper will investigate and classify their traumas and reveal how some of the protagonists managed to heal themselves with the help of their community and cultural heritage.

Keywords: Leslie Marmon Silko, Louise Erdrich, post-traumatic stress disorder, war, sexual assault

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## Introduction

This paper analyses *Ceremony* (1977) by Leslie Marmon Silko and *The Round House* (2013) by Louise Erdrich, which focus heavily on traumatic experiences and the healing process of the characters. Traumatic experiences have always been an integral part of the human experience but have not always been represented in their entirety. Although most would think of war when traumatic stress is mentioned, the subject matter is much wider as it pertains to a wide variety of subtypes such as generational trauma and sexual trauma. Traumatic experiences are capable of irreversibly changing the course of one's life and habits, and post-traumatic stress disorder is one of the many responses of the body and mind of the traumatized person. This paper aims to analyze the intricacies of post-traumatic stress disorder related to war as seen in *Ceremony* by Leslie Marmon Silko and sexual assault trauma in *The Round House* by Louise Erdrich by examining the various symptoms characters exhibit.

This paper's opening chapters give an overview of post-traumatic stress disorder, literatures of trauma, and jurisdictional issues that prevent Native Americans from seeking justice in crimes that have been committed on their land. By examining the history of traumatic experiences and the history of Native Americans, it aims to shed light on the framework and context in which these novels have been written.

Subsequent chapters analyze the authors of *Ceremony* and *The Round House*, their contributions to their respective genres and communities, types of trauma, types of trauma-related symptoms, and the court of public opinion of trauma in *Ceremony* and *The Round House*. Firstly, the topic of sexual assault and its impact on a family and community will be analyzed through *The Round House* by Louise Erdrich. In *The Round House*, Erdrich contextualizes the injustices a high percentage of women face when attempting to bring their assailant to justice and the impact sexual assault can have not only on the person who was assaulted, but also on those who care about them. Secondly, the topics of war-related trauma and generational trauma will be explored by analyzing *Ceremony*. Through *Ceremony*, Silko utilizes Native American mythology and spiritualism to shed light on the lasting impact of generations of oppression and the unique experiences of Native American soldiers.

The concluding chapter will summarize the aforementioned chapters, emphasize the relevance of *Ceremony* and *The Round House* as literatures of trauma, and their importance in representing not only victims and perpetrators of trauma but Native American communities which are statistically more likely to experience the impacts of these traumas within their communities.

## 1. History of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

Post-traumatic stress disorder has existed long before modern medicine had the chance to recognize and classify it as a disorder. Symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder have been represented in many texts throughout history, from Mesopotamia and Ancient Greece all the way to the twentieth century.

Many civilizations and nations have used a spiritual approach to explaining symptoms and diseases in general, namely, Mesopotamians believed that illnesses came from mistakes they had made that displeased gods (Abdul-Hamid et al. 552). Also, Mesopotamians had healers who treated illnesses holistically, through natural remedies and scriptures to please the gods. Symptoms of post-traumatic stress described in historical texts were the same as modern-day diagnostic criteria, such as distancing from loved ones, avoidance of potential reminders of trauma, and emotional dysregulation (Abdul-Hamid et al. 552). In Mesopotamia, war is stated to be the most common cause of these symptoms because, in battle, a person would kill many who would come to seek their dissatisfaction in spirit form. In “The Invention Of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder And The Social Usefulness Of A Psychiatric Category,” Derek Summerfield emphasizes the fact that, although people in the Neolithic era had the disorder, many did not receive the diagnosis until it was popularized. Summerfield criticizes the frequency in which people seek diagnosis citing work disputes or daily inconvenience as traumatic to avoid responsibility or accountability. Furthermore, Assyrians also left detailed accounts of war trauma and injuries, and some of the symptoms were wandering, intelligible speech, and depressive episodes (Abdul-Hamid et al. 554). Ancient Greeks had a similar approach to diagnosing mental conditions, and they joined the physical and spiritual realm of beings, treating the illnesses through catharsis and natural remedies (Abdul-Hamid et al. 552). The most prominent classification of mental disorders by Galen, as cited in *Remarks on Ancient Psychopathology*, explores the intensities, longevity, and causes of mental disorders. Galen and his successor Soranus acknowledge the competitiveness and societal structure of Ancient Greece which may foster mental illness in combination with physiological disturbances. In “War Stories Told, Untold and Retold from Troy to Tinian to Fort Campbell,” Thomas G. Palaima references Homer throughout the article, emphasizing the prevalence of authors like Joseph Heller and Tim O’Brien utilizing Homer’s works in their war retellings, thus linking ancient war literature and literatures of modern warfare. Works such as these are some of the many examples of literatures of trauma throughout history, Homer being one of the pioneers of war trauma retellings. War retellings and literatures of trauma evolved as trauma became a heavily researched subject from the nineteenth century to modern times.

The study of traumatic experiences as origins of emotional stuntedness and oversensitivity started at the very end of the nineteenth century in Paris. Jean Martin Charcot first proposed suggested that traumatic experiences in patients could be the root of their “hysteria” (Van der Kolk 11). His student, Pierre Janet, further researched the connection of trauma to psychopathologies at the same hospital where Sigmund Freud later did two clinical rotations. Freud studied “hysterical” patients intently but further exploration of the link between mental illness and trauma was not continued until the Second World War (Van der Kolk 12). Abram Kardiner wrote about his experiences of treating and observing World War I veterans suffering from traumatic stress in *The Traumatic Neuroses of War*. He noted that veteran’s trauma recollection was unchanged no matter the passage of time (qtd. in Van der Kolk 12). The discussion on the role of psychological trauma in mental disorders, as researched by Janet, Freud, and Kardiner, was reopened during the aftermath of the Vietnam War and the women’s rights movement.

It was in 1980 that posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) was added to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-III). The symptoms of PTSD were: reexperiencing the traumatic event through dreams or flashbacks, avoidance of reminders of the trauma, and symptoms of increased arousal which would constitute feelings of anxiety (Van der Kolk 12). In “Caesar In Vietnam: Did Roman Soldiers Suffer From Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder,” Melchior notes that post-traumatic stress disorder had many names throughout history, soldiers in the Civil War suffered from “soldier’s hearts,” in World War I from “shell shock,” and in World War II from “battle fatigue.” Although Melchior emphasizes the differences in stressors and lifestyles of soldiers in ancient and modern times, his research details many consistencies in retellings of traumatic experiences.

The latest edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-V) sorts post-traumatic stress disorder into trauma and stressor-related disorders, with the traumatic event as a diagnostic criterion (265). In addition to a person experiencing a traumatic event, the event may be reexperienced as an intrusive recollection of the traumatic experience. Trauma-related intrusive recollections often include sensory, behavioral, or psychological components (275). Types of reexperiencing the traumatic event are dreams and dissociative states, commonly known as “flashbacks.” Events or sensations that remind the individual of their trauma are called “triggering cues,” and exposure to these cues may elicit dissociative states, persistent negative alterations in cognition and mood, intense psychological stress, or physiological reactivity (275). Because of this, many individuals avoid speaking about the event and avoid any event or sensation that may trigger a recollection of the event as it alters their mood, future prognosis, and negative

perception of themselves and others. Other behavioral changes include loss of appetite, disinterest in previously enjoyed activities, and avoidance of loved ones (275). The DSM-V also notes that women are more likely to develop post-traumatic stress disorder, most commonly as a consequence of domestic violence or sexual assault (276). Societal attitudes contribute to the frequency of developing post-traumatic stress disorder through victim-blaming and rape myths (Chivers-Wilson 115). Social support and preventive education are shown to be vital to successful recovery and sexual assault prevention (Chivers-Wilson 113). Aside from sexual trauma, a common type of trauma is intergenerational trauma. Intergenerational trauma is the transference of trauma from the generation that experienced the trauma to subsequent generations through behaviors or reenacting the traumatic experience (“Intergenerational trauma”). It is commonly seen in oppressed communities because of the prevalence of adverse living conditions such as poverty which is closely linked to adverse childhood experiences that may change the brain chemistry of children and impair their reasoning and moralizing capabilities. Aside from the aforementioned types of trauma and symptoms of post-traumatic stress, there is a rare form of post-traumatic stress that is caused by committing violent acts. This type of trauma is called perpetrator trauma, and it is most commonly associated with returning veterans and recently, young adult offenders (Mahlako 3). Young adult repeat offenders of petty crimes are more susceptible to violent outbursts because of their underdeveloped neuropsychological functions, exposure to adverse childhood experiences and living conditions, substance abuse, peer pressure, and volatile environments (Mahlako 3). Types of traumas that will be discussed throughout this paper are war-related trauma, sexual assault trauma, generational trauma and perpetrator trauma, along with their repercussions on the victims and their communities.

Many academics argue that a comprehensive history of trauma cannot exist because of periodic neglect and resurfacing of societal focus on similar topics, in addition to public interest it is also important to note the wide variety of impacts of traumatic experiences on survivors or victims (Schönfelder 27). Schönfelder argues that literatures of trauma supplement medical diagnosis and historical recollections through testifying and retelling of traumatic experiences in fiction. Thus, emphasizing the importance of literatures of trauma, in particular the literatures of minorities and oppressed subgroups in society such as Native American tribes and women which will be the primary focus of this paper.

## 2. Native American History

This chapter offers an overview of specific topics in Native American history that pertain to *The Round House* and *Ceremony*, in particular the traumatic experiences of Native American soldiers in World War II, rape, and jurisdiction issues in crimes against Native American women.

Since colonization, Native American tribes have been on the outskirts of American society. Denied job opportunities, and shunned from society, motivated many Native Americans to join the military during the World Wars. Countless young Native Americans sought out employment in the military and weapon production as the industry rapidly grew in size and importance (Franco 34). In World War II forty percent more Native Americans enlisted of their own free will than had been drafted, and only one percent of young able-bodied Native Americans between the ages of 21 to 44 did not register for the draft. By the end of World War II, in some tribes only thirty percent of men were not employed by the military and the beginning estimates of the number of active soldiers were greatly exceeded (Franco 34). Recruitment into the army was a byproduct of the lack of employment opportunities and of a joint goal of protecting their land and values. World War II proved to be a watershed for civil rights among Native Americans. Subsequently, many Native Americans turned to radical measures such as seizing the Bureau of Indian Affairs to protest postwar living conditions because of the lack of government engagement in reservation maintenance and lack of civil rights (Franco 37). The lack of civil rights was made evident in 1885 when the Major Crimes Act, as cited by Owens (504) granted jurisdiction of major crimes on tribal land to federal courts instead of state or tribal courts, thus denying Native Americans the 6<sup>th</sup> Amendment, that is, the constitutional right of a jury of their peers.

Degrading tribal authority, The Second Public Law of 1953 forces individual states to pay for legal action that had now been transferred to them by the federal government. Many cases, especially sexual assault charges, had to be thrown out because of the lack of funds and the overwhelming number of cases brought to the courts. Only in 1968 did the Indian Civil Rights Act of 1963 give Native Americans proper citizenship by allowing Native Americans the constitutional rights of due process, trial by jury of their peers, and rights to a public defender to those facing trial in tribal court. Now, tribal courts could prosecute felonies if they had funds for available public defenders, a law-trained judge, and prisons. If not these same cases would be sent to federal court which would commonly cause the cases to be thrown out. Finally, in 1978. the ruling of *Oliphant v. Suquamish Indian Tribe* was that “Indian tribal courts” could ask Congress to allow them to try and punish non-Native Americans who commit crimes on tribal land, which this caused 33 of the 127 reservations to assert the right to arrest and try non-Native Americans. The Supreme

Court was dissatisfied with this and gave jurisdiction to state and federal courts to choose whether or not to try non-Native Americans for crimes against Native people.

This legislative maze caused an increase in sexual and other violence against Native American women. Namely, the Department of Justice reports that the rate of sexual assault on Native women is approximately three times higher than in the general American population. This allows the existence of alarming statistical data which indicates that roughly thirty-seven percent of Native women could be raped and thirty nine percent could suffer domestic violence (Owens 508–11). Case dismissal rates are also caused by a staggering disregard of evidence by law enforcement in dealing with such crimes (Tharp 26-27), as seen in the case of Jancita Eagle Deer and Governor William Janklow. Eagle Deer wanted to stop Janklow from practicing law in tribal court because she claimed that Janklow raped her in 1967. when she was fifteen (Tharp 34). The case was handed down from tribal court to the FBI because there had been enough evidence to warrant a trial, Janklow did not appear at the hearings, and the FBI did not investigate further after Eagle Deer was suspiciously killed in a hit-and-run accident after being seen with FBI personnel. Jancita's aunt, Delphina Eagle Deer was later beaten to death by a "drunk" police officer. Janklow himself heavily promoted the 1978. Supreme Court ruling that prevented tribal courts from prosecuting non-Natives (Tharp 35).

The Violence Against Women Act appears to offer improved groundwork for responses to rape on the reservation perpetrated by non-Natives living or working on reservation grounds, however, tribal jurisdiction is only granted in a narrow set of circumstances (Tharp 34). These perpetrators commit approximately forty-one percent of all rapes. Additionally, these jurisdictional mazes allow sexual assault and domestic violence perpetrators to easily escalate to major crime status which further impedes most tribal courts from prosecuting crimes of this nature (Tharp 37).

### **3. Louise Erdrich**

Louise Erdrich, born in 1954 in Little Falls, Minnesota, is an American author whose principal subject is the Ojibwa tribe. Erdrich's father was German, and her mother was half Ojibwa, and during Erdrich's childhood, she taught at a Bureau of Indian Affairs boarding school in North Dakota. Erdrich attended prestigious universities such as Dartmouth College for her bachelor's degree, and Johns Hopkins University for her master's degree. She has written many award-winning novels and short stories such as "The World's Greatest Fisherman" and *Love Medicine*. While at Dartmouth she met her husband, Michael Dorris, with whom she collaborated in writing *The Crown of Columbus* (1991). Erdrich then explored her heritage from her father's side, writing *The Master Butcher Singing Club* which centered around people from a midwestern small town who were German, Polish, and Scandinavian ("Leslie Marmon Silko.").

One of her latest novels, *The Round House* (2012), won the National Book Award. In 2013, Louise Erdrich wrote an opinion piece for *The New York Times* which demonstrates her motivation for writing *The Round House*. Erdrich begins the article by criticizing two Republicans running for Congress who passed judgment on "legitimate" rape, and she continues by providing alarming statistics regarding the violence inflicted upon Native American women and women in general. Erdrich ends by highlighting the red shawls that Native American women were wearing in support of sexual assault survivors. *The Round House* is Louise Erdrich's call for legislators, and activists to provide protection and support for Native American women who have become or will become victims of violent crimes during their lifetimes.

#### **3.1. Elements of PTSD in *The Round House* by Louise Erdrich**

Sexual assault and its repercussions on the victim's body and mind are commonly irreparable, and their communities and lives are forever altered. Louise Erdrich recognizes these struggles and evokes the history of injustice and terror that plagues her own Ojibwa community along with other Native American communities and takes a stance in the form of a complex literature of trauma. *The Round House* is a story about a boy who witnesses his family being transformed when his mother was violently raped and almost killed.

This paragraph focuses on Geraldine, a victim of rape, and the symptoms of posttraumatic stress she exhibits throughout the novel. The novel begins with thirteen-year-old Joe and his father Bazil, musing over his mother's, sudden outing. When she was uncharacteristically late for dinner, they went on a drive to see whether or not she accidentally forgot something at the store and went

back, they laughed in relief as they saw her driving straight-faced towards their home. Bazil was the first to recognize something is amiss, he runs to the car, in which his wife is sitting motionless, to pick her up. Joe observes from a short distance; “She slumped against him, stared past me,” (Erdrich 9), she stares off into the distance as if she cannot comprehend her surroundings. This initial state of shock is not uncommon after a traumatic event, the body enters a fight-or-flight state and does not let out until perceived safety. When Bazil starts helping her out of her car, Joe sees that she is covered in vomit and blood, she is completely stiff in the shape of the car seat, staring through her son and husband (Erdrich 10), this state may be interpreted as a state of clinical shock in which the victim of trauma is unresponsive while completely awake. She is quickly driven to the hospital, shaking violently (Erdrich 10). Whole-body tremors are also commonplace when a person is slowly recovering from a state of shock. Joe, while waiting for news about his mother’s state, overhears that his mother was violently raped and severely beaten by an unknown perpetrator. In the coming weeks, Joe and his father attempt to return their lives to normalcy but to no avail. Joe and Bazil continue trying to find ways in which they can help Geraldine recover and bring her attacker to justice. The first time Joe sees his mother after her injuries have become more prominent is jarring, he describes her as ghostly pale with black and purple marks that cover her face and body (Erdrich 29). Joe later observes his mother after her injuries have slightly healed and remarks: “Deep violet streaks and the yellow of healing contusions still marred her face. The white of her left eye was scarlet and her eyelid drooped slightly, as it would from then on, for the nerve had been tampered with and the damage was irreversible,” (Erdrich 43). This shows how the viciousness of the assault left a permanent physical and psychological reminder of the events that occurred. The changes in her body continued to unnerve Joe and Bazil, as she became unnaturally thin as she refused to leave her room and experienced a loss of appetite. The loss of appetite and avoidance of loved ones is a symptom of post-traumatic stress disorder as evident in the previous chapter regarding the DSM-V. While interacting with her husband and son, Geraldine shows signs of increased sensitivity and irritability (*American Psychiatric Association* 276), during which she at times succumbs to a dissociative episode: “With a cry, she snatched her hand away as though I’d hurt her. She went rigid and closed her eyes. This action devastated me” (Erdrich 15). A few weeks after the attack, Geraldine starts cooking again but is startled by Joe and Bazil entering the house without announcing their arrival, this causes Geraldine to have an intrusive recollection of the event (*American Psychiatric Association* 275) after which she reenters her room and isolates herself further (Erdrich 51-53). Geraldine isolates herself for most of the novel while she has persistent intrusive recollections of the event, physical symptoms ie. nausea, and psychological symptoms such as irritability and sensitivity. She does not perceive her son and



husband's support as she is navigating her trauma. Her persistent symptoms prove that recovery from a traumatic event is not linear, it exerts patience from the victim and their community, Joe and Bazil feel an enormous amount of guilt regarding these incidents, but no one can be completely certain what might become a "triggering cue" to a victim (American Psychiatric Association 275). After her assailant is arrested, Geraldine begins to slowly return to her normal self only to retreat into isolation after he is freed (Erdrich 220), this also serves as a reminder of the longevity and complexity of the process of healing from trauma.

Geraldine's struggle not only affects her but also her son and husband, they can see the effects the traumatic experience had on her but they cannot bring her back to her old self. This paragraph focuses on Joe and Bazil's trauma and subsequent actions throughout the novel. After her attack, Joe tries to cheer up his mother by entering her room and hugging her, but his mother punches him in the face as she did not perceive it was her son but her attacker suddenly jumping at her (*American Psychiatric Association 275*), this causes Joe to distance himself as he realizes the severity of his mother's condition. Together, Bazil and Joe start researching cases similar to Geraldine's to try to not only help her but to distract themselves while Geraldine continues isolating herself and sleeping for seemingly endless hours (Erdrich 54). Bazil is aware of the severity of the crime and the slim chances of the perpetrator being brought to justice. He confides in a detective regarding Geraldine's state, explaining that she takes no visitors, does not interact with Joe or him, and expresses his guilt regarding the aforementioned incident (Erdrich 89). Bazil is exhausted as he attempts to continue to be an attentive father and husband while seeking justice for his wife. He is seen by Joe as increasingly irritable (Erdrich 33), exhausted (264), and aging rapidly (66). Bazil forces the family to spend time together by eating dinner in his wife's room, even after Joe expresses his discomfort regarding the lack of conversation topics and the severity of his mother's state. During one of these dinners, Joe notes his father: "forged on, a lone paddler on an endless lake of silence, or maybe rowing upstream," (Erdrich 177). Soon after Geraldine's attacker is freed because of the lack of evidence, Joe is faced with the realization that his mother has changed; she lacks warmth and that he feels that he does not have enough time to get to know this version of her (Erdrich 227). This feeling of distance is a common thread for survivors of sexual assault and their families because of the severity of the act and the prolonged isolation it causes. Amid their struggles as a family, the investigation of the crime remains ongoing. It is revealed that, because Geraldine cannot pinpoint the exact location of her attack, the police cannot arrest the perpetrator nor bring him to trial as it is unclear whether the attack happened on land in tribal or state jurisdiction. Joe investigates the crime himself by visiting the approximate scene of the crime (Erdrich 71) and finds evidence that was disregarded by police (73), thus fueling his

frustration and need for justice. Before Joe found out who the perpetrator was, he investigated a Christian preacher who had recently moved to the reservation. After eliminating the preacher as a suspect, Joe hoped the preacher could teach him how to shoot because of the preacher's military background but the preacher refused. The preacher instead, unknowingly, gave Joe the idea to take taking justice into his own hands, Joe remembered the phrase "Sins Crying Out to Heaven for Vengeance," the preacher explained that: "The sins that cried out for vengeance were murder, sodomy, defrauding a laborer, oppressing the poor" (Erdrich 294). Joe concluded that sodomy included rape and started making a detailed plan to murder his mother's attacker, the mere thought of going through with the act terrified Joe, but he felt that there was no one else who could bring his mother's assailant to justice (Erdrich 309). Bazil, also fueled by frustration and a need for justice, assaults the attacker in a grocery store (Erdrich 285) which catalyzes a heart attack. Bazil remains worried and angry throughout the novel while Joe works towards avenging his mother. Joe, who was once a victim of circumstances, now becomes a perpetrator. Joe steals weapons and ammunition from his friend's family and learns the pattern of behavior of his mother's assailant, killing him with the help of his friend (Erdrich 330). Both boys experience symptoms of post-traumatic stress induced by perpetrator trauma after the murder. Perpetrator trauma is characterized by personality changes such as isolation and difficulty communicating, depression, anxiety, and alcohol abuse (Mahlako 3). Joe starts experiencing perpetrator trauma in the form of intrusive recollections of the event through dreams (Erdrich 359) while constantly attempting to dissuade his parents from their suspicions of him (342). Throughout the novel, Joe is further incentivized and comforted by stories he learns about Wendigos, creatures created by feasting on human flesh. The creatures remind Joe of Geraldine's assailant as he has taken away her warmth and humanity. In contrast to the assailant, the Wendigo proves to be vegetarian and born of assault (Erdrich 250), only hunted by those who should have prevented the assault (Erdrich 210). This story is a direct metaphor for the investigation of the crime against Geraldine, the other woman who was also attacked was never found and the attacks themselves would have been prevented if legislation provided protection for victims of domestic violence and prosecuted those who inflict it.

To conclude, Geraldine exhibits psychological and physical symptoms of post-traumatic stress, the longevity of these symptoms exceeds initial shock and indicates that her condition may be chronic. Bazil's symptoms of sleeplessness and irritability point to post-traumatic stress but they are not elaborated in detail as he is not the focus of the novel. However, Joe's experience as a prepubescent boy avenging his mother is highly elaborated. Throughout the novel, Joe sees his parents deteriorating which causes his mental state to steadily decline, he is irritable and irrational

in his convictions. After committing the murder, Joe heavily shows symptoms of perpetrator trauma such as vivid recollections of the event through dreams, anxiety surrounding his parents finding out about what he had done and becomes more susceptible to addictive behavior.

#### 4. Leslie Marmon Silko

Leslie Marmon Silko is a Native American writer and poet who grew up on the Laguna Pueblo reservation in New Mexico. She attended the Bureau of Indian Affairs schools and the University of New Mexico, she went on to do graduate work in English and pursue a in creative writing. She writes fiction, poetry, and tribal fiction. Her first publication was the poetry collection *Laguna Woman* (1974) in which she combined myths and stories she heard in childhood to depict contemporary struggles that Native Americans face. In 1981, Silko published one of her most critically acclaimed works *Storyteller* and received a MacArthur Foundation fellowship (“Leslie Marmon Silko.”).

One of Silko’s most notable works, *Ceremony* (1977), tells the story of a returning World War II veteran of mixed heritage who seeks help in healing from the trauma of war from a tribal wise man who teaches him Laguna folklore and ceremonies. *Ceremony* was also praised for disregarding chronological narrative, this technique was reminiscent of Laguna Pueblo oral tradition (Carsen 108). *Ceremony* was written at a time when Silko was living in Alaska, away from her home and heritage (Silko iv), she fell into a depressive episode after being deprived of the sun and the Pueblo reservation air and nature. In the preface for *Ceremony* Silko writes:

I wasn’t just homesick for the sandstone cliffs and the sun; I missed the people and the storytelling, so I incorporated into the novel the old-time story about Hummingbird and Green Fly, who help the people purify their town to bring back the Corn Mother. The title of the novel, *Ceremony*, refers to the healing ceremonies based on the ancient stories of the Diné and Pueblo people (iv).

Her initial motivation for writing *Ceremony* was feelings of depression, migraines, and homesickness, as the main character of the novel, Tayo, slowly recovered from war trauma and found himself again aided by ancient ceremonies, so did Silko herself recover. Writing *Ceremony* became Silko’s escape from the difficulties she faced in her life, the novel began as a comedy about a high-functioning alcoholic and ended as an uplifting story of a war veteran whose cultural heritage saves his life (Silko v).

##### 4.1. Elements of PTSD in *Ceremony* by Leslie Marmon Silko

*Ceremony* by Leslie Marmon Silko is a profoundly disorienting experience, the lack of chronological order, chapters, or page numbers, immerses the reader in the story, and the main

character's emotional state. The novel's main story is intertwined with poetry depicting what is believed to be the origin of white people by the character in the novel. This secondary narrative allows Silko to incorporate various Pueblo beliefs and cultural elements such as the Hummingbird, Green Fly, and Corn Mother.

The novel starts with Tayo returning from war to his hometown after being hospitalized. Tayo was hospitalized because he was unable to rescue his brother from succumbing to injuries while deployed, the doctors managing Tayo spoke about his ailment: "They called it battle fatigue, and they said hallucinations were common with malarial fever" (Silko 7), Tayo remembers his time at the hospital but does not know how much time he spent there (213). Tayo had heard stories of battle fatigue, and he had heard soldiers' screams but he did not know the reality of the illness until it struck him. The flies that flew over his brother Rocky's body haunted him (Silko 94), he needed time, and help until he could return to normalcy. The first distinct symptom of post-traumatic stress Tayo exhibits is emotional sensitivity and impulsiveness. Shortly after returning to his hometown, Tayo begins spending time with other veterans, often drinking and retelling war stories, one of the veterans who is often present is Emo. Emo often shamed Tayo for his mixed heritage, told war stories that made it clear that he wished he could go back to the war, took pride in the amount of "Japs" he killed, and carried their teeth in a bag as keepsakes. One day the men met at the same bar as always to reminisce about the war, Emo took out the teeth and kept posing with them and putting them in his mouth, this angered Tayo. Tayo then suddenly stood up and shoved a broken beer bottle into Emo's stomach (Silko 48). Tayo's friend Harley tried to make the other men stop bothering him but they did not listen until it was too late, he later helped Tayo seek help from a healer.

The second type of symptom Tayo has are physical symptoms, he often feels weak, numb, unable to move his extremities (Silko 14), nauseous and he experiences vertigo (27). These symptoms lead to a third type of symptom, "flashbacks. The attack on Emo was later revealed to have been caused by a flashback, the loud voices of the men around him and the glimmer of the teeth brought him back to the war (Silko 58). Triggering cues such as these are expected and widely represented but Tayo also experiences dissociative episodes without a clear trigger. Walking with Harley to the healer, Tayo looks up at the sky and feels as if he is suddenly transported back onto the island in the Pacific where he is calling out for his brother to help him after he had gotten shot (Silko 184). Tayo, Harley, and the other veterans are seen to use alcohol as an escape from the difficult circumstances they were faced with while at war: "Liquor was medicine for the anger that

made them hurt, for the pain of the loss, medicine for tight bellies and choked-up throats” (Silko 37). They represent a large percentage of veterans who succumb to substance abuse after returning from deployment, Native American soldiers are twice as likely to develop a substance abuse disorder after deployment in comparison to the general population (Walker 238). Unknowingly, by attempting to lessen their symptoms, they were delaying the inevitable as research shows that psychiatric disorders such as post-traumatic stress are more prevalent in those who present symptoms of substance abuse (Walker 238). Prior to visiting the healer, Tayo reaches a breaking point after drinking excessively and vomiting to cleanse all of the negativity that has accumulated in his body (Silko 156), this does nothing to ease him.

When Tayo meets with the healer, as the healer leads Tayo through his house, Tayo begs the healer to help him saying: “I’ve been sick, and half the time I don’t know if I’m still crazy or not. I don’t know anything about ceremonies or these things you talk about, ” (Silko 115). Spirituality and religion aid some veterans in their healing processes, many believe that veterans’ traumatic experiences create spiritual wounds that modern medicine and psychiatry cannot mend (Werber et al. 4). Along with the healer, a woman Tayo meets helps him heal as she exposes him to other spiritual practices (Silko 87), these spiritual practices and ceremonies are often used to address spiritual injuries (Werber et al. 6). Tayo’s healing journey is sped up as he embraces spirituality after the ceremony has begun, he does not cry in front of his family as in the beginning (39), but by the end of the novel Tayo feels free of his illness (Silko 168). As his healing journey nears the end, Tayo starts noticing the state of his community. Only after the ceremony does Tayo realize the importance of community support and how estranged people have become (Silko 228). New landowners and the industrial architecture they built on the reservation greatly affected Tayo’s community, especially in Gallup. Gallup is a riverside community where the population is mixed heritage, like Tayo, live in poverty (Silko 100). The women of Gallup prostitute themselves to landowners, and their children learn to hide away in order to get food (101). The Gallup is a prime example of intergenerational trauma that impacts wider communities, just as negatively as substance abuse and stereotyping. Tayo realizes how different his life could have been, he could have become just one of many Native Americans who kill or are killed because of substance abuse or mental illness diagnosed by the Veteran’s Hospital (Silko 235). The novel ends with Tayo’s grandmother uttering an ominous sentence that confirms Tayo’s thoughts: “It seems like I already heard these stories before . . . only thing is, the names sound different.” (Silko 242). Leslie Marmon Silko masterfully circles the novel by ending Tayo’s story with the same word it had begun

“Sunrise”, the beginning and ending of a cycle that will naturally repeat itself, bringing hope and nostalgia to survivors of traumatic experiences and their families.

## Conclusion

Trauma and traumatic experiences are not a modern invention; these experiences have long existed before the terms for them were invented. Records from ancient civilizations such as Mesopotamia and Ancient Greece show that the disorder has always required healers or physicians to manage or attempt to cure. These physicians or healers have always utilized community beliefs or myths to manage a wide variety of symptoms now detailed in the DSM-V which was published by the American Psychiatry Association. The DSM-V recognizes the impact of trauma and the harsh consequences it may have on sufferers of post-traumatic stress. Post-traumatic stress disorder is a debilitating disorder caused by life-altering traumatic events whose prevalence is evident in Native American communities. The different subtypes of traumatic experiences that may occur in oppressed communities are war-related trauma, sexual trauma, intergenerational trauma, and perpetrator trauma. Since the colonization of the Americas, Native Americans have been oppressed and violently attacked without having the hope of their attackers ever being brought to justice. This sentiment is proven by recent legislation regarding the jurisdictions of tribal courts and police disregard for tribal communities, it is proven further by the disheartening statistics regarding the frequency of domestic violence and sexual assault in Native American communities. The Violence Against Women Act should have improved legal standing of cases of rape on reservations in which the one committing the crime is non-Native living or working on reservation grounds, however, many women are further ostracized and attacked when they seek to bring their attacker to justice. Louise Erdrich and Leslie Marmon Silko juxtapose post-traumatic stress disorder by depicting characters who faced war trauma and sexual assault respectively.

On one hand, in *The Round House*, Louise Erdrich explores the impact of sexual assault on the victim, their family, and their community by choosing a thirteen-year-old boy as the narrator. His mother was a victim of sexual assault, he sees her injuries, her mental health struggles, her losing her identity, and distancing herself from everyone and everything she once loved. In addition to seeing his mother struggle, he sees his father, a tribal judge, unable to bring her attacker to justice aid his mother in her recovery. This motivates him to take justice into his own hands which causes him to spiral into post-traumatic stress induced by him becoming a murderer. Erdrich succeeds in her attempt to showcase the disregard and apathy police and legislation have for crimes against women, although women have been unsung pioneers of the fight for post-traumatic stress to be a valid diagnosis that encompasses a variety of traumatic experiences, their attackers have seldom been brought to justice. On the other hand, in *Ceremony*, Leslie Marmon Silko shows the lives of many Native Americans who upon returning from war experience a wide variety of



symptoms of post-traumatic stress such as intrusive recollections of the traumatic experience, physical symptoms, irritability, and emotional outbursts. These symptoms hinder them from reconnecting with their communities, distancing them from their religious practices and often descending into addiction, specifically substance abuse. Substance abuse has been a prevalent issue in veterans' who return from war, and Native communities since the introduction of alcohol by colonizers. Substances such as alcohol have a temporary numbing effect that prevents sufferers of post-traumatic stress from experiencing symptoms. Aside from substance abuse, Silko touches on intergenerational trauma in Native communities that further forestall individual healing and community restoration. *American Reading Ceremony* is itself a disorienting experience because of the non-chronological order, meticulously written to depict the struggle of one veteran's struggle to come to terms with his experience in war and heal from it. Finally, he finds solace when meeting with a healer who utilizes tribal beliefs and healing ceremonies.

To conclude, historical accounts and literature on post-traumatic stress provide a variety of symptoms that can be seen in both *Ceremony* and *The Round House*, while legislation regarding sexual assault crimes, jurisdiction issues in regards to crimes on Native land, and lack of support only aggravate symptoms and postpone recovery. *Ceremony* and *The Round House* show the versatility of traumatic experiences, the intricacies of post-traumatic stress disorder, and its impact on individuals and their communities. Both authors prove to be not only authors but activists by giving voice to their own underrepresented and unsupported communities by employing and creating literatures of trauma that honor Native American traditions and beliefs despite societal disregard and dismissal of such experiences and traditions. Both novels showcase difficult topics that the wider public shies away from, vulnerable groups that are not aided by supportive structures that should have been in place to shorten their recovery from traumatic experiences.

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