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Indigenous Women with a Cause

— A Character Analysis of Linda Hogan's *Power* and Louise Erdrich's *The Round House*

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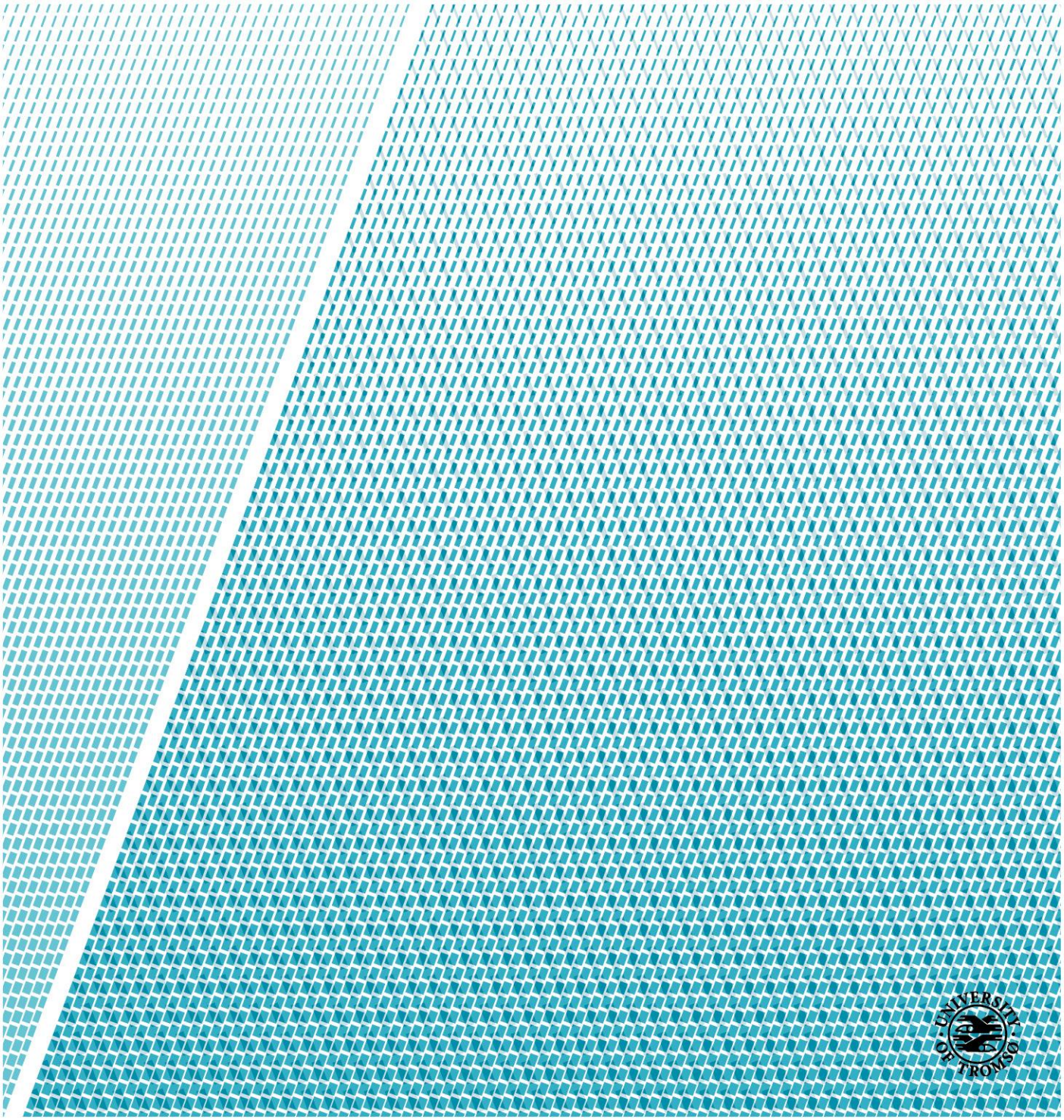

To my grandmother Eva

An example of what it means to be

A strong and courageous woman

Acknowledgements

First, I would like to thank my daughter, Michaela, who has patiently waited for Mom to have some more free time again.

I would like to thank Laura Castor, for introducing me to the works of Linda Hogan and Louise Erdrich.

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Table of contents

List of Figures

Introduction

When there's an emotional element, a story, with characters you grow to care about, then I think it actually makes a difference in the world, and that's why I write. Because story has a power.

-Linda Hogan

When I started working on this project, I had just heard of the accusations of rape and sexual harassment that had begun to unfold against Bill Cosby (2016). I was appalled to learn the ugly truth about a person that I had until then viewed (in the character of Mr. Huxtable in the *Cosby Show*) as the manifestation of a good father figure. Following the case of Bill Cosby came the even more shocking scandal when the Harvey Weinstein allegations were all over the news in 2017. Women are being encouraged to speak up about sexual harassment thanks to the "Me Too" hashtag that has been sweeping the world since October 2017. Even President Trump has been accused of sexual harassment. I live in a country where women received the right to vote as early as 1913. Our current Prime Minister and Minister of Finance are both women, and they were re-elected in 2017 for a second period. I have always been very proud of being a citizen of a country that favors the idea of equal rights for *all* citizens to the degree that Norway has seemed to do, especially since the 1980s and onwards. However, even here, the #Metoo-campaign

revealed several cases of sexual harassment by high-profile male politicians abusing their position, with some cases going back decades, and I was again shocked and outraged on the behalf of the women who had to endure this without feeling there was an option to speak up about it. The #Metoo-campaign has caused much controversy, among other things due to opening up for possible false accusations. However, while that may be a possibility, I believe the long-term effect of this campaign has a much wider potential. In general, the campaign has proven to all people around the world and women in particular, that through social media, it is possible to do something about their own situation, and that breaking the silence is the first step towards change. In addition, the campaign shows that for women who do not enjoy the same rights as their sisters in the western part of the world, they can have a voice anyway. Lastly, this campaign has explicitly proven that the work of the feminist movement is not by any means over, not even in my own country.

So what is the purpose of feminism? What are the main goals feminists want to achieve? We know what it *has* been until recent years.[i] In *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf provides a timeline of women's struggle for equality from Shakespeare, via Boswell to Mary Woolstonecraft, and forward to her own time. Woolf's essay is regarded a key work within feminist criticism, and examines the educational, social and financial disadvantages women have faced throughout history. It contains Woolf's famous argument: "[A] woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction" (Woolf 29). Woolf builds the argument that literature and history are male constructs that have traditionally marginalised women through the voice of the character Mary, who visits the British Library to find literature about and by women. Woolf refutes the then widely held assumption that women are inferior writers, or inferior

subjects, instead locating their silence in their material and social circumstances (29). Women were prohibited from attending school and university, and were in general recognised as second-rate humans, across all social classes. As is masterfully portrayed in the two most famous Jane Austen novels *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), and Sense *and Sensibility* (1811) over a century earlier, women were also excluded by inheritance laws. Inheritance laws stated that women could not inherit property, hence if their husband died, they had to accept seeing their homes taken over by any of the closest male relatives, in many cases leaving them (and their children) dependant on kind-hearted relatives for the rest of their lives unless they remarried. With such laws in effect, it is not surprising that society expected women to get married at the time, and that marriage mainly provided financial security and status. Women were supposed to spend their time on housekeeping, entertaining guests, playing piano, embroidery, and childrearing, depending on social status. In the upper middle class and upwards in the social hierarchy, women may have had the time and resources to expand their education, but it was considered dangerous for the female sensibility to know too much about the cruelties of the world, even as late as the mid-nineteenth century.[ii] However, Woolf has been criticised by feminists, especially from the end of the 1960s and onwards. Then how is it possible to claim that this work is still important for feminism and feminist criticism in particular?

One main reason is that the ideas Woolf presented in this essay prefigure so many of the same arguments that were relevant back in the time of Mary Woolstonecraft and for the feminist movement in general, as well as the arguments of feminist theory from the 1960s onwards. The importance of the 'privacy of one's own room' that Woolf explained is descriptive of women's position in society throughout the centuries, and as this thesis aims to demonstrate, we may not

have come as far from how the situation was in Woolf's time as we might think. Women's duty long into the 1970s was mainly to stay at home taking care of the children and their education, in addition to catering to any of their husbands' needs. Except for (in some countries) the right to vote and the right to divorce, as well as the right to education, it was not until after World War II women gained a wider range of self-determination and the issue of equality between genders made any substantial progress. However, one might claim though that the 1950s and the 1960s American concept of the middle class ideal 'nuclear family' that spread throughout Europe, with the housewife that stayed at home and acted like a servant for her husband and children, is not something that helped progressing the feminist movement's goals, rather the opposite. Who does not remember the poster images of the 'perfect housewives' from the 1960s, always with their best smile and best dresses on, greeting their husbands at the door when they came back from work, slippers in hand?

From the 1970s and particularly from the 1980s, some real progress happened for women's career possibilities, and popular culture built up under this development, with films such as "Working Girl" (1988), where we see Melanie Griffith portraying a woman working her way up in a dominantly male working environment, facing both male cynicism and sexual harassment along the way. Early feminists paved the way for young women today, who in most European countries and in the US by law are equal to men with regard to their rights as individuals. Unfortunately, for a vast number of women, the situation with regard to women's rights in certain areas *within* these countries has not changed much to this day, as this thesis aims to demonstrate. Both novels I have chosen for this project, *Power* and *The Round House*, show that this is not, as one might think, a problem reserved for developing countries. There are currently

women from indigenous or ethnocentric communities in our part of the world who find themselves at a higher risk for sexual and/or physical abuse, and have a lower chance of achieving justice than white women.

To me, the most important feminist issues are: a struggle for equality and the same rights in society as men, a right to decide over one's own body in all senses (but particularly when it comes to sex and reproduction), and most importantly, a right to be *heard* as a contributing member of society. Some of these have been accomplished, such as the right to vote and to work after having children, the right to decide over one's own body in terms of abortion, and women have at least since the 1970s been recognized as valuable politicians, academics and overall social commentators. The main questions emerging in the wake of the #Me Too-campaign are for me: What are feminism's main goals today? More closely related to this project, how might feminist criticism contribute to achieving these goals?

My first encounter with Linda Hogan's novel *Power* and Louise Erdrich's *The Round House* was in one of my master classes. It was shocking to learn that (as these novels illustrate) there are groups of women in our part of the world who are not only more at risk for physical and sexual abuse but also have specific external factors affecting their individual right to self-determination. There are even areas where the law cannot protect them in the same way as other women, *within* the same country. I immediately decided that this somehow had to be the main topic for my thesis. I have done some work previously relating to texts by and about women, and consider myself a feminist, but never had I known just how dire the situation is for certain groups of

women today. I have encountered close to home how substantial a body of proof is required in order to have a case of domestic abuse come to trial even here in Norway. I became outraged when I learnt that in the US, either Tribal Courts or State/Federal courts in practice do not protect women who have been raped (or otherwise abused), by a non-Tribal person. Although the main concern in *Power* is how the white government is narrowing down tribal areas in a scale that threatens the possibility to live the traditional way, it still is a story about the power of the individual and the powers affecting women in indigenous communities. *Power* illuminates specific dilemmas women in tribal communities are facing, all combined into a tale of hope through never giving up. *The Round House*, although it is mainly concerned with a very specific issue concerning legal rights for indigenous women, also (very much due to the choice of narrator) illustrates the ripple effect of a horrible crime on the people surrounding the victim, as well as the specific factors affecting women in the area the novel is set. In this thesis, I argue that there is a need for an extended paradigm in analyses of characters in literature by and about indigenous women, and that feminist readings applying similar paradigms in addition might become an area where feminist criticism could provide valuable contributions to the ongoing struggle for equality. With this in mind, there are three reasons for choosing the novels.

Firstly, given that both novels are coming of age narratives, it seemed interesting to explore why both authors chose this genre for their novels, and ask if somehow the choice of genre enables a better understanding of the socio-political commentaries the authors aim to convey. Choosing two novels which both are narratives within a character-based genre opens up for a comparison between them on the function of the genre, but also possibly a broader understanding of the circumstances affecting the characters' actions and choices. In order to do that, it is necessary to

provide a brief overview of the development of the coming of age genre, but also the developments of characterization. Given that a character's main function is to mirror reality (or illustrate the issues the author wants to attract attention to), characterization needs to develop parallel to developments in society. The theoretical introduction in chapter 1 provides a short overview of the main developments in characterization as well as the development of the coming of age genre, before moving on to examining why and how Erdrich and Hogan have utilized this genre in their novels.

Secondly, I chose to compare these novels because they are stories by and about women living in indigenous areas of the US. My main goal for this project is to explore if there is a way feminist criticism may contribute to spreading knowledge about these important issues concerning a substantial part of society. If indigenous women experience different treatment by law, then it is possible that there are certain factors present in these communities affecting women in particular. I encountered the concept of 'Intersectionality' during my research, a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1998. Crenshaw lists certain intersecting factors specific to what she calls 'women of color', signifying women from culturally homogenous or ethnocentric areas, such as Black women and (more specific to this context), indigenous women. Feminist criticism embraced this concept immediately, although so far mostly in readings of literature by and about black women. However, the intersecting factors may also be applied to indigenous women, as the introduction to chapter 2 aims to demonstrate. My reading of Crenshaw also unveiled the need for expanded paradigms in order to account for the complexity of the indigenous characters in *Power* and *The Round House*. Chapter 2 aims to explore whether these intersecting factors are present in the

novels, supporting the need to include such factors when reading literature about indigenous women.

Thirdly, both novels build up towards a climax where characters are facing ethical dilemmas on a subjective and a community level, meaning that the choices they make will affect both the individual(s) concerned *and* the community. The ethical dilemmas in *Power* and *The Round House* relates to a very important issue within the discussion on human rights, the concept of self-determination, which simultaneously concerns individuals and communities collectively. When women are concerned, the intersecting factors unveiled in chapter 2, prove to affect their self-determination as well, rendering many unable to make choices that might improve their situation. In indigenous communities, as illustrated in both *Power* and *The Round House*, there seems to be no culture for reporting physical and sexual abuse; it seems to be a 'normalized' occurrence. There seems to be an attitude of apathy where this issue is concerned, which the novels illustrate, and (as Chapter 2 will demonstrate), also is confirmed by actual statistics on this group of women. History of victimization, both on a community level and an individual level, may have contributed to this attitude. It is obvious that if one has learnt through experience that reporting abuse does not provide any actual result, a sense of learned helplessness may develop into an established culture of indifference and apathy. As described in chapter 2, when women have tried to speak up about this problem, they have had the experience that both tribal leaders and the government have refused to prioritize their rights to self-determination on an individual level for the sake of achieving collective community rights.

On a theoretical level, I can understand that one has to make sacrifices along a difficult political process, which negotiating rights to self-determination for indigenous communities must be. However, placing women's individual rights to self-determination over their own future and their own body on the back burner is the same as sacrificing half their community's individual rights for the sake of collective rights, which is simply shocking. By including not only the intersecting factors specific to indigenous characters, but also adding how their perception of self-determination may affect their choices, an analysis may provide a more complete reading that encompasses all the relational factors influencing indigenous these particular groups of women's life. Thus, a reading of *Power* and *The Round House* applying this extended paradigm, may contribute to a better understanding (and more exposure for) the issues the authors want to convey.

This thesis aims to explore theoretically the development of characterization in general and the coming of age genre in particular, before moving on to see how Linda Hogan and Louise Erdrich have utilized this genre in order to convey the issues they want to illuminate in *Power* and *The Round House*. Since these novels are by and about indigenous women, this thesis will argue the necessity for an extended paradigm in order to account for the complexity of the indigenous characters in *Power* and *The Round House,* based on an analysis of the concept 'intersectionality'. The main goal for this analysis is to suggest how similar readings of literature by and about indigenous women might become valuable contributions from feminist criticism in the ongoing fight for equal rights.

CHAPTER 1

Characterization, the Coming of Age Narrative and Character Analysis

Of

The Round House and *Power*

The coming of age genre has existed since the 18th Century, and although it has developed from an originally very rigid form, it has continued to expand its ubiquity until today. The genre is immensely popular still, and as this chapter will demonstrate, it is particularly popular in the US. A character-based narrative requires a thorough character analysis, and as chapter 2 and 3 will demonstrate, there are certain factors that need to be included when reading characters with an indigenous or ethnocentric background. In order to study these characters within the framework of the coming of age genre, it is important to establish an overview of characters and their function within a literary work. I will return to the coming of age genre after giving a brief overview of the development characterization, supporting my claim that it is necessary to open up a character analysis in order to include all factors affecting characters, rather than narrowing the parameters for the reading in order to fit into an already existing paradigm. A key challenge for feminist criticism during the last decades has been finding a unique 'female' perspective within the already established 'male' paradigms (see chapter 3 – introduction).

This thesis aims to demonstrate that when reading literature by and about certain groups of women, certain factors that pertain only to particular groups of women have to be included in order to understand their actions and the issues the authors want to convey better. However, first it is important to establish the historical background for character analysis, and even though some scholars claim that 'character is dead', and although I do admire and appreciate literary works experimenting with no characters, it does not mean that character does not still have an important function, to 'mirror life'. In my opinion, character has the most important function in a work that has a socio-political message to convey, like *The Round House* and *Power* do. The fact that the coming of age-genre, which is very character-based, is still so immensely popular and frequently used by contemporary authors, is a testimony in itself to the importance of character in a story, suggesting that, most likely, the traditional idea of a character will continue to live on in new great stories far into the unforeseen future.

Literary scholars often describe characters in a more general way as constructs that perform actions within a story. When present in a work of fiction, characters can manifest as anything from a main character who 'drives' the plot forward in various directions, to merely functioning as a main object for the 'hero's' quest or someone standing in the background. They may help to illustrate important themes, work as catalysts for action, represent a group of people, a social class, or function as a 'bouncing ball' for the main character. The list of functions characters may serve in a story is endless; hence, the function of characters in a work of fiction is undeniably very important. However, on the historical timeline from Horace and Aristotle, to the Enlightenment period, on to realism, and then towards modernism and post-modernism, the use

and function of characters has changed dramatically. In his *Preface to Shakespeare*, Samuel Johnson compares the works of Shakespeare to those of other dramatists at the time:

> Shakespeare has no heroes; his scenes are occupied only by men, who act and speak as the reader thinks that he should himself have spoken or acted on the same occasion…[H]is drama is the *mirror of life* [my italics]…and if he preserves the essential character, is not very careful of distinctions super induced and adventitious. (Norton, Johnson 375-6).

I include this comment by Johnson because in my opinion, it encompasses the essence of a character's function – to 'mirror life'. I will return to how the characters in *The Round House* and *Power* 'mirror life', and show how for that reason alone it is necessary to incorporate all factors affecting said characters in an analysis. If a character fulfils his or her function in a story according to Johnson, they 'mirror life' in the setting in which the author has placed them. It is not a great leap to suggest that in order to understand the characters in a literary work, who 'mirror life', we need to know the circumstances constituting the life they 'mirror', which is what I wish to demonstrate in the following character analysis. Stephen Kern argues that the purposes or functions of a character change along with social/political developments, as well as increased knowledge in various fields, such as psychology and anatomy. For example, in Johnson's time women or people of colour were not regarded as equal to white men, and so for characters to be a 'mirror of life' as society developed, 'new' characters had to be invented, and they had to be portrayed (and analyzed) in a new way. Johnson and his peers[1] started what within less than a century developed into a revolution within literature, realism.

[1] Samuel Johnson enjoyed the esteem of London's literary circle and became great friends with many other prominent men of the time including Adam Smith, Sir Joshua Reynolds, Edmund Burke, and Oliver Goldsmith with whom he founded the "Club", later known as the Literary Club. Biography written by C. D. Merriman for Jalic Inc. Copyright Jalic Inc. 2007, accessed on www.online-literature.com/samuel-johnson/, 07/13/2017

Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist* (1838) marks the beginning of a major shift where suddenly novels provided a new perspective for the middle class on the situation for lower class people at the time. The protagonist is an innocent child, corrupted by a society where he has no chance to improve his life situation except by turning to crime. The shift with regard to character is mainly that the character's traits and personality become increasingly important, and the use of children or adolescents maturing into adulthood in many of his novels, emphasized the issues Dickens wanted to illuminate. Novelists struggled to create intricate and layered characters who, as much as possible, seemed as though they could be flesh and blood creatures. Realist authors achieved much of this effect through internal monologues and a keen understanding of human psychology. The field of psychology was in the process of evolving at the time. Students of the human mind were beginning to realize that an individual is composed of a network of motivations, interests, desires, and fears. How these forces interact and sometimes do battle with each other plays a large part in the development of personality. By narrating the stories in a more plain language, with characters that the audience recognized, realistic literature managed to fulfil its purpose, which, as proclaimed by Georg Brandes[iii], was to "cause debate and encourage progress" (Encyclopaedia Britannica). One example of such narratives is Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, where the protagonist is a woman struggling with the choice of adhering to what society and her husband expects of her, or breaking with norms and accepted behaviour in the hopes of being true to her own beliefs. Ibsen constructed his plays around the main characters, and the elements of classical tragedy (reformed by Shakespeare in the Renaissance), are certainly present in the plot of *A Doll's House*. However, the problems Ibsen addressed were at the time not heard of on stage. The characters were more anti-heroes, and he did not give them romanticized traits. In

addition, these plays described the new bourgeois class, so the characters had their own social rules and challenges influencing their choices, which also made them more 'realistic'.

This shift in characterization continues (with some exceptions) until we reach the end of the 19th century, when Sigmund Freud launched his theories on psychoanalysis, the United States had abolished slavery, British colonies were beginning to fight for liberation, and secularization increased, resulting in the decline of Victorian virtues and their influence on western society and literature. Some key works mark the transition from realism (and subsequently naturalism) to modernism. Focusing on the shift in characterization, I might mention Knut Hamsun's breakthrough novel *Hunger* (1890), which is often read (and from the 1980s on unequivocally canonized), as a prototype for a modernist text. Another novel clearly inspired by Hamsun's style, but achieving much more attention within literary criticism, is James Joyce's novel *A Portrait of The Artist as A Young Man* (1916), which represents the Künstler-roman that developed from the Bildungs-roman. These novels represented the 'new' focus on the inner struggles of the 'modern' human being, as well as the necessity to invent new ways to 'mirror' how people related to a world that became increasingly fluctuating and unstable. For instance, how would we understand the suicide of Septimus in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, without knowledge about shell shock and the effects on soldiers after World War I? More importantly in this context, how could we understand the subtle clues to Mrs. Dalloway's inner war if we did not have knowledge of her status as a woman at the time the novel is set? Both *Power* and *The Round House* may be described as 'Bildungsroman novels', or to use the more contemporary term, coming of age narratives, where the plot, but also the socio-political commentaries, are

centred around the characters. I will return to the novels more elaborately in subchapters 1.1 and 1.2.

The task of close-reading characters in current works of fiction seems to be more of a challenge than with earlier literature. Within the realm of literary theory today, it seems to be a common understanding that characters are predominantly constructed elements included in a story in order to fulfil some purpose, and are not meant to be read as real-life individuals. Until the literary period of realism, it may have been easier for critics to analyze characters as mere constructs in a set paradigm. However, changes in society, medicine, and politics that took place from the mid-1850s and throughout the 20th century had a massive impact on reforming how humans related to their surroundings, in addition to how these surroundings affected their perception of what it means to be human. This process is ongoing, so the way we read characters from a critical point of view must change accordingly. Due to the fact that from the literary period of modernism until today, the distinctions between different literary genres have become more fluid, in moving forward within literary criticism (at least when it comes to analysing characters), it may be time to slowly move away from the more established, narrow paradigms, which have been very useful so far. It is not a bold statement to say that people today are even more complex with regard to social status, gender affiliations, race, and personal traits than the modernist human may have been. Globalization and migration incite a development towards viewing identity and ethnicity differently than what has been the norm, something that also affects people, and arguably characters in current literature presumably aim to 'mirror'. As Kern demonstrates with his examination of the transition from realism to modernism, these changes require 'new' characters in order to, as Johnson states, 'mirror life' in a way that is relatable to the reader.

As this thesis aims to explore, characters in testimonial narratives like *The Round House* and *Power* tend to be more 'real' than mere constructs, suggesting that at least for certain types of narratives, characters become more than constructs and take on a life of their own, related to the facts the plots are based on or provide knowledge about. Given that the setting of the novels I have chosen both originate from real issues or incidents, it is evident that the protagonists' respective journeys appear more autobiographical and realistic than a completely fictive narrative. The focus for this thesis is to demonstrate the need for expanded paradigms to account for the complexity of indigenous characters, in addition to suggesting that similar readings might be an area where feminist criticism can make a valuable contribution to the ongoing struggle for equality for all women. The next part of this chapter will explore how the coming of age narrative is used in *Power* and *The Round House,* and move on to unveil why Louise Erdrich and Linda Hogan chose this particular genre for their novels.

The coming of age narrative

Power and *The Round House* are both coming of age narratives. This chapter aims to explore why this genre is still so popular, and examine why the authors have made a conscious choice to use it, in addition to how the genre works in the novels. Louise Erdrich has stated that she constructed *The Round House* in the form of a suspense coming of age narrative, as part of an agenda to reach more readers with the important messages she wishes to convey. The choice of using this genre enables a new perspective on the issues addressed in the novels. Since the genre is character-based, it opens up for a multi-layered analysis focusing on the characters' circumstances, which this thesis aims to provide. Due to the immense popularity among

American readers this genre has, the novels I have chosen also call for an examination of the advantages this genre may provide for certain types of stories.

What we refer to as the 'coming of age genre' is the current equivalent to the Bildungs-roman, a literary form of the novel that originated in Germany towards the end of the 18th Century. According to Roger Fowler and Peter Childs, the commonly regarded prototype for the Bildungs-roman is Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, published in 1795-6 (Childs 18). Broadly stated, the term originally applied to literature revolving around the personal growth of a young adult developing into a 'productive' member of society through facing various experiences and/or obstacles that affected his or her choices. According to Goethe, the gradual growth of the protagonist "depends on a harmonious negotiation of interior and exterior selfhoods, a reconciliation that involves the balancing of social role with individual fulfillment" (qtd.in Childs 18). The Bildungs-roman, or coming of age narrative, is often some kind of educational journey for the protagonist. Either it is a physical journey where along the way the protagonist discovers new layers of self-awareness, or it may manifest as a metaphorical journey, where the hero faces a problem or has to make a difficult choice. In the latter, one or several decisive incidents or characters may provide the 'stages' of the journey leading to more self-awareness.

The development of this genre has gone through several stages, broadening the parameters for what constitutes as a coming of age narrative. Although the genre is quite easy to define, the wide range of topics addressed by this genre throughout the last two centuries continues to

expand, again complicating the task of defining the term immensely. In the Enlightenment era, the genre rested on the core idea of "completion through enlightenment" (18), as mentioned earlier. In Victorian Britain, the Bildungs-roman became associated with social dislocation: a young adult dreams of becoming an artist, but realizes through his journey that the 'right' thing to do is to grow up, start a family and become a productive member of the Industrial Revolution's capitalist society. Novels like Charles Dicken's *David Copperfield* (1850) and *Great Expectations* (1861) focused on psychosocial interaction and showed the protagonists facing challenges in finding their identity, in a society that was going through a massive transition in almost all areas. Social, economic, scientific and religious ways of thinking people considered antiquated were replaced with new ideas at a pace that had never been seen before (Childs 18).

Other European countries made use of the coming of age genre in order to represent rebellion against social convention, in particular for women. In France, *Madame Bovary* (1857) by Gustave Flaubert was a controversial sensation. The protagonist is a typical upper middle class woman living in the strictly conventional countryside in France. Through her metaphorical journey, she experiences self-realization within the area of sexual fulfillment, and her rebellion against social conventions is on an abstract level, a symptom of her discontent with her life in general, after the realization that her childish romantic notions of marriage and being a wife were not even close to reality. She refuses to accept her own situation and begins a metaphorical journey, where she discovers her own desires and realizes that she is an individual, to whom social convention (or the established parameters for what a woman could participate in or choose) may not suit very well. Although that does not end well for Madame Bovary

specifically, the novel has continued to be a very important work with regard to women's right to decide their life choices (or the right to self-determination, which chapter 3 will examine).

Towards the 20th century according to Childs and Fowler, "Modernism's addiction to the revelation of the interior life tended to focus attention away from the social interaction of the individual and towards the ineffability of the fractured self" (19). Modernism, in addition to the development of psychological theory and understanding of the human psyche, inspired the development of the Künstler-roman, or 'novel of the artist'. The Künstler-roman emerged as a response to the limited parameters for what a 'productive' member of society should be according to the criteria for the Bildungs-roman, and it became a subgenre that addressed the struggle of an artist to fulfil an artistic potential instead of giving it up and adhering to social convention. As mentioned in the theory introduction on characterization, Knut Hamsun's *Hunger* (1892) and subsequently James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (*1916), as well as Thomas Mann's *Doktor Faustus* (1947), are some of the most celebrated novels within this subgenre.

This genre has a particular connection to American culture. America seen metaphorically in light of its history is a 'young' country, and there is a tradition in American culture for starting over. Maybe this is related because the original settlers came across the continent exactly for that reason, to make a new beginning, leaving behind the Old World that did not offer many possibilities for social climbing, leaving the majority of citizens doing all the work for basically nothing in return, while a few increased their fortune year after year. Kenneth Millard connects the 'innocence' of these settlers, and the New World, to the innocence in the protagonist of a

typical coming of age narrative, he asks: "How is such innocence conceptualized and configured by these novels, what forms of social experience does it encounter and what kind of maturity might it be said to achieve?" (Millard 5). Millard claims that innocence "has a particular resonance in the context of American national mythology" (5). For example, one particularly prevalent conception of the United States is that it originated as a nation by means of a decisive break with the Old World that had grown corrupt. Millard concludes:

> America is the rebellious teenager, impatient with the authority of its European parents and eager to create its own character founded on a different set of values and priorities. So there is a confluence of the genre of the coming of-age novel and a particularly, or even uniquely, American narrative of national identity; the individual new citizen's drive towards new forms of independence is coterminous with that of the burgeoning nation (Millard, 5).

Millard refers to R. W. B. Lewis's *The American Adam* (1955) and argues by acknowledging Lewis's thesis as "an influential or even dominant strain of the national mythology of the United States" (6) that the coming-of-age novel has a unique position in terms of national identity. Millard claims that this position is related to "the ways that it appropriates and refurbishes that mythology for its own contemporary purposes" (Millard 6). However, Leslie Fiedler emphasizes that this American focus on 'starting fresh', or "the constant return to beginnings", is a part of a "disproportionate faith in the new which is also debilitating" (209). Fiedler states: "The images of childhood and adolescence haunt our greatest works as an unintended symbolic confession of the inadequacy we sense but cannot remedy" (Fiedler 210). *Power* and *The Round House* unveil circumstances within American society seen from the perspective of two indigenous adolescent protagonists, providing a unique insight for the reader that would not be as close to reality if someone outside this ethnic group had written about them. Structuring the novels as coming of

age narratives where the narrators view the events in retrospect, opens up for more mature reflections from the protagonists on the incidents driving the respective plots forward.

In *Power*, we meet Omishto, an adolescent living with her mother and stepfather Herm in the territory of the Taiga tribe in the swamplands of Florida. In her mother's house, she lives the 'modern' way, but she spends more time with her aunt Ama (who is not really her aunt, but goes by that title). Ama lives in a house away from the 'modern' houses, but not with the elders in the tribe in Kiili Swamp. However, the living conditions in Ama's house are not anywhere near the standard of the protagonist's own house. Ama lives in the more traditional way, something Omishto's mother is both critical and a bit jealous of. The novel starts out with a hurricane ripping through the whole community, and Omishto finds herself in the middle of an inferno of wind and rain, fighting to survive. As the story develops, supernatural elements are introduced, unfolded by the encounter with four women from Kiili Swamp, who just appear after the hurricane from nothing, like a mirage, half-real and half unreal. The same women also appeared a year earlier, right in front of a man named Abraham Swallow, who was guilty of drinking and beating his wife and children. He was seen running into the woods screaming, never to come back alive. Chapter 2 in the novel opens with Omishto stating that he "died, either by fear or magic" (*Power* 5). Ama discovers that there is a wounded panther roaming around, and she brings Omishto with her in order to find the panther and kill it so that it does not have to suffer anymore. By killing the panther, Ama takes the life of the most sacred animal to the Taiga people, in addition to violating western law, because the Florida panther is classified as an endangered species. The killing, and the aftermath, where Ama chooses exclusion from the tribe because she does not want to tell the elders of the state the animal was in, spurs the coming of

age process in Omishto and leads her to make a very difficult choice at the end of the novel. Hogan depicts Omishto as torn between two 'worlds' or societies, the traditional and the 'western'. On a concrete level she has to choose a side in a conflict where both sides are right and wrong (pertaining the killing of the panther), causing an ethical dilemma on an abstract level. Omishto's dilemma is not simplified by the fact that she in practice has to choose between the elders in the tribe (represented by Ama), and her own mother.

In *The Round House*, we meet the teenager Joe Coutts, the son of Geraldine and Judge Bazil Coutts, and the year is 1988. As the novel begins, Joe and his father Bazil, who works as a tribal judge, are tending their garden in North Dakota. After a while, they realize that Joe's mother has not come home. Joe and Bazil decide to go look for her, only to find Geraldine still sitting in her car, smelling like gasoline, and all of her clothes covered in vomit and blood. Joe and his father takes Geraldine to the hospital at once, where Joe realizes that someone has violently raped his mother. After returning from the hospital, Geraldine stays in her bed all day, as a reaction to the attack. Joe and his father do their best to make her feel better, by reading to her and bringing her food in her room. As time progresses, Bazil even decides that the whole family eat together in Geraldine's room, so they can continue with their 'normal' life as much as possible under the circumstances. It is strange that Geraldine refuses to tell anything about the rape or the rapist, neither to Bazil nor law enforcement, even though it becomes clear that she knows who he is. Joe hangs out with his friends Cappy, Zack, and Angus, feeling stressed out about the lack of progress in the case. One night Joe's father brings home case files from his office for he and Joe to look through, hoping that they might find something that could help forwarding Geraldine's case. One of these cases refers to the adoption of Linda Lark by Betty Wishkob, and for some

reason, Bazil marks this case as important. When Joe has free time, he, Cappy, Zack, and Angus try to investigate the crime. They go to the Round House, where they have found out that the attack took place, and look for evidence. Joe finds the gas can that the attacker probably used on Geraldine there. Another clue is a six-pack of Hamm's beers. The boys go through several suspects they know drink that particular brand of beer, among them Father Travis. They exclude him from suspicion when they find out that his genitals are so scarred that he could not have raped Geraldine Coutts.

Joe's father takes him to see Linda Wishkob, and Joe learns that Linda Lark is her birth name. Linda tells them her life story, explaining how her mother, Grace Lark, abandoned her as a baby because of a birth defect, so Betty Wishkob took her and raised her. Mrs. Lark had not shown any interest in Linda, until recently, when Mrs. Lark has contacted Linda in order to try to convince her to donate her kidney to Linda's twin brother Linden. Linda chooses to proceed with the donation even though she experiences Linden being verbally abusive to her. One day after this conversation with Linda, Joe finds a doll in the reservation's lake. When he takes off its head, Joe finds a large bundle of money inside. He takes the money to his aunt Sonja, who works with Joe's uncle Whitey at their local gas station. The money amounts to forty thousand dollars, and Sonja helps him deposit the money in a series of bank accounts for college, then she buries the passbooks in the woods. Afterwards, Sonja offers Joe a job at the gas station, and Joe accepts at once, because he is extremely attracted to Sonja.

Joe discovers that on the afternoon of her attack, Geraldine went to retrieve a file from her office. When Bazil and Joe confront her about the file, Geraldine finally tells them exactly what happened on the night of her rape: Geraldine's assailant had abducted her at her office and then taken her to the Round House where he was holding another woman hostage, Mayla Wolfskin. Geraldine heard her attacker asking Mayla where 'the money' was, probably the money Joe has found in the doll. When the attacker threatened to kill both women and Mayla Wolfskin's baby, Geraldine managed to escape. The file she had retrieved from the office was Mayla Wolfskin's, stating that Linden Lark was the father of her baby. At this point, Joe adds two and two together, and Lark is now his prime suspect. In this period, Joe spends much time with Whitey and Sonja and goes to work at the gas station with them every day. One day, while pumping gas to a white customer at the gas station, Joe realizes, to his horror, that the customer is Linden Lark. After a violent incident at Whitey and Sonja's house, Joe goes to stay with his aunt Clemence. One night Joe falls asleep and sees a silvery spirit outside his window. Joe immediately believes this is a ghost that wants to show him or tell him something important, and he tells Mooshum, who lives with aunt Clemence, about the spirit. Mooshum begins to tell Joe a legend about his ancestor, Akii and her son Nanapush. This is where Joe learns about wiindigoo justice, or the tribal equivalent of vigilante justice, which I will return to in chapter 1.1. Living with the aftermath of the catalyst incident of his mother's experience eventually faces Joe with a choice that becomes life changing: whether to take matters of law in his own hands, or not.

From the 1970s onwards, the coming of age genre has been interpreted by feminist theorists, and joined by gay and lesbian rewritings, such as Jeannette Winterson's *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* (1985) and Alan Hollinghurst's *The Swimming-Pool Library* (1988), yet again renouncing

the traditional boundaries of the genre. I will return to how feminists have used this genre in order to comment on women's position and struggle for equality in chapter 3. In *The Round House* and *Power*, along both protagonists' metaphorical journeys, several characters influence them and contribute to their respective personal development. Some of the most common features of a (traditional) coming of age narrative related to this context are psychological loss of innocence in the protagonist, confrontation with the adult world, moral challenges, individual needs and desires vs. external pressures. Other features also significant to this reading are a sense of failure and/or disappointment, the protagonist becoming aware of his or her limitations, and, finally, the protagonist achieving a higher level of maturity due to acceptance of the complexities and 'grayness' of the world. The next subchapter aims to give an overview of the way Louise Erdrich has constructed her novel *The Round House* as both a coming of age narrative and a suspense novel. In addition, the chapter aims to explore why the choice of genre is important in order to connect the personal level of the plot with the legal issues regarding Native American women Erdrich wants to illuminate.

1.1: The coming of age narrative in *The Round House*

> I should feel happy watching them across the table, but instead I was angered by their ignorance. Like I was the grown-up and the two of them holding hands were the oblivious children. They had no idea what I had gone through for them. Or Cappy. Me and Cappy. (*Round House* 322)

This quotation from Joe in *The Round House* is very interesting, because at this pivotal moment in the novel, the child and parents' roles have become reversed and Joe has done what the legal

system could not do, provided justice for his mother. He decides to go against his core values in order to achieve justice for his mother, making a sacrifice on the level of what a parent might do for their child. In some way, this quotation sums up the essence of this novel's many-layered, intricate plot. The young protagonist, Joe, goes through a coming of age process, he has solved a horrible crime, he has punished the perpetrator, and finally, the way justice prevails at the end manifests as a powerful testimony of the flaws in the legal system that Erdrich aims to highlight in this novel.

In February 2013, Louise Erdrich published a direct attack on legislative authorities in the *New York Times* entitled "Rape on the Reservation",[2] in which she brings to the attention of readers the horrific circumstances for women related to rape and sexual or physical abuse within Native American communities. According to Julie Tharpe, there are three important aspects of this issue:

> 1: The historical background on tribal law and order that has contributed to the crisis in sexual violence on reservations.
>
> 2: Erdrich's fictional illustration and strategic telling of the effects of sexual violence and the response that Erdrich has urged.
>
> 3: How the federal legislation, the Violence against Women Act, may assist. (Tharpe 1)

I will return to the first aspect Tharpe mentions in chapter 2, where I explore the intersectional factors increasing the risk of sexual or physical abuse for women in culturally homogenous areas in particular, evident in both The *Round House* and *Power*, due to both novels revolving around

[2] Complete article by Erdrich on www.nytimes.com/2013/02/27/opinion/native-americans-and-the-violence-against-women-act, February 26, 2013. Accessed 05/27/2018.

women living in indigenous areas of the US. The following subchapter will focus on the second of Tharpe's aspects in order to find out why Erdrich chose the coming of age narrative and the suspense novel format for *The Round House*. Another of Erdrich's novels, *Tracks* (1988), also comments on some of the same issues, enmeshed in the larger picture of colonial oppression against native peoples.[iv]

The Round House is not only a coming of age story masked in a suspense novel plot, it is also a highly relevant contribution to the fight against legal injustice for tribal people, and women in particular. The victim is not the narrator in this novel. Joe narrates the story, now a grown man reflecting on a period in his life that affected and matured him tremendously. Joe's mother suffers a horrible attack, and the thirteen-year-old boy experiences holding his mother's head in his lap on the way to the hospital. The boy makes it his mission to find and punish the person responsible for this crime. He does not get any help from his mother, who has chosen solitude and silence as a way of coping with what has happened to her. So in addition to helping his father look through stacks of court cases in order to find a legal way to give his mother justice, Joe has to talk to family members and other people in the community that provide him with the knowledge that this is not a one-time incident in tribal communities. As Erdrich stated upon winning the National Book Award for *The Round House,* the inspiration to write the novel originated in her desire to spread awareness about a dire situation for Native American women in particular. An excerpt of this interview follows:

> "Justice", Erdrich says, was the seminal issue for *The Round House*. "Right now, tribal governments can't prosecute non-Indians who commit crimes on their land", she says. In the novel's afterword, she writes about the appalling numbers of non-Indian men who rape Indian

> women on tribal lands and escape prosecution because of jurisdictional issues. "I've known about this for a long time but it's an injustice I never knew how to write about. I didn't want to write a polemical piece. Every time I'd talk about the novel, I'd say it's about jurisdiction and—YAWN, people's eyes would glaze over. I thought I have to find a way to tell this story that doesn't make them completely lose consciousness". (National Book Foundation, interview)

Based on the previously mentioned popularity of the coming of age-genre in the US, in addition to the vast audience who read suspense-novels, it is not a bold statement to suggest that this knowledge may have inspired Erdrich's choice of genre.

Jasmine Owens, attorney and former managing editor of the *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology*, goes into detailed background on the jurisdiction issues referenced in *The Round House.* Owens comments on the Tribal Law and Order Act (2010):

> The legislation, lauded as "historic" and "groundbreaking," does not do enough to protect women who have suffered rape and sexual violence. Despite the good press and excitement surrounding the new legislation, it fails to accomplish its stated purpose: "to reduce the prevalence of violent crime in Indian country and to combat sexual and domestic violence against American Indian and Alaska Native women" . . . The amendment does not recognize tribal authority to prosecute rape and other serious felonies and continues to restrict tribal courts' authority to adequately punish tribal members (Owens 3).

Rape and sexual violence in Indian Territory has reached epidemic levels. Data gathered by the United States Department of Justice suggest that American Indian and Alaska Native women are over 2.5 times more likely to be raped or sexually assaulted than other women living in the US (Perry 30). In addition, the identity of those who rape American Indian and Alaska Native

women makes the already brutal act take on tragic significance. While the majority of rapes in the United States are intra-racial (white men mostly rape white women, black men mostly rape black women, etc.), non-Native outsiders typically commit rapes on American Indians and Alaska Natives. According to a report from Amnesty International (2010), the statistics revealed that one in three Native women will be raped in her lifetime; 86 percent of rapes and sexual assaults upon Native women are perpetrated by non-Native men, of whom very few are prosecuted. The Department of Justice reports that a quarter of reported sexual violence towards these women is suffered at the hands of an intimate partner, while 41% of the cases report a stranger as the perpetrator (Amnesty 16-19).

President Barack Obama, who signed the Tribal Law and Order Act (2010) into law, called the situation "an assault on our national conscience".[3] The main judicial reason for this problem is the boundaries of Tribal Law jurisdiction, according to Owens. Tribal Court cannot prosecute non-Tribal people, so the case has to be heard in a State or Federal Court. Due to enormous caseloads, most cases are dismissed due to either lack of evidence or failure to collect sufficient evidence. If we add to this situation the fact that very few cases are reported, we know the actual numbers and ratios are significantly higher. This judicial issue forms the real-life backdrop of the plot in *The Round House*, and although the novel is set in 1988, the legal situation has not changed in practice still, as shown above. In the afterword of *The Round House*, Erdrich refers to many organizations that currently are working to "restore sovereign justice and ensure safety for Native women" such as Minnesota Indian Women's Resource center, Sacred Spirit's First Nation

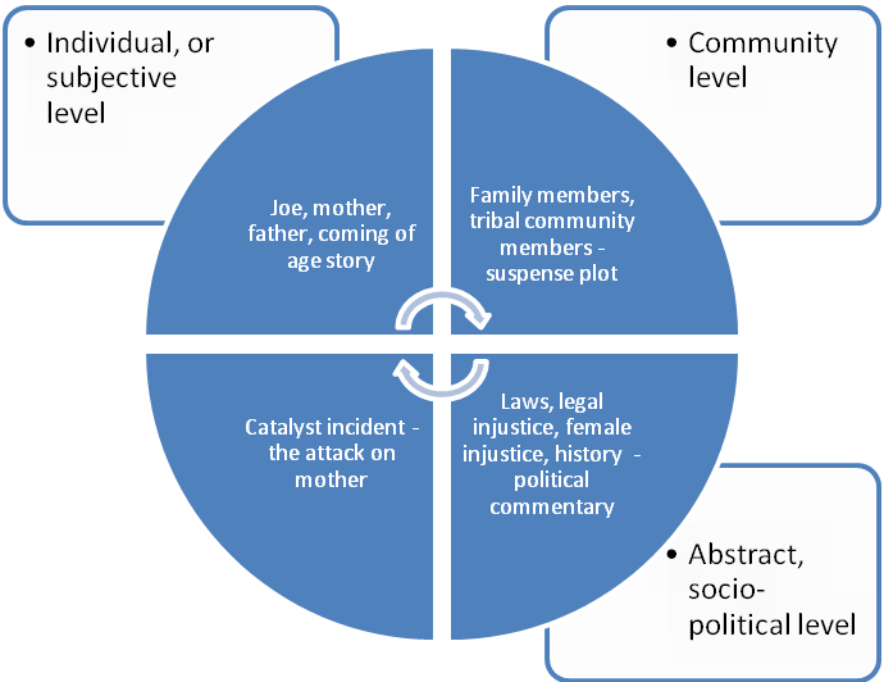
[3] President Barack Obama, Remarks by the President During the Opening of the Tribal Nations Conference & Interactive Discussion with Tribal Leaders (Nov. 5, 2009) (transcript available at www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-during-opening tribal-nations-conference-interactive-discussion).

Coalition, and Anishinabe Legal Services (336). The next part of this subchapter aims to explore why Erdrich's choice of genre and narrator not only has resulted in a highly captivating page-turner of a novel including a vast gallery of characters, but also conveys the important message she wants to illuminate. Each character constitutes a part in the puzzle while simultaneously painting a highly credible picture of a Tribal community.

In an interview with the *National Book Foundation* in 2012, when asked about why she chose to tell the story as coming of age narrative, Erdrich stated:

> In order to write a novel about jurisdictional issues – without falling asleep – I decided to try a character-driven suspense narrative. Personally, I have always envied and wanted the freedom that boys have…Also, as this is a book of memory; I am able to add the resonance of Joe's maturity. (*National Book Foundation*, interview)

Below I have tried to visualize how Erdrich has masterfully woven three novel formats into a 'three-level' plot, with each level shedding light on different aspects of the catalyst incident (the attack on Joe's mother Geraldine Coutts) that binds all of the characters together. In my opinion, Erdrich has found a very powerful and ingenious method of showing the ripple effect of a horrible crime in *The Round House*. In addition, she shows how the universal theme of revenge and the elementary need for justice affect not only the victim, but render many people surrounding the victim helpless and angry when the system created to provide justice legally does not work satisfactorily.



Using the terms from the chart above, the *individual, subjective level* of this novel is the personal experience and coming of age journey that the main character goes through. Joe moves in one instance from living his life as a 'care-free' teenager to having to watch his mother helpless and hurt, and then to choosing isolation and silence, shutting everyone out. We see him growing in maturity as he learns more things about reality than he is competent to handle at his age, in addition to daily being faced with the aftermath of the horrible attack on his mother. As he says at the time when he has decided to seek revenge on his mother's attacker: "She had treated me like someone older than I was…It was as if she had expected me to grow up in those weeks and now not to need her. If she was expecting me to act alone on my instincts, I was doing just that. But I still needed her" (Erdrich 277). Because Joe tells the story, we do not get to hear so much of the victim's thoughts, but it gives a unique perspective and description of the helplessness felt

by the closest family in such a situation. Joe observes his father desperately trying to stabilize their family life again by having daily dinners in the mother's bedroom, without much luck:

> Again, though my mother was angry, my father opened the shades and even a window, to let in a breeze… I was to become overly familiar with this glazed scene during those dinners because I didn't want to look at my mother, propped up staring wearily at us as if she'd just been shot, or rolled into a mummy pretending to be in the afterlife. My father tried to keep a conversation going every night…he forged on, like a lone paddler on an endless lake of silence. (161)

In addition to coping with this tragedy in his family, Joe is also a young teenager, who is at a crucial point in his life himself, growing up to become a man in this community, as well as discovering his own sexual desires in the middle of all of this. This experience provides Joe with a unique perspective on how some men are not good role models for young men.

The male role models surrounding Joe are not all good. Whitey is one of these 'bad' role models. He runs the gas station and diner where Joe earns his pocket money by helping out. Both Whitey and his wife Sonja drink quite a lot. Through an incident with Sonja (which I will return to in more detail in chapter 2), Joe realizes that in his community, domestic violence is accepted, and that women do not seem to do very much about it. After Whitey has beaten Sonja and attacked Joe, and he is lying passed out on the living-room floor, she says to Joe "Don't worry. He'll be good for a long time now" (188), which in itself is an indication of how people respond to violations and abuse in his community (see chapters 2 and 3 under the discussion on history of abuse). Joe's choices moving forward reflect that he is not mature enough to emotionally distance himself when necessary and make the 'right' decisions. However, he seems to reflect

quite maturely considering his age on how he sees no choice but to take action and kill Linden Lark, before his mother finds *her* way of stopping her assailant: "There was no one else who could do it. I saw it. I was only thirteen and if I got caught I would only be the subject to juvenile justice laws" (277). What he does not reflect on (which is how we see that he was still just a child at the time), is how his emotions would be affected after the deed was done. Due to that one choice, he has to live the rest of his life with the burden of taking part in killing another human being: "I was not exactly safe from Lark. Neither was Cappy. Every night he came to us in dreams" (324). This moment in the novel marks the climax of the coming of age narrative, where there is no point of return. This moment somehow reverses the roles in his family. Joe has now gone from being a child to taking care of his parents: "My mother was outside, kneeling in the dirt of the garden with a colander…She gave the colander a little jounce, to settle the beans. That's why I did it…And I was satisfied right then. So she could give her colander a shake…She could pick her bush beans all day and nobody was going to bother her" (311). Not only do we hear the story from a boy's perspective, Joe narrates the story in retrospect, looking back with the experience and emotional distance of an adult, assessing his own actions and thoughts along the way, providing an expanded insight into the personal level of this story.

The *community level of the story* presents itself when Joe has to talk to various members of his family and others in order to figure out who could have done this to his mother. In doing this, he meets Linda Wishkob and hears her story of abuse and injustice, which also offers some new information about Linden Lark, Geraldine's assailant (I will return to Linda Wishkob's story in chapter 3). Not only does Joe discover the clues that eventually lead him to 'solving' the crime, he discovers many things about the traditional way of living and the importance of the tribal

ways. His father tells him about the Ojibwe law and the incident when Joe's "great-aunt was saved by a turtle" (163). Joe's father explains to Joe how the tribal community has an important role in their lives:

> The clan system…punished and rewarded; it dictated marriages and regulated commerce; it told which animals a person could hunt and which to appease, which would have pity on the doodem or a fellow being of that clan, which would carry messages up to the Creator over to the spirit world, down through the layers of the earth or across a lodge to a sleeping relative. (163)

Erdrich draws the spiritual world into the community level of the story when Joe, after believing he has seen a ghost who seems to want to tell him something, meets with Mooshum, an elder in the tribal community. Mooshum tells Joe that someone has thrown his spirit onto him, and 'sees' that in order to find his luck (in that setting meaning progress in bringing Lark to justice), Joe should "go to…(his)…doodem"[4] and "find the ajijaak[5]" (142). He goes to his 'doodem', which is a "slough outside town" (142), and, after sitting there a while; a heron shows him a place in the water where he finds a doll with forty thousand dollars inside. The doll belonged to Mayla Wolfskin, a woman who had disappeared some time ago. The last person known to have seen her was Linden Lark, who had an affair with her. Mayla would never leave the doll there, filled with money, so someone who did not know the money was inside must have thrown it in the lake. In addition, if Mayla had moved, as Lark explained when interrogated about her, she would have brought the money. In addition, when his mother reveals that the file she was retrieving from the office on the day of the attack, was Mayla Wolfskin's, Joe is certain that Lark is not only his

[4]Doodem means clan or totem. In this context, it means a holy place of spirit. Ojibwe people's dictionary, ojibwe.lib.umn.edu/main-entry/doodem-nad.

[5] The term 'ajijaak' signifies a crane, and in *The Round House*, both Joe's father and grandfather had in their time ceremoniously been taken up in the Ajijak, which signifies the clan's 'inner circle'. Joe want his 'doodemag', his luck, to help him out, and he states: "herons and cranes are his luck" (142).

mother's assailant, but most likely a killer as well. 'Everyone' in the community is certain that Lark has killed Mayla, but no one has any proof. Joe understands that in order to bring Lark to trial, he must find Mayla's body.

Mooshum tells Joe the legend of Akii, who was "just an ordinary woman", who "could make out in dreams where to find the animals" (191), so her family never starved. Akii's husband, Mirage, "looked at other women" and had been caught several times. Akii still stayed with him, Mooshum explains, and life went on until "the year they forced us into our boundary" (191), 'they' signifying the white government. The white settlers killed all the animals, especially the buffalo, and the clan was starving. However, due to her special talent, Akii always brought home "a tidbit" for her family. Suddenly, she could not get any more food. Because "he was tired of Akii", her husband pretended to see the signs of Akii becoming possessed by a 'windigoo'[6], so that she had to be killed. There had to be an agreement in order to kill a wiindigoo, and the whole clan had to be a part of it. The killing had to be done by someone "in the blood family" (192). Akii's sister and brother refused, and so Nanapush, her nine year old son, "was given a knife and told to kill his mother" (192), now bound up against a tree. Nanapush could not kill his mother, and so they tortured her by leaving her bound up to freeze and starve to death. She broke free, but the men captured her again. The men tied Akii, attached a rock to her legs, and put her under the ice in the lake. Nanapush stays behind, and witnesses his mother bursting out of the water after holding her breath until the men left. She sends Nanapush on a trail to find buffalo, which he does. He almost freezes to death after killing the buffalo, but his mother finds him and they bring all the meat back to their starving clan, who tried to kill her twice. Ashamed of how they

[6] A winter cannibal monster, according to the Ojibwe people's dictionary. See footnote 4.

had treated her, they accepted the meat. Akii took her children and left, an independent woman. It is possible to read the story about Akii on at least two levels. On one level, it is an inspirational tale about never giving up the fight, assigning the 'roles' of Akii and Nanapush to the indigenous people as a community. Even though unjustly treated by the white settlers and by their own people, they would not accept defeat. On an individual level, Akii's story is also a cautionary tale about the necessity to be thorough when judgment is to be handed out, and that the task of defining justice is more or less always an ethical dilemma. As Mooshum says: "wiindigoo justice must be pursued with great care" (199).

Now why would Mooshum tell Joe this story? Joe explains:

> When I woke up, I had forgotten Mooshum's story – although I remembered it later on in the day, when my father came to get me, because he said the word carcass…He was saying *They've got this damned carcass in custody*. At that moment, I remembered Mooshum's story…and simultaneously knew they'd caught my mother's rapist. (200)

Mooshum's tale of wiindigoo contributes to Joe's final decision to gain justice the only way he could see possible at the time. Through discovering the various stories from people in the community, Joe realizes that Lark is not only his mother's assailant, he is a man who will continue to commit crimes unless he is stopped, as he has done similar things to several other women, like Mayla Wolfskin. To Joe, Linden Lark *is* a wiindigoo, an 'animal' that ought to be killed. The problem is that if he were to be brought to trial, he could not have been tried due to Joe's mother not being able to say exactly the spot where the attack took place. The attack took place at the Round House, where three borders cross, tribal, state and federal. Hence, the spot

where the attack took place determines which jurisdiction is responsible for investigating and bringing the case to trial.[7] Joe's main role model, his father, represents the legal system as a Tribal Judge, but he cannot help, and he eventually suffers a heart attack due to the stressful situation.

Eventually, Joe's mother's decision to stop Lark, makes up Joe's mind to take Lark's life: "She gazed past me, transfixed by a thought. The knife crease shot up between her eyebrows. It's something Daddy told me. A story about a wiindigoo. Lark's trying to eat us, Joe. I won't let him, she said. I will be the one to stop him" (*Round House* 262). With his father incapacitated, Joe begins structuring his quite intelligent plan to kill Lark, given that he is thirteen at the time. He justifies the act to himself through dedication to his purpose, "building lie upon lie", preparing for his deed, until lying came "as naturally as honesty once had" (275). In thirteen-year-old Joe's mind, his 'purpose', which he names "Sins Crying Out to Heaven for justice" (275) retrieved from the list of sins he had learnt from Father Travis (258), is by the end worthy of any means in order to achieve. Joe tries to find some peace with what he is about to do: "If they could prosecute Linden Lark, I would not have to lie about the ammunition or practice to do what someone had to do. And quickly, before my mother figured out her version of stopping him" (276). Adult Joe reflects on his teenage self in this moment:

> Now that I have lived some, I understand what happened to me in the kitchen that night, and why it happened when it happened…I had never really been afraid before, not for myself…Though

[7] See under the headline *Abstract, socio-political leve*l for more details on the legal issues

> damaged, my parents were sleeping upstairs, in the same room, the same bed. But I understood their peace was temporary. Lark would appear again. Unless they found Mayla dead, or she showed up alive and filed a kidnapping charge, he was free to walk this earth…I had to do what I had to do…I lay on the floor, let fear cover me, and I tried to keep breathing while it shook me like a dog shakes a rat. (*Round House* 278-9)

Joe manages through this night, and comes out of it with an important realization that shows his growth throughout the novel: "Now that I knew fear, I also knew it was not permanent. As powerful as it was, its grip on me would loosen. It would pass" (280). After Linda Wishkob tells him that not only has Linden Lark escaped prosecution but also left a phone message to her stating that a woman would give him money in exchange for something and that "he's going to fix up the house and live there forever" (282), Joe becomes even more determined to proceed with his plan to stop Lark.

Erdrich returns to the legal issues that inspired her to write the novel at the end, where Joe's father, representing the legal system that failed his wife in his position as a judge, attempts to "argue a legal precedent" for Lark's killer, already knowing that it is his own son. In some way, Judge Coutt's soliloquy also constitutes Erdrich's explanation, or 'defense', of the vigilante justice that takes place with the execution of Linden Lark:

> I ask myself in this situation, and one sworn to uphold the law in every case, what I would do if I had any information that could lead to the identity of the killer…But I have decided that I would do nothing…Any judge knows there are many kinds of justice - for instance ideal justice as opposed to the best-we-can-do-justice…There was no question of his guilt…Lark's killing is a

> wrong thing which serves an ideal justice…It threads that unfair maze of land title law by which Lark could not be prosecuted…Yet..[t]hat person who killed Lark will live with the human consequences of having taken a life…I must at least protect the person who took on that task...It could be argued that Lark met the definition of a wiindigoo, and that…his killing fulfilled the requirements of a very old law. (323-4)

When Joe finds out that the body of Mayla Wolfskin has been discovered, he realizes that Lark would have been sent to jail for the rest of his life after all (327). Although not specified why in the novel, Joe's nightmares about Lark stop after learning that he would have been sentenced to death anyway, indicating that his decision to kill him was in some way 'right'. However, as one of the features of the coming of age narrative listed in the introduction to this subchapter, Joe realizes that the adult world has many 'grey' areas, and sometimes, decisions (or choices) are both right and wrong, something the analysis of the protagonist Omishto in *Power* also will demonstrate. After the car accident that kills his best friend Cappy (who shot the deadly load into Lark), Joe reflects on his own 'catapult launch' into the adult world:

> There was that moment when my mother and father walked in the door disguised as old people. I thought the miles in the car had bent them, dulled their eyes, even grayed and whitened their hair and caused their hands and voices to tremble…I found, as I rose from the chair, I'd gotten old along with them. I was broken and fragile…Nobody shed tears and there was no anger...I don't remember that they even looked at me or I at them after the shock of that first moment when we all realized we were old. (335)

Joe is narrating this story as an adult looking back to this important period of his adolescence, and although he does not say very much about how it has been to live with the aftermath of his

'wiindigoo justice' against Lark, he does work as a lawyer. In that sense, Erdrich brings all the levels of this story together by Joe's (in some way) continuing the fight his father (and mother through her work as a legal secretary) could not finish, attempting to improve the legal situation for *all* individuals in their tribal community. As Judge Coutts explains to him: "Some day. We want the right to prosecute criminals of all races on all lands within our original boundaries" (243).

The *abstract or socio-political level* of this novel is not only included in the story by the attack on Geraldine Coutts and the quest to catch the perpetrator, but also in the choice of characters. As explained in the first part of this analysis, the novel addresses legal jurisdiction complexities for Native women on U.S. reservation lands, where Tribal Court does not have the authority to convict and sentence rapes committed by non-Tribal perpetrators on Tribal women. One example is a court ruling from 1978: "Indian tribal courts do not have inherent criminal jurisdiction to try and to punish non-Indians, hence may not assume such jurisdiction unless specifically authorized to do so by Congress" (Oliphant v. Suquamish Indian Tribe. 435 US 191 1978). What this means is that federal courts may choose not to try a case where a non-Indian raped a tribal woman. Due to the fact that the 'real' building the Round House is in the middle of three jurisdictions, this court ruling exemplifies what happens to Joe's mother in the aftermath of the rape, symbolizing the legal complexity with regard to legal boundaries. Thus, they need to know exactly the spot where the attack happened in order to find who is responsible for prosecuting the case. Since Geraldine Coutts cannot remember exactly where the attack took place, they are not able to move forward with the prosecution. Judge Coutts explains: "The Round House is on the far edge of tribal trust, where our court has jurisdiction, though of course not over a white man. So federal

law applies…But just to one side, a corner of that is state park, where state law applies" (*Round House* 210). The choice of characters enables Erdrich to braid the legal issues into the plot: Joe's father is a judge, his mother works at the tribal registry office, and it is in her work there that she encounters Lark's 'work' for the first time, in the case of Mayla Wolfskin. Julie Tharp explains:

> Having the victim married to a tribal judge provides us with natural access to the history and complexity of tribal law while also showing us a man deeply affected by his paralysis within it, his complete inability to try the man who has brutally attacked and attempted to immolate his wife. Judge Coutts is essentially emasculated. And as an honorable upholder of justice, he cannot bring himself to vigilante justice. (Tharp 30)

Joe's father illustrates the problem with tribal law by displaying an old, moldy casserole he has dumped on the table, stacking knives, forks, and other utensils on top of it. He then stands back and says, "That's it...That's Indian Law" (*Round House* 241). He goes on to explain that in order to set things right eventually, he must not fall into the trap of vigilante justice even though the situation is as unfair as it is. He states: "We are trying to build a solid base here for our sovereignty…We try to press against the boundaries of what we are allowed…Our records will be scrutinized by Congress one day and decisions on whether to enlarge our jurisdiction will be made" (243). However, by the end of the novel, after enduring a heart attack and realizing that his son has resorted to doing what he could not, namely achieving justice for his wife, it seems to cause a change in Judge Coutts. Perhaps through realizing that the system he has worked his adult life so diligently to change is still as unfair as before, and experiencing the ripple effect of an attack like this so close to home, he begins to see Joe's act in a different light. As quoted above, Judge Coutts goes as far as utilizing the ancient tribal law about the wiindigoo in arguing

a legal precedence for the killing, with the hope of helping his son cope with the emotional aftermath of killing someone.

According to Julie Tharpe, the case of Mayla Wolfskin in *The Round House* is derived from a real court case from 1974, involving Jancita Eagle Deer (Tharp 35). The court-case came out of a scandal involving William Janklow, the governor of South Dakota from 1979 to 1987 and again from 1995 to 2003. In 1974, a young woman named Jancita Eagle Deer filed a petition to keep Janklow (Yeltow in *The Round House*) from practicing law in tribal court. She claimed that he had raped her when she was fifteen and working as a babysitter for his family. Joe learns from Linda Wishkob that Mayla Wolfskin worked for a government official named Yeltow. Linden told her: "My girlfriend has been avoiding me lately, because a certain high placed government official has started paying her to be with him...She's really too young for me…I was waiting for her to grow up…This highly placed official grew her up while I was in the hospital" (*Round House* 133). Most likely, although not stated directly, Yeltow is the one Mayla got all the money she hid in the doll from. According to tribal judge Mario Gonzalez, there was compelling evidence in this complicated, but ultimately unresolved, case of Jancita Eagle Deer. Jancita reported the case at the time when the incident occurred, and in 1967, the BIA had forwarded the case to the FBI office, but neither arrests nor charges were ever made. Just a few months after filing the petition in 1974, Jancita was killed in a suspicious hit-and-run accident, after last being seen in the company of an FBI informer. Her stepmother, Delphine Eagle Deer, who took up the cause after Jancita's death, was herself beaten to death just months later by a BIA police officer who "pleaded drunkenness as his defense" (Tharpe 36). Both cases remain unsolved to this day according to Tharpe. Returning to *The Round House*, Mayla Wolfskin hid the money she had

received from Yeltow and tried to escape with her baby, implicating Joe's mother as a confidant. Thus, Geraldine Coutts had to be silenced too, after Lark had caused Mayla's 'disappearance'. She almost were silenced, had it not been for the fact that Lark could not light the match after soaking her with gasoline, and she was able to run. The real court case used in the novel is a horrifying demonstration of the urgent need for action with regard to the severity of the legal situation for women in indigenous communities that Erdrich wants to attract her readers' attention to.

With this novel, Erdrich sheds light on a legal situation for tribal women or women living in tribal communities that cannot be described as anything other than a crisis. She has constructed a very effective plot that not only attracts more readers due to its 'true purpose' being 'masked' as a suspense novel, but also because she is not telling the story through the eyes of the victim. Instead, Erdrich uses a teenage-boy as the narrator and protagonist, enabling the reader to see the ripple effect of such a crime on a young boy, who is about to become an adult and have his own sexual experiences at the same time as his mother is sexually brutalized. In addition, the community provides not only clues, but also other stories that lead to both solving the crime, and Joe's final decision, which represents the turning point in his coming of age journey. All of these elements are masterfully braided together to complete this narrative, where we find on a 'universal' level the socio-political testimony that Erdrich (based on her own words) wants to shed light on. The legal system as it is now renders not only tribal women helpless, but also the men who want to help, but cannot, the women who are afraid of becoming the next victim, and the children like Joe, who have to carry the weight of their elders' emotional trauma on far-too-young shoulders. Chapter 2 will examine more closely the topic of women's position within

ethnocentric areas (in this context indigenous territories in the US), and how this is portrayed in *The Round House* and *Power*. The next subchapter aims to compare how Linda Hogan has used the coming of age narrative in *Power* with some of the aspects of my discussion on *The Round House* above.

1.2: The coming of age narrative in *Power*

On the one hand, *Power* tells a story of victimization and violation of indigenous rights, represented by the very intriguing character Ama. It is possible to claim that by the end of the novel Ama manifests in a sense as a religious symbol, sacrificing her own status within the tribe hoping to preserve the old people's beliefs and, to some extent, identity. On the other hand, it is a gripping story about women living in a community on the verge of being subsumed by the 'western idea of progress', meaning their land has been narrowed down to the point where the native way of living might become impossible to choose. Omishto narrates the story, an adolescent who, through her journey, comes to a life-changing choice between living a more traditional way among the elders at Kiili Swamp, and living the more 'western' life with her mother. There are advantages and disadvantages on each side in this personal dilemma that make the choice even more difficult, a difficulty portrayed beautifully through Omishto's sometimes poetic reflections throughout the novel, beginning with the opening lines:

> This is the place where clouds are born and I am floating. Last night, before I fell asleep, the earth was bleeding…The land, too, is musty and sea-green…and even the water, with seeds floating across it in search of other worlds, is green. Insects walk on it. Spiders drift above it on threads of

> silk. It's as if I am curled inside an opening leaf in this boat covered with algae, as if I am just beginning to live. (Power 1)

Due to the choice of narrator, the novel becomes multi-layered, depicting the story of Ama and Omishto's mother from an outside perspective, as well as providing an inside view of life in a tribal community. Because she narrates the story, it is possible for the reader to get a rare view of the different powers affecting Omishto as a young woman living in a tribal community, and the crisis of identity she journeys through as she is forced to make an adult decision in a difficult situation. However, at the same time, Hogan conveys hope in this story, not in a romanticized, 'Hollywoodesque' style. Hogan constructs the narrative as a depiction of strong women all working to make a difference: the mystical four women who appear when needed, the elders at Kiili Swamp, and Ama, who makes the tough choice to kill the dying panther although she faces exclusion from the tribe due to the panther being their most sacred animal. Finally, Omishto, who represents the next generation of Taiga people, chooses to go live with the elders in hopes of continuing the tribe's survival, demonstrating the power of the individual (in this case a woman) to make change by not giving up. Hogan has not named her novel *Power* by accident. It displays the seemingly dominant powers of the western world affecting the tribe collectively, but also the power in sacrifice, the power of self-determination when faced with a dilemma, and, finally yet importantly, the power women may possess if they combine their efforts and show the courage to change their situation.

Linda Hogan seems to have a more intuitive approach to her writings than Erdrich, at least based on what she stated in an interview with Carole Miller about her first novel, *Mean Spirit* (1989). Miller asked Hogan how much she knew about constructing a novel, choosing characters, and

putting together scenes: "I didn't. I still don't. There's nothing that can really prepare a person for a novel. It's not, for me, a static form of writing, but a process of seeing what will unfold, even a novel rooted in history as this one is" (Interview Miller 4). Upon asked if she had learnt something during the process of writing her first novel, Hogan stated:

> LH: "Well, I tell you if I were doing it again, I wouldn't have so many characters because it's really hard to work through the growth and change of each character throughout the story. I also know more about how stories work. I didn't really understand how, for instance, a plot develops and how a character changes and how people have to respond to events, and how you have to go through the same characters wherever they appear and paint in the details of their life and make visible and concrete any change that person goes through even beneath the surface of the book." CM: "Make them flesh, rather than creatures on a page? LM: "Yes, right. And that's hard to do with a large cast of characters" (Miller 5).

Hogan continues to explain to Carole Miller, using an example of a (in her opinion) masterly constructed narrative, Marquez's *Chronicles of a Death Foretold*, declaring that one of the best things about it is, that it is short, but that "the characters show a lot of change" (6). Hogan has not explicitly given a reason for choosing the coming of age genre, and she has stated that she is not interested in allowing the possible expectations of her as a Native American author dictating what she writes about, or adjusting her work according to what she might view as necessary in order to reach a larger audience (7). In her own words:

> "When you're a writer . . . you just want to do the best job you can. Most of the writers I know just really want to write, they need to write, they need to get it out, and they need to put it into a shape and a form. They want the one that's the most alive and resonant, and they're not sitting

> around thinking about how the editors in New York would like this line, or thinking, how will a Black or White audience relate to this?" (Miller 6)

However, when we see her three novels *Mean Spirit* (1989), *Solar Storms* (1995), and *Power* (1998) together, especially due to the thematic link between the novels, it is possible to suggest that Hogan has developed her initial reflection on the construction of a novel by narrowing down both the number of characters and narrator(s) for each of them. Given Hogan's seemingly intuitive approach to writing, this development might also suggest something about the versatility of the coming of age genre when it comes to adding layers to a narrative. In addition, Hogan narrows down the focal point from a more testimonial narrative in *Mean Spirit*, via one protagonist (who is also the narrator in *Solar Storms*) to the way she uses the coming of age genre in a more traditional way in *Power*, as explained in the introduction to this chapter.

In all three of Hogan's novels, there is a recurring main theme: the tension between the views of the characters representing tribal communities, versus the views of the characters representing Anglo-American, often oppressive, forces, which manifest differently in each novel. Through limiting the focal point to one narrator, the reader becomes more intimate with the narrator. This intimacy opens up new layers of knowledge about the powers affecting and influencing the protagonist, both externally and internally, leading to a more accurate understanding of how it is to be a Native American woman growing up in a tribal community. Narrating the story through one person's perspective enables Hogan to include elements that would not be possible to include in a different format, in particular the long-term emotional effects of a conflict on the

people involved. Gary Wynn Burbridge examines Hogan's three novels *Mean Spirit*, *Solar Storms* and *Power*, and explains that in *Mean Spirit*, the issues involving the events in question are primarily local, involving the power of the oil speculators and the local authorities exercised against the Osage. The seemingly deliberately ineffective actions of the Bureau of Indian Affairs play a relatively small part in the novel. Burbridge claims that the number of characters, if anything, becomes a bit problematic in *Mean Spirit* (Burbridge 108, footnote). In *Solar Storms*, Angela Jenson is the protagonist, and with a few exceptions, we understand the story through her thoughts and her actions. Her mother, Hannah, is a very influential character, as is her grandmother. We follow Angela, going on a journey from Adams Rib, in Northern Minnesota, arriving deep in the Boundary Waters[v] in search for her identity. Having only one narrator opens up for a reading on a socio-cultural level at the same time as it allows the reader to experience first-hand the personal development in Angela throughout the journey. Burbridge states when discussing *Solar Storms*: "The politics of the matter, such as the dam issue, fade gradually. People get excited, protest, and go home. But the stories about how people are affected, especially the emotional component of the stories, makes a difference" (Burbridge 110). Simply put, in *Solar Storms*, Hogan manages to address the main theme, but narrowing down to one protagonist (who also is the narrator), enables the reader to see the emotional effect on not only the community, but on a subjective, personal level as well.

In *Power*, it seems that Hogan found the narrow focal point appealing, given that she chose to narrow it down even more. *Power* is set in Florida, where a hurricane affects the lives of the Taiga people, seen through 16 year-old Omishto's perspective. Omishto is growing up in a tribal community faced with the environmental consequences of the 'western idea of progress', which

has ruined the swamplands in southern Florida, where she lives. Hogan builds the plot in *Power* around actual events, as Erdrich does in *The Round House*. A Seminole named Chief Billie was arrested and tried for killing a Florida panther. Hogan has stated that what interested her about the case was that the man who killed an endangered panther was a tribal chairman who claimed religious freedom as a justification for his actions (Burbridge 151). One of his attorneys declared a victory and said the case highlighted inequities in the white man's system of justice, according to this excerpt from the Orlando Sentinel:

> "The odd and cruel irony of this case is that Chief Billie is being prosecuted for taking an animal that never would have been endangered had white people not developed South Florida," said Bruce Rogow, a Nova University law professor. The prosecution's expert witness testified that human beings are responsible for the demise of the Florida panther. Fewer than 50 Florida panthers are believed to exist today. Jurors were told that development in South Florida, and the resulting destruction of wildlife habitat, is the primary cause of the panther decline. They also were told that a number of panthers had been killed by motorists who accidentally ran into them or by hunters who shot them. (Orlando Sentinel)

I will return to the environmental aspect of *Power* in chapter 3, which deals with the concept of self-determination on a community level and an individual level. Due to the fact that Hogan has chosen just one narrator, a teenager faced with an extremely difficult dilemma where there is wrong and right on both sides, the coming of age process becomes a metaphorical journey which ends when Omishto makes her choice to fully embrace the traditional lifestyle. In reality, her choice is between sacrificing one half of her life for the future of the tribe, like Ama did, or adhering to her mother’s desire to make her live more like white people, or 'modern'. By

constructing this dilemma, Hogan is addressing the duality of the Native American culture versus the dominant 'white' culture, and the challenges of establishing one's identity within that paradigm on the one hand. On the other hand, the main issue of power in many forms, contrasted with each other, hovers in the background throughout the novel. Ama, the panther, the Kiili women and Omishto are on one side, representing the indigenous people facing the 'white' oppression represented by Omishto's mother, her sister, Herm. On a community level, Ama faces judgment, from Omishto and the elders at Kiili Swamp, but also from the white court system. Hogan's choice to use the coming of age genre is brilliant for many reasons. One reason is that it allows her to use Omishto's journey towards making her choice, to explore not only the environmental issues in the novel, but also the sometimes-mystical relationship between humans and animals that appears throughout the story. In addition, Omishto's struggle with the constant duality that all inhabitants in this community struggle with to some extent is mirrored in the natural catastrophe of the hurricane ripping through the opening chapters, the killing of the panther, and the trial. The next part of this subchapter will return to the three levels of socio-political commentary presented in the diagram at the beginning of subchapter 1.1, in order to explore if a close reading uncovers these levels in *Power* as well as in *The Round House*.

On a *subjective level,* it is possible to say that *Power* deals with Omishto's transition into adulthood. She struggles with feeling whole, due to her being torn between the realization that her mentor Ama Eaton's traditional ways of living are on the path to extinction, while on the other hand, living like her mother (and sister), being 'normal' in the eyes of the more assimilated part of the community, is an even more disturbing option for Omishto. A pivotal moment of that struggle arises when Omishto does not agree with Ama's choice to kill the panther, followed by

the killing. That moment changes Omishto and she has to realize that both sides of the conflict may have rights and wrongs, again illustrating one of the common features of the coming of age genre, the step where the protagonist realizes that the adult world has many 'gray' areas. One step on her journey to seeing her surroundings from a more adult perspective shows in her reflections when Ama has killed the panther: "I know what Ama is doing, what we have done, cannot be right, not just that it is against the law, but that it can't be *right"* (*Power* 71). She tries to explain it to herself by implying that Ama did not want the panther to be killed by poison or being hit by a car, but that explanation does not seem to help her much, emphasizing the difficult ethical dilemma she is faced with: "In this, maybe she is right. But she is also wrong…I look around me in this world…this country doesn't lie. There's no one to steal here in this honest, decent land but us, and I am already sick by this act Ama has entered into, this act I don't yet comprehend, except that it is both grace and doom, right and wrong" (62). This episode matures Omishto to the point where already the morning of the trial against Ama for killing the panther, she seems to have come further in her reflections about the main choice she views as inevitable. Omishto realizes (like Joe does by the end of *The Round House*) that the roles of parent and child somehow have become reversed. She reflects on this issue while her to her mother trying to appease her before the trial: "I look at her and I won't tell her that I was wrong, too…She believes, anyway, that I am forgiven, that I am taken back into the fold. But I am leaving it, walking out the door without a thing in my hand, no book, lunch, or pencil" (103).

Duality is an important theme in *Power*, as referred to in the introduction to this subchapter. One way it is depicted in *Power*, is via the dual meaning of the most important incidents in the novel: the storm, the killing of the panther, and the trial. One example of a reflection Omishto makes

during the storm may certainly be interpreted as dualistic: "As I run into the deepening color of storm, I don't recognize this place, this land that is screaming and drowning and I know this is just the beginning; the full force of the storm has not yet reached us" (34). The human helplessness when faced with forces of nature can certainly be transferred to the helplessness of indigenous peoples when they faced (and still face) western culture invading their sacred territory. It is possible to read the enormous old tree that Omishto describes in the opening pages of the novel symbolically, maybe even allegorically, simply by the use of the name Methuselah.[8] The Metuselah tree has to give in for the hurricane, even though it has been there for centuries, something that also suggests a dual meaning. Given that we read the Methuselah tree as a symbol of the tribal community that has been beaten down and left for dead by western 'progress', Omishto's reflections when finding shelter by Methuselah's roots for the remainder of the storm, suggest a dual meaning: "What else can I do when I'm so small…All nature is against us. It falls down on us. It throws itself at us…Methuselah falls and I hear nothing but only see what has lasted this long is being taken down now as if it were nothing, as if it had never been anything that counted…And then…after the roaring voice of the storm has spoken, passed judgment, it turns and runs away" (37-8). The Methuselah tree was initially planted by the Spanish settlers according to Omishto (37), hence the notion of Nature 'washing' away the remnants of old oppressors is not far-fetched in this context, and may at the very least be considered a symbol of hope for new beginnings.

[8] According to Gymnosperm Database (March 15, 2007), Metuselah was until 2012 the oldest known living non-cloned organism, 4,849 years old, growing in California, USA. There is a biblical reference to the name, Methuselah was one of Enoch's sons, and he became the oldest man to live, with his 986 years. What I found very interesting in this context, is that here is even a discussion on the ethymology of the name, where some claim that Methuselah should be interpreted as "casting aside [*shelaḥ*] the ignoble masses [*methu*]"; *i.e.*, while some in that generation were righteous, they ignored their responsibility to teach others. – hermeneutics.stackexchange.com/questions/2537/what-is-the-significance-of-methuselahs-name , April 18, 2018

As mentioned earlier, duality shows within individual characters and in the contrast between characters in *Power*. Hogan contrasts Ama to Omishto's mother, due to their both being mother figures to her: "My mother is of a split mind, too, and she thinks Ama Eaton believes like an old woman, in old things, and it's probably a sin, what she believes. But I think my mother, who tries to pass for white, is really afraid I will love Ama more than I love her" (20). Omishto's mother struggles with dual identity as well, she criticizes Ama's way of living in front of Omishto but she somehow admires her too. Omishto reflects on her mother's duality: "[S]he knows I come here and help out and she keeps quiet about it, as if some part of her agrees with what I do, as if she likes the ways she's also strong and tough-minded as a mule" (21). Ama herself is dualistic in the sense that she seems to belong to another world than the concrete, and Omishto is at one time not even certain whether she is real or not. However, before the killing of the panther, Ama is living in two worlds: "Ama said the old ways are not enough to get us through this time and she was called to something else…To living halfway between the modern world and the ancient one" (22-23). *Power* exhibits the two worlds many Native Americans grow up facing today, dealing with various forms of power affecting them, such as the power of nature, endurance, knowledge, physical strength, belief, language, spirit, the law, and death. With the recognition of this duality around her, Omishto has to accept her own sense of division. She reflects on the duality around her after the killing of the panther: "The storm was not just wind and rain, not just a house with a shutter thrown open, a door thrown off its hinges. It was not just a dying house with a broken window and branches and leaves blown inside it. It was a beginning and an end of something…Whatever has ended, whatever has begun, it is strong in the air" (73). However, as a woman living in a tribal community, Omishto faces even more

challenges with regard to higher risk of abuse or domestic violence, which will be explored in chapter 2.

On *a community level*, Omishto is stuck between her mother, who wants her to be 'white' and a good Christian, and Ama, the symbol of everything that is sacred to Omishto, but also seemingly on a path towards extinction, like the panther. In observing her juggling these two worlds as she simultaneously negotiates her own identity as well as reading her reflections around her own situation, the non-Native reader gains a far greater insight on a subjective level than through a less limited focal point. The reader follows Omishto as she encounters different aspects of a tribal community, many of which are comparable to the community depicted in *The Round House*. In addition to the religious question of her mother being strictly Catholic and forcing her (with good intentions) to adhere to more modern, western social standards, Omishto is forced to handle sexual harassment by her stepfather, feeling like an outsider in school, as well as making sense of mystical happenings with the four women from the tribe. Finally, after being present for the killing of the tribe's most sacred animal, she has to watch her mentor sacrifice her status in the tribe for the sake of the tribe not losing faith in its future. Chapter 3 will examine these topics in more detail.

Already in the beginning of the novel, where the epigraph reads: "Mystery is a form of power" we are introduced to another layer of this story, adding another aspect of duality within Omishto, and also revealing the other principal theme in the novel, environmental issues. Returning to the third level from the diagram in the beginning of subchapter 1.1, on an *Abstract, or socio-cultural*

level, Hogan addresses environmental issues stemming from a real-life case where a Seminole named Chief Billie was convicted of killing a Florida panther, as mentioned earlier. As I read that story, I could not understand how this man could use religious faith as justification for killing the panther. There is a third point of duality within this novel, and that is the religious aspect: the strict Catholic upbringing that most children in Tribal communities have, versus the tribal traditions and beliefs. Most Native communities have been forced to become Catholics, or Christian believers of some kind, largely due to Native American children being forced to attend strict Catholic boarding schools, also depicted in *The Round House*. The dual judgement Ama faces mirrors the dual system of belief that most indigenous people have to relate to: the Catholic or other Christian belief system of sin and punishment, and the nature religion of her tribe, built on the relation between people and nature, with the panther Sisa as "the God of Gods" (84). Omishto realizes that the killing she has just witnessed transcends the actual incident:

> [I]t seems it is the whole world that has fallen…It has fallen in a way that means this place is taken down a notch. Unloved and disgraced and torn apart…And betrayed…It was an old story we must have followed, that we were under something that felt like a spell…Ama would never have done it otherwise, neither would I…It is not like me at all to believe in any such nonsense as stories or forces that would take over a person but it's the closest I can come to truth and reason. (92-93)

Although Hogan has built the story on the real case of the Seminole who killed a panther for religious reasons, she has managed to convey from a subjective focal point how important the sacred relationship with animals and nature is for the tribal community, collectively *and* individually. That knowledge provides a non-Native reader with a deeper understanding of the

various intersectional factors affecting indigenous people, in this case, their belief system. The use of the coming of age genre gives Hogan the freedom to unveil how important this part of the Native American culture is, both from the subjective perspective (via Omishto's observations and reflections), and (via the course of the trial), how on a community level, external 'powers' judge the ethical issue of killing an endangered species. Hogan invites us into the mystic, natural and supernatural forces lingering in the background already in the first chapter, where we get to know Omishto. She talks about "the cat" which she has never seen: "I've heard that they follow people sometimes, creeping behind us, trying to figure out what we are…We must mystify them…As animals, I mean" (3). It is possible to read the panther dualistic as well according to Burbridge, due to its being both "real and spiritual" (Burbridge 153). The panther is of course physical, but there are also many references to the spiritual panther guiding Ama and according to Taiga tradition, the panther is her "twin in nature" (*Power* 64). The duality of the panther unveils the abstract, socio-political commentary of this novel. As described by Omishto just after Ama has killed the panther:

> Ama cries just to look at it. I know why she cries. Because once they were beautiful and large and powerful. Now it's just like her. Like the woman who wears boy's old shoes because she is poor and they're cheaper, and it is also like me trying so hard to stay out of Herman's way, thinking what kind of life I'll ever have, and it is like the cut-up land, too, and I see that this is what has become of us, of all three of us here. We are diminished and endangered. (*Power* 69)

The second chapter of the novel begins with a reference to Mr. Abraham Swallow, who died under mystical circumstances: "Old man Swallow died either by magic or by fear" (5). Although it is present in some form in her other two novels, Hogan included mystery and magic as central elements in *Power*. It is common knowledge that the close relationship between humans and

nature is an essential part of indigenous peoples' culture, and it certainly is in the Taiga tribe from Florida, where the story unfolds. Hogan might have been able to describe these elements with a different focal point, as Omishto also observes the people surrounding her without necessarily knowing their true feelings. However, it would not have been possible to convey the matter-of-fact inclusion of these elements in various parts of life so credibly, if they were not depicted through the voice of someone who has grown up with these elements as a part of their daily life. Just listen to Omishto matter-of-factly describing herself in a way many from an outside perspective perhaps would describe as a product of childish fantasy:

> Even if I can't see what's in the shadows this time, I know what I feel and there are things I know and feel and see that other people don't…That's why my father named me Omishto. It means The One Who Watches…it's true, I watch everything and see deep into what's around me. "I have a strong wind inside me", is what Grandma said. A wind with eyes. They used to call it the spirit, the breath, and the name we have for it is Oni (4).

Only if someone who accepts them as natural describe such elements may the novel provide this level of understanding of just how difficult the choice Omishto has to make is. The catalyst incident (the killing of the panther) and the aftermath of the trial contribute to Omishto's final choice to go live with the elders at Kiili Swamp, which I will return to in chapter 3.

This chapter has demonstrated that *Power*, as well as *The Round House*, successfully and credibly unveil different layers and aspects of their respective stories due to their use of the coming of age narrative form. In addition, for the narrator to have an adult language (*Power*), and/or adult reflections looking back at a life-changing period of their life (*The Round House*)

while facing challenges or having to make difficult choices, provides a more mature interpretation of the maturing process that takes place in the two protagonists. Not only does the reader experience how the young adult feels in the moment, but she or he also gains access to an adult's reflections and/or language. This is certainly very important in *The Round House*, due to the legal and ethical issues the novel deals with. However, the poetic, mature language of Omishto's reflections most certainly also expands the non-Tribal reader's understanding of her situation, in addition to unveiling the dual meaning of various aspects in the story. Although the two novels address two different issues, they are combined under the flag of highly important areas of injustice, both legal and ethical, where authorities certainly need to do something sooner rather than later. These two novels also share the feature that they revolve around women and women's position in Native communities. Even though the narrator in *The Round House* is male, the catalyst incident that the whole novel revolves around is the attack on his mother, and the ripple effect of helplessness throughout a community when it is not possible to bring a perpetrator to justice within the frameworks established to provide that. In *Power*, Omishto is guided, helped, and inspired by powerful women, first represented by Ama, and later represented by the Kiili elders. Feeling helpless in the hurricane, appeasing her doubts when witnessing the killing of the panther, as well as her fears trying to fight off her sexually abusive stepfather, all along there are women influencing Omishto. Finally, she makes the decision to join forces with the powerful women at Kiili Swamp, sacrificing her 'modern' life but providing hope for the continued survival of their people, however faint it may be.

In the introduction, I made a theoretical argument for the necessity to continuously develop the parameters under which we read characters in works of fiction, especially within the coming of

age genre, which is has gone through a massive change since the 18th Century. The next chapter aims to uncover certain factors that may have to be included when analyzing narratives dealing with female characters living in indigenous and otherwise culturally homogenous areas, such as the tribal communities in *Power* and *The Round House*. Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term 'Intersectionality' in 1998, claiming that some groups of women are exposed in particular to certain risk factors of abuse compared to women in other communities. The next chapter will examine two articles by Crenshaw in order to determine what these factors signify. By applying these factors to some of the female characters in *The Round House* and *Power*, I hope to expand the level of understanding the circumstances surrounding them, on a community level and on an individual level.

CHAPTER 2

Kimberlé Crenshaw's Concept of Intersectionality and Feminist Literary Theory

Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term 'intersectionality' in 1998, in a discussion of black women's employment in the US. In 2001, she was invited to introduce this term in Geneva, during the preparatory session for the 'World Conference against Racism' (WCAR) held in Durban, South Africa, the same year. From that event, the term gained tremendous popularity, and was used in various UN and NGO forums (Yuval-Davis et.al. 194). I believe it is a common understanding that one important purpose of studying a literary work (or in this context, characters) is to highlight important issues addressed in it. If I am going to explore the main characters in *Power* and *The Round House*, who are included in the overall term defined by Kimberlé Crenshaw as 'women of color', i.e. women from predominantly ethnically and/or culturally homogenous areas, it is necessary to look at all factors influencing their situation. Thus, I consider Crenshaw's intersectionality concept to be an essential element to include in my analysis of *Power* and *The Round Hous*e.

In general, Crenshaw emphasizes the need to "account for multiple grounds of identity when considering how the social world is constructed" (1245). Subchapter 2.1 will provide a general overview of the concept based on two articles by Crenshaw: "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex" (1989) and "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity

Politics, and Violence against Women of Color" (1993), both of which are grounded in prior scholarly work, then link the concept to literary theory. Subchapter 2.2 attempts to apply these factors to the novels in order to find out whether they in fact are present in *The Round House* and *Power*.

2.1: What is intersectionality, and how is it relevant to literary theory?

Merriam Webster's Dictionary defines the term intersectionality as "the complex, cumulative manner in which the effects of different forms of discrimination combine, overlap, or intersect". Although the term originally applied only to the ways that sexism and racism combined and overlapped, intersectionality has come to include other forms of discrimination as well, such as those based on class, sexuality, and ability.

In "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color", Crenshaw states that the main problem with identity politics "is not that it fails to transcend difference, (…) but rather the opposite - that it frequently inflates or ignores intragroup differences" (Crenshaw 1242). This problem is evident with regard to violence against women, because "the violence that many women experience is often by other dimensions of their identities, such as race and class" (1242). The understanding that violence against women is a system of "domination that affects women as a class" (1242) instead of isolated single incidents has developed into a separate branch of what is commonly known as 'identity politics'. To illustrate Crenshaw's objective: A white woman living in a dominantly white area has different intersecting factors affecting her than a 'woman of color'. Such factors could be religious,

cultural and political, but also (as in the case of the victims in *The Round House* and several of the characters in *Power*), involving legislative, or 'de jure' factors. However, *within* a certain culture, geographical area, or ethnocentric sector, several factors are excluded in an analysis of the circumstances if the focus is separately either racial or sexual. Crenshaw wishes to highlight the lack of focus in feminist and antiracist discourses on "how the experiences of women of color are frequently the product of intersecting patterns of racism and sexism" (1243). Crenshaw's main argument is that many factors *combined* constitute the identity of a 'woman of color', and looking at them separately will not provide a complete understanding of the powers affecting an individual situation. The focus within feminist and anti-racist politics has been on *either* race or gender, and Crenshaw attempts to demonstrate that the lives of black women or women from ethnocentric communities "cannot be captured wholly" (1243) by applying these factors separately.

Intersectionality, or the components incorporated in this idea, is proving to be very applicable in social sciences as well as within psychology and literary criticism, although it is a term that has been a cause of debate. Nikol G. Alexander-Floyd has explored this term's origins and its development. Quoting Linora Salter, Alexander-Floyd explains: "a single word can be used to stand in for whole philosophical or ideological approaches…they represent a paradigm wrapped up in a single word" (Alexander-Floyd 4). She draws a distinction between intersectionality as an ideograph and intersectionality as an idea. As an ideograph, the term stands for the more general examination by various schools of social and literary theory of oppressive forces constraining 'women of color' focusing on class, gender and race. On a more conceptual level, intersectionality as an idea describes the "intersecting, or co-determinative forces of racism,

sexism and classism influencing the lives of black women" (Alexander-Floyd 4). Although this term originally was introduced in a discussion on black women and their situation, it is not a great leap to transfer their situation to women living in indigenous and other ethnocentric groups. The conceptual understanding of the term predates Crenshaw by decades, and Alexander-Floyd constellates some earlier works within the same ideological framework. She mentions Frances Beale's "Double Jeopardy" (1970), which presents the idea that black women experience sexism as well as racism as negative socioeconomic and political forces. In 1988, Deborah King added a third element to the 'Double Jeopardy'-concept, claiming that class constitutes another challenging force black women have to struggle against. Alexander-Floyd continues to list several black feminists' productions on intersectionality after Crenshaw's, uncovering a new subfield within multiple schools of theory (Alexander-Floyd 6).

2.2: Intersecting factors affecting characters in *The Round House* and *Power*

In the article "Mapping the Margins" (1991), Crenshaw explains her notion of the term intersectionality:

> I consider intersectionality a provisional concept linking contemporary politics with postmodern theory. In mapping the intersections of race and gender, the concept does engage dominant assumptions that race and gender are essentially separate categories. By tracing the categories to their intersections, I hope to suggest a methodology that will ultimately disrupt the tendencies to see race and gender as exclusive or separable. While the primary intersections that I explore here

> are between race and gender, the concept can and should be expanded by factoring in issues such class, sexual orientation, age, and color. (1242, footnote 9)

Crenshaw divides her article into three categories where, due to intersectional factors, 'women of color' are being systematically disempowered. They are *structural*, *political*, and *representational* intersectionality. I attempt to dive further into two of these categories in order to examine their relation to *The Round House* and *Power*, and possibly, to discover how the main characters are affected by them.

The first category of systematical disempowerment of women Crenshaw explores is *structural intersectionality*, where the demographics of 'women of color' are significant to how they experience violence, rape and potential consequences after the fact. In the case of *The Round House* or *Power*, would the fact that both protagonists live in tribal areas have any influence on their experience? In order to address this question, we need some facts about life in tribal reservations in the US today. According to the 2010 US census, about 22% of the 5.2 million Native Americans live on tribal lands (Native American Aid). Living conditions in most parts of these reservations have been referred to as "comparable to Third World" (May 2004, Gallup Independent, qtd.in Native American Aid). Overall, Tribal and Federal government are the main employers, and a high percentage of the population lives solely on welfare in the form of either veteran's payments or social security/disability payments. According to the 2005 BIA American Indian Population and Labor Force Report, those who possess other employment receive below poverty wages (Native American Aid). As much as 28% of the overall Native American population lives below the poverty line (2008 American Indians census facts). However, *within* reservations, according to the 2006 National Center for Education statistics, the number reaches

from a staggering 38% up to figures as shocking as 69% living below the national poverty line (Native American Aid). The Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota is regarded as one of the poorest counties in the US. Only one in five has a job, and many travel 120 miles for seasonal employment, leaving grandparents to raise their children. Sixty-nine percent live below the poverty line, and most have to manage on merely 2,600 US dollars per year (Native American Aid). A severe housing shortage has forced hundreds into homelessness while thousands live in overcrowded, low-standard housing facilities.

How are these factors related to a systematic disempowerment of women? Nicole P. Yuan, Mary P. Koss, Mona Polacca, and David Goldman present prevalence and correlates of adult physical assault and rape in six Native American tribes. This survey is far too complex to serve justice in this context, and so I will focus on the statistics related to violence against Native American women. The survey lists four risk factors for physical abuse and sexual assault linked to low economic status and standard of living: *demographics*, *alcohol abuse*, *cultural factors*, and *history of victimization* (Yuan et.al. 1568-70). Based on the survey, these risk factors prove to be higher within Native American reservation areas than in other areas with similar levels of income and education.

With regard to the first of these risk factors, *demographics,* Fairchild, Fairchild, and Stoner (1998) found that women "younger than 40 years and living in a household that received governmental financial assistance were independently associated with current domestic violence among a sample of Navajo women" (Yuan et al. 1569). In *Power*, both Omishto’s mother and

several other women are exposed to physical abuse, and there are not many options for women to report or escape bad relationships, except for perhaps by 'magic' intervention. In the opening scene of the novel, Omishto tells the story of Abraham Swallow. We meet him as he takes his last breaths: "That day, we heard the sound of Abraham Swallow's breathing coming down the white road…saw his grey hair in a mess and the blackbirds flying up all around him…He looked at us like we were two spirits…'They killed me'. And he went on past us" (*Power* 11-12). Abraham Swallow dies just after this scene, and his wife blames the four Taiga women led by Janie Soto for "killing him by their wills alone" (14). Omishto learns from her mother that the old Taiga people actually had sentenced Swallow to death for beating both his first and second wife, as well as his children. However, when Ama asks Omishto if she believes magic killed Abraham Swallow, her answer is a bit more pragmatic: "No, Ama. I don't think magic killed Mr. Swallow. I think he just drank too much" (13). Omishto talks about her stepfather Herm, and claims that he is one of the reasons why she stays so much with Ama, even sleeps in her boat from time to time:

> I don't want to look pretty in the house with my mother and stepfather looking at me, his eyes always looking too much in places they don't belong, and my mom jealous like she is being replaced by me and its all my fault, my design…I should be mad at my mama for staying with Herm…The way he looks me down and then up, hungry, and it takes only two seconds but I can read what it means that fast (7, 18).

Ama advises her to stay away, as Herm is "an attack waiting to happen" (18). In neither of these examples is there any indication of anyone even portraying it as an option to report the domestic violence or the inappropriate sexual behavior of the stepfather, something I will return to in chapter 3. On the day of Ama's trial, Omishto struggles with putting up the front door of Ama's

house, because the door is very heavy. However, according to Omishto, "putting it up is easier than putting up the doors to myself, my body, my heart, to keep Herm from fighting with me" (103). The author would omit a more proper reaction to these incidents unless it is a conscious choice in order to show that it is not a common practice in tribal areas to press charges when experiencing domestic violence or inappropriate sexual behavior.

In *The Round House*, Louise Erdrich builds the novel on the experiences of the victim of a brutal rape and her surroundings, with focus on the legal aftermath. Joe, who is the teenage son of the victim, Geraldine, watches his mother suffering tremendously. His father, who is a tribal judge, is struggling with a system that fails its victims. Eventually, this experience drives Joe to the only solution he can see as a thirteen-year-old boy, to take matters in his own hands. (I will return to this aspect of the novel more detailed under the subtitle *Political Intersectionality*). This novel is set in a tribal community, like *Power*, but in *The Round House*, the reader becomes more familiar with some of the reasons that perhaps it is not as common to report incidents of domestic violence or even a brutal rape in tribal communities. Julie Tharp refers to the organization *Futures without Violence* and a report, which indicates that Native American victims of sexual violence have higher levels of alcohol abuse and dependence, suicide rates, and mental distress than the general population. Posttraumatic stress disorder is substantially higher among American Indian and Alaskan Native persons than in the general population (Tharp 30). In an interview about her novel referred to by Tharp, Erdrich comments herself about Joe's response to the rape: "This catapults him into adulthood. He's not ready for this, but it throws him into a set of responsibilities that no 13- year-old should have to bear. And as the book goes

on, as he sees that the adults cannot achieve justice, it becomes clear to him— and then it becomes clear to his best friend, as well— that they may have to seek justice on their own" (32).

Except for their gender, the main difference between the two narrators is that Joe comes from a home where he has received a higher level of education than most in his area, while Omishto we might in this context view as not having the same level of legal (or overall) competence surrounding her. When we first meet Joe, he comes in after working in the garden with his father, describing the "stalky shoots (that) had managed to squeeze through knife cracks in the decorative brown shingles covering the cement blocks" (*Round House* 3), suggesting a somewhat higher quality of living conditions than the majority of people living in indigenous areas. Throughout the novel, Erdrich contrasts Joe's status with that of other members of his community, emphasizing these economic and social differences. In *Power*, Omishto describes Ama's house, where she spends most of her time, as a "dying house" (*Power* 29), where "the wood itself is so rough that moss tries to grow on it" (7). After the hurricane in the beginning of the novel, "the fronds of the roof are gone" and the "door is blown off its hinges" (38). Ama's house is contrasted to Omishto's mother's house, where they have a "tornado cellar" (90), and where a "towel and newspaper sit on the floor by the door so [they] won't leave footprints all over the house" (90). Her mother's favorite statement is "Cleanliness is next to godliness" (90). They have a "washing machine", TV in the living room, and "gray linoleum tiles" (91), compared to the wooden floorboards in Ama's house.

Both Joe's parents are educated people, both working within the legal system. The first thing Joe picks up after coming in from the garden is what his father calls "The Bible" (*Round House* 4), Felix St. Cohen's *Handbook of Federal Indian Law*. Compared with the situation in *Power*, most of the adults surrounding Omishto, except maybe for her mother who tries to live as a 'white' woman, are people who live in poverty with low or no education. Omishto reflects on education as something that separates her and Ama: "[A]s smart as she is, she never went to high school…even though she reads, she still swears by old-time beliefs, and she believes in all the Taiga stories, that they are true" (*Power* 13). What is comparable in this context is that both protagonists seem to experience a similar sense of helplessness faced with powers they are unable to conquer, again related to issues concerning tribal communities in particular. Although it is possible to argue that in cases of domestic violence and sexual abuse, legal systems in general fail in too many cases to help the victims the way they deserve, the situation in *The Round House* is an example of how it is even worse, directly related to the fact that the victim lives in a reservation. In *Power*, Ama faces judgment in the shape of exclusion from her own people that might seem to the reader to be unfair given the circumstances of her 'crime'. Compared with *The Round House*, Erdrich highlights a current legal dilemma in the US between Tribal Courts' jurisdiction and federal law, which is so severe that it actually attracts sexual predators to these areas. These legal issues will be explored further under the subtitle *Intersectionality and Politics*.

The second risk factor from the survey by Fairchild, Fairchild, and Stoner, *alcohol abuse*, indicates that individuals with alcohol problems were approximately 1.5 times more likely to experience traumatic events than nonusers, and it is common knowledge that overall, a low

standard of living and unemployment are contributing factors to drug and/or alcohol abuse. Kilpatrick et al. (1997) found that drug use and combined drug and alcohol use significantly increased the odds of new assault in a national sample of women. The study from 1998 with Native Americans presented in "Risk Factors for Physical Assault and Rape among Six Native American Tribes" found that alcohol dependence was "an independent risk factor for experiencing and perpetrating physical domestic violence among Navajo Indians" (Yuan et al. 1569). Unfortunately, there are not many surveys on adult drinking patterns in Native American communities. However, according to Fred Beauvais's article "American Indians and Alcohol" (1998), school-based surveys have provided a relatively complete picture of drinking among Indian youth from 1975 until 1998 (Beauvais 254). In 1993, 71 percent of Indian youth from grades 7 to 12 reported having ever used alcohol, and 55 percent reported having ever been drunk. Approximately 34 percent of this age group reported having been drunk within the past month. About the same proportion of Indian and non-Indian youths in grades 7 to 12 had ever tried alcohol in their lifetime. When Indian youths drank, however, they appeared to drink in heavier amounts and experience more negative consequences from their drinking than did their non-Indian peers (254).

As mentioned earlier, in *Power,* we meet Abraham Swallow, who clearly has a drinking problem, which is linked to his abuse towards his family. In *The Round House,* many of Joe's family members resort to alcohol as a way to cope with everyday life, which also spurs incidents of abuse. Joe's first infatuation with a member of the opposite sex is with Sonja. He describes her as smelling of "Marlboros, Aviance Night Musk, and her first drink of the late afternoon" (*Round House* 29). After his mother's horrible experience, his aunt Clemence astounds Joe as

she comes out with a bottle of whiskey and three shot glasses. "She poured the third glass half full and tossed it back…I had never seen my aunt toss back a whiskey like a man…I'd never known my aunt to smoke before, but she had started since the hospital" (36, 37). When they go for the pow-wow, Joe observes that the leaders of the event, Randall's friends, "were baked" (42), a well-known term for being high on cannabis. Linda Wishkob's story also reveals that her "Dad drank from time to time and passed out on the floor" (125). Whitey and Sonja drink every day, and the episode when Whitey suspects Sonja of having an affair because she bought herself some new earrings with the money she and Joe found in the doll, starts after Whitey goes to the bar in the middle of the day (186). These examples demonstrate that the factor of alcohol abuse is certainly present, and as a negative force, in both *Power* and *The Round House*.

History of victimization is the third risk factor that we may link to the demographics of victims. Julie Tharp explains that in addition to PTSD, it is well documented that indigenous people frequently suffer from generational or historical trauma: "According to proponents of this idea, domination and oppression of Native peoples increased both economic deprivation and dependency through retracting tribal rights and sovereignty. Consequently, American Indian and Alaska Natives today are believed to suffer from internalized oppression and the normalization of violence" (Tharpe 86). Two studies conducted with Native Americans found that among 30 Midwestern Native American women, all of the women that were abused as children were subsequently abused as adults (Bohn 16-19). An investigation by Kunitz, Levy, McCloskey, & Gabriel in 1998 with Navajo Indians showed that childhood physical abuse, but not sexual abuse, was a significant risk factor for being a perpetrator and victim of physical intimate partner violence (Yuan et al. 1569).

In *The Round House*, there are several incidents of abuse and normalization of violence. When Whitey has had his aforementioned episode, after hitting him unconscious with an empty beer bottle, Sonja's remark to Joe upon his concern that he might be dead is: "No he ain't. That was an empty. 'Sides, I know just how hard to hit him…Don't worry. He will be good for a long time now" (*Round House* 188). The whole story of Linda Wishkob (or Lark) in *The Round House* is a story of abuse continuing into adult life. Linda was born the twin sister of Linden Lark. Her limbs were deformed at birth, so her mother and father "refused to have (her) in their house" (122). In her own words, she was "left in the nursery with a bottle strapped onto (her) face" (122), while the county decided what to do with her. Betty Wishkob, a janitor at the hospital, took her and raised her. She did not get peace there either, because the county tried to relocate her several times. Based on her description of her home, it is understandable that the county may have wanted to find a more suitable home for her: "The house…has a faint smell of rotted wood, onions, fried coot, (and) the salty smell of unwashed children" (125). However, she looks back at her childhood with good memories of her Dad taking her to hunt gophers, fishing and digging for potatoes, even though he drank so much he passed out on the floor from time to time. She describes her mother's temper as explosive: "She never hit, but she yelled and raved" (125). What is interesting is that Linda does not see her foster parents as abusive, suggesting it has been her 'normality' throughout her life, again confirming what Julie Tharp has stated about normalization of violence. When Linda's biological mother, Grace Lark, approaches her to ask her to donate a kidney for her brother, despite of her not being in touch throughout Linda's life, she agrees to meet him. Linda's stepsister, Sheryl, has a more 'normal' response to the request: "These people ditched you, they turned their back on you, they would have left you in the street to die. You're my sister. I don't want you to share your kidneys" (131). Meeting Linden in the

hospital, his responds to her offering to help: "This was my mother's idea. I don't want your kidney. I have an aversion to ugly people" (134). However, Linda does not listen to her sister and proceeds to do the surgery, which leaves her with a bacterial infection and a longer stay in hospital. She refers to the infection as an "infection of the spirit", and she is healed by the love of her "real family" (135). Linda's story is also a testimony to the effect abuse may have on a person's ability to make individual choices, which would forward their own best interest, something that will be discussed further in chapter 3.

The last risk factor from the survey by Fairchild, Fairchild, and Stoner is *cultural factors.* High rates of victimization may be associated with oppressive traumatic events and practices that contributed to losses of cultural affiliation (Fairchild et al. 2002). According to Yuan et al., many Native American children experienced removal from homes and placements in boarding schools, or with adoptive or foster care families, "disrupting the family structure and producing negative consequences" (Yuan et al. 1570). Another influencing factor within this topic is known as 'historical trauma'. According to Duran, Duran, Woodis, & Woodis, historical trauma is defined as "unresolved grief resulting from traumatic changes in the spiritual, social, and economic structures of Native American communities" (1570). However, there is, according to Yuan et al., little empirical data on the link between disruption of cultural affiliation and violence or victimization. I have still included this factor here because it is non-disputable that disruption of family ties or living in unstable environments at an early age is a contributing factor to possible substance abuse in teenage years. The boarding schools that Native American children were sent to offered a highly regulated environment that did not allow them to nurture any of their own culture or language, in addition to upholding a very strict religious regime. Joe in *The Round*

House mentions boarding school, when Edward suggests to him that Geraldine might feel better if Clemence took her to church: "I don't think Geraldine would find comfort there, after all these years. We all knew that my mother had stopped going to church after she returned from boarding school. She never said why. Clemence never tried to get her to go, either, that I knew of" (*Round House* 81). In *Power*, Omishto describes her mother as "complex" (*Power* 15), mainly due to her struggling between adhering to her strictly religious background, and her respect and admiration for her cultural heritage, to a point where she is jealous of Ama's relationship with her daughter: "Mama respects her [Ama] and is jealous. Mama's made her choices and they are different. Still, she'd like it both ways" (*Power* 16). Throughout the novel, the characters Ama and Omishto's mother function as human manifestations of the dilemma she is facing: respecting her mother's wishes for her to assimilate to a more 'modern' life, or following her more basal instinctive emotions and sense of belonging.

This subchapter has tried to give an overview of the most common structural and demographical additional risk factors for physical and sexual abuse that Crenshaw claims women from ethnocentric communities are facing. Several of these factors are closely linked to political decisions and legislation. The next subchapter will focus on how political and legislative decisions with regard to native territory have caused the aforementioned risk factors to arise. However, as Erdrich addresses in *The Round House*, some of these decisions have created and are still creating a situation where in most cases incidents of sexual and/or domestic violence are not prosecuted, causing the situation for women in these areas to be in even more dire need of improvement. The next subchapter aims to unveil how Erdrich calls our attention to a legal situation within tribal territory, which renders women helpless, often resulting in apathy.

2.2: Political Intersectionality in *The Round H*ouse and *Power*

The second category Crenshaw discusses is *political intersectionality*, where she explains how feminist and antiracist legislation actually have created the opposite of what was the intention. In Crenshaw's own words, political intersectionality signifies that "women of color are situated within at least two subordinated groups that frequently pursue conflicting political agendas. The need to split one's political energies between two sometimes opposing groups is a dimension of intersectional disempowerment that men of color and white women seldom confront" ("Mapping the Margins" 1252). As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, Crenshaw defines political intersectionality as an area where in her opinion antiracist and feminist discourses have failed in their attempt to "forward the interest of 'people of color' and women" (1252). Crenshaw believes that antiracist discourse fails to "interrogate patriarchy", resulting in the continuance of the subordination of 'women of color'. According to Crenshaw, feminist resistance strategies fails to "interrogate race" (1252), with the result that the subordination of women in ethnocentric or indigenous areas is often replicated and reinforced. Crenshaw divides political intersectionality into three main branches: The Politicization of Domestic Violence, Political Intersectionality in Rape, and the last branch, Rape and Intersectionality in Social Sciences. Each of these sectors deserves a complete overview. However, since Crenshaw provides a very broad discussion on this issue, the following paragraphs will focus on the elements that are relevant to the analysis of *The Round House* and *Power*. In *The Round House*, Erdrich sheds light on the fact that 'women of color' living in ethnocentric or indigenous areas have (due to legislation), few options to prosecute an alleged rapist. In both novels, domestic violence seems like something that the

victims tolerate without even thinking that they should do something about it, maybe due to lack of options to prosecute.

Crenshaw argues: "women of color can be erased by the strategic silences of antiracism and feminism" (1253). She moves on to illustrate this by recounting her own experience with the Los Angeles Police Department when she attempted to gather some statistics of domestic violence reports by precinct. The statistics were not released to her, and she was given the explanation that "the Department feared that statistics reflecting the extent of domestic violence in minority communities might be selectively interpreted and publicized so as to undermine long-term efforts to force the Department to address domestic violence as a serious problem" (1253). Furthermore, she was told that "activists were worried that the statistics might permit opponents to dismiss domestic violence as a minority problem and, therefore, not deserving of aggressive action" (1253). Surprisingly, she met the same reluctance from the minority representatives, who according to Crenshaw, were concerned "that the data would unfairly represent Black and Brown communities as unusually violent, potentially reinforcing stereotypes that might be used in attempts to justify oppressive police tactics and other discriminatory practices" (1254). The concern is understandable, because men from ethnic minority backgrounds, and most certainly Black men, have been, and are still stereotyped as "aggressive" and “uncontrollably violent" (1254). However, and this is Crenshaw’s point, no matter how good political arguments on both sides for their reluctance to shed light on these statistics, withholding information that might have been useful in discovering domestic violence on women in these ethnic groups, creates a situation where they have fewer opportunities than women in other communities.

The need for a minority community to maintain their cultural integrity and identity is certainly understandable. However, as Crenshaw illustrates with an extreme example from the author Shahrazad Ali, maintaining aspects of a culture that involves justification of physical abuse under the label that it is only something 'white women' consider to be abuse. This rhetoric "denies that gender violence is a problem in the community and characterizes any effort to politicize gender subordination as itself a community problem" (1254). Ali's book that Crenshaw refers to is the controversial *The Blackman's Guide to Understanding the Blackwoman*[9]. This book is an example of in my opinion potentially very dangerous chains of thought, not for men, but for women. Ali was given time on Oprah, Phil Donahue and other media, which not only resulted in a larger sale of her book, but also that millions of people were introduced to this way of viewing women and their position in society. Crenshaw lists several examples. I have chosen the two I found most aggravating. Ali advises in her book the "Blackman to hit the Blackwoman in the mouth, "[b]ecause it is from that hole, in the lower part of her face, that all her rebellion culminates into words. Her unbridled tongue is a main reason she cannot get along with the Blackman. She often needs a reminder" (Crenshaw, "Mapping" 1254 footnote 39 and 40). Ali even points out that "[t]he Blackman being number 1 and the Blackwoman being number 2 is another absolute law of nature. The Blackman was created first, he has seniority. And the Blackwoman was created 2nd. He is first. She is second" (ibid).

An example of what might happen in cases where this kind of thinking is celebrated is a court case in Sweden just recently. A man was acquitted for battering his wife, beating her in the head and stabbing her in the face with a high-heeled shoe, because allegedly she had not gone to the

[9] Civilized Publications, 1992

family first in order to address the problem and work it out internally. The court had also used in their argument for the acquittal the point that he was of a good family and she was not (NRK – Dom ryster Sverige). Swedish crime expert and author Leif G. W. Persson says to the Swedish State Network that the verdict [my translation] "beats all preconceived notions about prejudice. The two judges states that the woman is not reliable simply because she is a woman. It is completely repulsive and not in line with Swedish law."[10] I included the example from Ali's book because although it mainly has to do with Black communities, and the other example from Sweden has to do with sharia laws and a Muslim community, based on the statistics examined in the previous subchapter, the same reluctance and/or prohibition to report domestic violence is prevalent also in Native American communities. Thus, Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality is applicable to indigenous women as well, and the examples show the possible outcome of allowing certain ways of thinking that allows violence and abuse to become a 'natural' part of any culture.

The first reaction from Joe's mother after the rape in *The Round House*, but also her temporary resignation followed by seclusion, is a natural reaction to the feeling of not being able to redeem injustice that has been done to you. Given that in indigenous communities there is an established culture for solving matters internally (like in the case of Abraham Swallow in *Power*, where the elders in *Power* sentenced him to death, but no one reported him to the authorities), the numbers for domestic violence and sexual abuse that are not reported must be high. The fact that the type

[10] Direct quotation from https://www.nrk.no/urix/dom-ryster-sverige_-mann-ble-frikjent-for-mishandling-fordi-han-er-fra-_en-god-familie_-1.13948375 : "Ifølge Aftonbladet argumenterte en av dem eller begge blant annet for at «mannen kommer tilsynelatende fra en god familie, i motsetning til kvinnen, noe som også har betydning for vurderingen av skyldspørsmålet», samt at «det er ikke uvanlig at kvinner feilaktig hevder at de er blitt utsatt for mishandling og trusler, og later som om de har behov for beskyttelse, bare for å skaffe seg en egen leilighet".

of statistics that Crenshaw wanted to obtain are being withheld from the public for fear of stigma or for mere political reasons, is the same as sacrificing half of the people within these communities for the benefit of the other half, under the flag of diminishing racism; a contradiction on its own terms. In addition, as will be examined in more detail in chapter 3, although indigenous women have tried to speak up about this issue, they have often been silenced by their own people, because the main objective for the tribal leaders has been to achieve collective rights in the first place. In addition to this, Crenshaw also lists the more commonly known risk factors, such as the fact that minority women more often than white women are confined to their homes and are not encouraged to or able to have jobs or seek companionship outside the family (1263). They experience difficulties with language when they do find the courage to seek help (1264), and within feminist circles they have experienced being excluded due to demands for certain feminist credentials in order to appear in both public discussions about domestic violence as well as on boards and committees (1264). The next paragraph will add to the list of additional risk factors, which 'women of color' uniquely are faced with, by providing some information about legislative issues that even further deteriorate women's position and their ability to change their own situation in minority communities.

2.3: Intersectionality and literary theory

As I have examined in this chapter, the main objective for Crenshaw in discussing this concept is not to create new boundaries, it is to open up or combine the existing ones: "[I]ntersectionality is not being offered as some new, totalizing theory of identity. Nor do I mean to suggest violence against women of color can be explained only through the frameworks of race and gender

considered" (Crenshaw, "Mapping" 1241). What seems evident to me from reading Crenshaw is that within human relations politics or social theory, it is necessary to realize that by applying either a too broad or a too narrow scope on certain groups, we exclude important factors that affect people as well as their actions, which again may cause injustice.

The term 'intersectionality' was coined by a feminist, and was immediately embraced within socio-political theory. However, since it is a term that is closely connected to women's experiences, it is also natural for it to be absorbed by feminist literary critics as well. Intersectionality came to be used as a paradigm to close-read and interpret female writings and texts about women. However, what is the meaning of the word 'feminist' or 'feminist literary criticism'? Toril Moi explores this question:

> Feminist criticism…is…a critical and theoretical practice committed to the struggle against patriarchy and sexism, not simply a concern for gender in literature, at least not if the latter is presented as no more than another interesting critical approach on a par with a concern for sea-imagery or metaphors of war in medieval poetry. (Moi 117)

Moi attempts to explain the 'purpose' of feminist theory by stating the main goals for a feminist ciritc: "[To] make explicit the politics of the so-called 'neutral' and 'objective' works of her feminist colleagues, as well as to act as [a] cultural *critic[s]* in the widest sense of the word" (118). Moi claims that due to mainly all existing ideas being 'male' at the time when feminist criticism emerged as a 'new' branch of literary study, one of the main problems is that there is no "pure feminist or female space" (118) to speak from. However, what Moi believes to be most important is not whether a man or a woman wrote the text (or theory), but "whether its effects

can be characterized as sexist or feminist in a given situation" (119). In that sense, is it possible to find a specific 'feminist' approach and give new light on a text that emphasizes the important feminist issues that the author wants to highlight?

In line with my main goal with this project, there are two questions remaining: How may a reading applying an extended paradigm including these intersectional factors give a better understanding of the issues the authors want to convey? And, could similar feminist readings of literature by and about women living in culturally homogenous communities possibly contribute to giving a voice to women who are not enjoying the same rights as their sisters? The last chapter of this thesis will give a very brief overview of the concept of self-determination, and discuss how it applies to indigenous people, before moving on to how *Power* and *The Round House* demonstrate that the perception of self-determination is affected by these intersecting factors, rendering women less capable to make the right decisions to improve their situations. The fact that many discussions about this concept generally do not separate between individual rights and collective rights, causes a problem within indigenous communities for women when due to the additional factors affecting their lives, they are more at risk for abuse than men, especially when they are not heard by their own leaders.

C HAPTER 3

Self-determination constructed by 'intersectional influences': a contributing factor to continued victimization?

> It would be a thousand pities if women wrote like men, lived like men, or looked like men, for if two sexes are inadequate, considering the vastness and variety of the world, how should we manage with one only? Ought not education to bring out and fortify the differences rather than the similarities? For we have too much likeness as it is, and if an explorer should come back and bring word of other sexes looking through the branches of other trees at other skies, nothing would be of greater service to humanity; and we should have the immense pleasure into the bargain of watching Professor X rush for his measuring-rods to prove himself 'superior' (Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* 90).

Both *Power* and *The Round House* are by and about women. The issues the novels address are issues that concern all women, but for indigenous women or other women living in other ethnocentric areas, there are additional factors to be included in order to obtain a complete picture of these issues, as I have tried to convey in the two previous chapters. As Louise Erdrich reveals in *The Round House,* the deficiencies in the section of the American judicial system pertaining to tribal communities are shocking. The overview by Kimberlé Crenshaw of all the intersecting factors that contribute to increasing the risk for abuse in minority communities calls for an investigation on how feminism, and particularly feminist readings of literature by and/or

about women, may contribute to this cause somehow. As discussed in the introduction, although feminism has reached many goals, there is still urgent need for public awareness to the fact that in practice, a large number of women in our part of the world do not enjoy the same rights as their white 'sisters'.

In the academic world, the opportunities for women to study and do research have certainly expanded since 1929. However, feminist criticism is so 'new' compared to the established branches of literary theory that it still has to find its way within a system and hierarchy originally constructed by men. Woolf's 'Professor X'[11] may be merely a character in her essay, but in reality, it was (and I will claim still is) a substantial undertaking for a feminist critic having to adhere to academic standards set within the different schools of theory when attempting to find a unique feminist perspective. Woolf's example of Professor X illustrates that there has been a tendency on a conscious or unconscious level to criticize literary works differently according to the gender of the author. Now one might say correctly that the situation has changed for the better today and women receive much credit for their work within many fields. However, this thesis has tried to show how two female indigenous authors from the same countries where other women enjoy this freedom and sense of equality have shed light on the fact that there are many women, citizens of the same countries, who do not. For feminist critics, this knowledge suggests at the very least that it is even more important to include all relational factors that have been or are in place surrounding authors and their characters when reading literature by and/or about women in this demographic.

[11] 'Professor X' is the fictional professor Woolf constructed in order to illustrate that female scholars were not at the time regarded as able to achieve the same credibility level as male scholars, something Woolf most likely also had experienced personally.

There are not only external challenges feminist critics have to overcome, but internal ones as well. Rebecca Whisnant addresses one example of such 'internal' conflicts within feminist circles. She examines the notion that radical feminism, often associated with the second wave of feminist theory and activism in the 1960s and 1970s, is widely considered passé in feminist circles—particularly in academic ones. According to Whisnant, radical feminism has been dismissed as "naïve and simplistic, conflated with separatism and/or with a biologically essentialist 'cultural feminism', and regarded as unduly obsessed with sexual violence and exploitation" (Whisnant 68). Whisnant examines the earlier work of Andrea Dworkin, a well-known radical feminist, with the intent to show that Dworkin "thought and wrote not only about race, but about multiple unjust hierarchies, in sophisticated and multidimensional ways" (68), suggesting that those criticisms may have been applied too widely.

My main argument for this thesis is that given that the main goal of the feminist movement is to achieve equality between genders, the need for enlightenment and action is not by any definition passé, and urgent action is necessary. Feminist criticism may contribute to this important work by providing new perspectives on women's situation, as conveyed in literature by and/or about women. Since the 1960s, feminist criticism has played a major role in uncovering areas where the feminist movement still has work to do, by framing reading as a political act. The first chapter of this thesis argued for the necessity to read characters not only through the perspective of one school of theory, simply because the main function of a character is to 'mirror life' in some way, hence the criteria for analysing characters must change according to the development of society. I have also demonstrated through my analysis that perhaps it is necessary to create extended paradigms embracing all the intersecting factors influencing particularly female characters from ethnocentric communities. The second chapter has explored in detail some of

these intersecting factors determined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, illuminating how these factors are present in *Power* and *The Round House*. In this chapter, I will add yet another factor to the analysis, self-determination. This is a very important issue within the discussion on human rights of indigenous peoples. Self-determination is important on two levels, a community level and an individual level.

The two novels I have chosen for this thesis are comparable in many respects. Firstly, they portray women living in indigenous communities, and they both explore the effect the tense relationship between the so-called 'Western ideas of progress' and the native way of living on a community level. Secondly, although in *The Round House* the story is told through the eyes of a young male, both novels tell stories of individuals, women faced with violations and ethical dilemmas that are not necessarily unique for women in these communities, but the women in *Power* and *The Round House* face additional factors increasing the effects on their situations. Edward Said asks, "Is the beginning of a given work its real beginning, or is there some other, secret point that more authentically starts the work off?" (Said 3). The 'secret point' in *Power* and *The Round House* dates far back, to when the indigenous peoples' collective rights to self-determination were taken from them, and today, this history of abuse is affecting these peoples' individual right to self-determination. This chapter will begin by presenting some findings from an article by Rauna Kuokkanen, "Self-Determination and Indigenous Women's Rights at the Intersection of International Human Rights". The chapter attempts to explore, by applying some aspects from Kuokkanen's article, how the concept of self-determination, for everyone on a community level, and for women on an individual level, changes due to external (judicial) impact in both *Power* and *The Round House.*

Kuokkanen argues for the necessity of a direct coupling between indigenous self-determination and human rights, then moves on to explore the tension between collective indigenous peoples' rights and individual human rights. She examines the sensitive question of how to define these 'peoples', which in itself is a valid argument for her claim that it might be better to consider indigenous people as individuals, and not a 'people' (227-30). Indigenous peoples' self-determination is a global human rights issue on both national and international levels. Indigenous peoples' human rights have recently been recognized in the international community through the adoption of the UN Declaration on Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007 (Kuokkanen 231). The Declaration of Human Rights affirms indigenous peoples' civil, political, and cultural rights, and emphasizes that these rights apply equally to men and women in indigenous communities.[12] The right to self-determination is regarded as the most important among these collective rights. The significance for indigenous people lies in the fact that "collective rights are not just about protecting cultural attachment; they are also about political voice and gaining access to the processes which affect conditions under which one lives" (229).

In *Power*, Omishto finds herself caught between two worlds, illustrating a dilemma both native communities and native women may find themselves in with regard to self-determination. On the one hand, she excels at school and lives in a 'modern' house, much like any 'western' girl, enjoying the comforts of a good standard of living, according to 'western' terms. On the other, she spends most of her free time alone or with her aunt Ama, near the woods and water in southern Florida, on her Taiga land. One of these worlds, the native one, is vanishing. One might

[12] Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, G.A. Res. 61/295, adopted 13 2007, U.N. GAOR, 61st Sess., 107th plen. mtg., U.N. Doc, art. 22

say that it has been subsumed by the 'western idea of progress', narrowing down the swamplands with road building and the lines of Taiga-land have been "drawn by the government" (6). Omishto reflects on the situation for her Taiga tribe: "I look at myself or the other Taiga people and I think maybe the only thing that remains of us…are bones and teeth. We barely have a thing, a bit of land, a few stories, and the old people that live above Kiili Swamp" (6). Her self-determination is affected by the responsibility she feels for her tribe and the traditional way of life that is vanishing.

Omishto lives with her mother, another woman with division in her heart. Omishto's mother is married to a non-tribal man, and she is strictly religious due to attending Catholic boarding school growing up. She is desperately trying to live as 'western' a life as possible, while struggling with the power of her secret longing for her native culture. Omishto reflects on her mother's duality in the first chapter of the novel, where she explains why she spends most of her time at Ama's instead of at home: "Ama is simple, not like my mama, who is so complex…Mama's made her choices and they are different. Still, she'd like it both ways. I can see that now and then. She'd like to learn from the old people, live the way we used to, but she wants it modern, too" (*Power* 15-16). Omishto's mother's duality mirrors her own duality, and Ama seems to be a beacon of light for her, because Ama has made the choice both Omishto and her mother have not, the choice of living in one world only:

> Ama says it is not about choices but about heart and heart is what Mama's low on. Because of how Ama lives, she's a woman both admired and ridiculed, sometimes by the same people and in the same moment of time…I think she's got more than the rest of us because she believes in

> herself, in what she does. She lives in a natural way at the outside edges of our lives, and she 'keeps up relations', as she says, with nature and the spirit world (17).

What Hogan does in this novel is to use the characters' individual duality to illustrate the dilemmas they are facing in terms of self-determination on a community level: she does this brilliantly by drawing in the panther, a representation of natural forces, the spirit world, and Ama's sacrifice, demonstrating the need for a relational approach. Although Kuokkanen's article is not a literary analysis, it confirms the fact that in reality, the situation for indigenous women with regard to self-determination has not been resolved, and it involves many ethical as well as judicial dilemmas, both on a community level and an individual level. Thus the necessity to challenge, or open up, the way characters who 'mirror life' are read, particularly with regard to literature by and about indigenous women, is evident, due to the fact that they are facing discrimination in 'real life'. Kuokkanen explores the concept of self-determination on a community level versus an individual level, and argues that the focus on collective rights and women's rights in a general perspective only is causing a deterioration of women's rights in indigenous areas. Although there has been a growth of research in this field, according to Kuokkanen there are few gender-specific analyses (226). She highlights several areas where existing theory on this subject falls short:

> Self-determination (both individual and collective) and gendered violence are among the most important and pressing issues for indigenous women worldwide. Existing indigenous self-governance arrangements have often failed to protect women from social and economic dispossession and from multilayered violence experienced in their own communities and in

> society at large. It has also become evident that current justice systems or existing structures do not adequately address violence against indigenous women (Kuokkanen, 226)

Recognition of the interdependence and overlapping character of human communities in the world is an issue that feminist political theorists and indigenous scholars view as the foundation of theories and conceptions of relational self- determination. Kuokkanen refers to Iris Marion Young who argues that a relational interpretation of self-determination better reflects reality in general, and specifically indigenous peoples' claims for the right to self-determination. In Young's view, the dominant understanding of self-determination as non-interference, separation, and independence is misleading. Drawing on feminist political theory, she argues that the precept of non-interference "does not properly take account of social relationships and possibilities for domination" (229). Kuokkanen comments:

> These views recognize the interdependence and reciprocity between all living beings and often are articulated in terms of responsibilities rather than rights. Carried out through every day practices as well as through ceremonies, self-determination is embedded and encoded in individual and collective responsibilities sometimes called the laws…that lay the foundation of indigenous societies (231).

Feminist political theorists have argued for a relational approach to all rights and for the recognition of how rights structure relationships according to Kuokkanen, something that leads us back to the necessity to define (in an analysis) the specific circumstances for particular groups of women, and not to generalize, regarding either minority groups' rights or individuals' rights. Returning to literary criticism, which is the focus of this thesis, it is not a great leap to argue that analyses of literature by and about women are more likely to uncover the specific circumstances

for certain groups of women by including relational factors, as an alternative to attempting to ‘squeeze’ them into already established paradigms for analysis.

According to Kuokkanen, the "concern for indigenous women" has long been recognizing the ways in which indigenous women "commonly experience human rights violations at the crossroads of their individual and collective rights" (232). Environmental pollution and the destruction of ecosystems are good examples of such violations. They undermine indigenous peoples' control of and access to their lands and resources, and often compromise women's ability to take care of their children and families due to health problems, contamination, and increased violence (233). In *Power*, Hogan illustrates this problem through the hurricane that rips the Taiga land in the opening chapters of the novel, functioning as a symbol of the power of the natural (native) world rebelling against the so-called 'man-made' world. Ama’s trial, where she faces not only the 'white' judicial system, but also tribal judgment for killing a holy animal, is another illustration of this problem. She responds to both judgments with silence. Amy Greenwood Baria describes the way Hogan manages, through comparison, to parallel three levels of the Taiga community affected by the threat of destruction. The different levels are: people (the collective community’s decline due to oppression); ways of life (Omishto’s upcoming decision between different worlds, Ama’s conflict when she has to kill a holy animal, and also her own duality being an outsider); and nature (the panther functioning as a symbol of the vanishing Taiga tribe, as well as the reason it is endangered in the first place). Baria states: "Hogan creates an urgency powerful enough to reawaken dominant culture to its destruction of yet another natural resource – its ever-dwindling Native population" (Baria 68).

Due to the 'western idea of progress', the swamplands of Florida, where the fictional Taiga people reside, have been excavated so much that the natural habitat for the Florida Panther has been reduced to almost nothing, rendering it an endangered species. Ama's killing of the panther, which although in a very poor state is the most sacred animal for the fictional Taiga tribe, functions as a symbol of what might happen to the tribe if nothing is done to change the situation, both for the panther and for the community. Omishto describes the state of the panther: "It is so sad a thing to see and yet there is still the beautiful curve of its back and the large, lifeless paws, there claws dangerous a day ago but now they are reduced, vulnerable looking" (*Power* 69). Omishto's reflection on Ama's reasons for killing the panther suggests that the killing has a wider significance: "I think she doesn't want the outsiders to kill this cat. She doesn't want it to die by poison or be hit by a car like the others" (62). The words 'outsiders', when combined with 'car' and 'poison', suggest the 'outsider's', i.e. 'western' intrusion in the panther's natural habitat, i.e. the Taiga tribe's land.

As mentioned in chapter one, both Omishto and Ama know that killing the most sacred animal of the tribe, and in addition an endangered species, is wrong, within both tribal law as well as 'western' law: "[S]he is right. But she is also wrong…whatever it is, it is killing, and I think, can't a human decide what to do and what not to do?...I can't and I don't. And neither can Ama and I know this…We are carried in something larger" (62). After killing the panther, Omishto is "sorry to be a human" (66), and hopes to be forgiven, realizing the possible impact of what Ama has done, suggesting that the killing has a symbolic function in the story. She says to Ama: "You

have killed yourself", to which Ama replies: "I know it. Don't I just know it" (67). Ama's sacrificing her status within the tribe because she did not want the elders to know how sick the panther was can be read in its entirety on two levels. In that scenario, the dying panther on a concrete level is endangered, but it also symbolizes the decay and ruin of the tribal community caused by the 'male' oppressive government. Omishto is very aware of the upcoming aftermath of the killing in form of a trial, which is also judgement on two levels, the 'white' trial and the tribal judgment: "There will be punishment and retribution, I know, words they use at my mother's church" (74).

Omishto is confused as to why Ama so adamantly begs her not to say anything about the state of the panther, when it might help her in her upcoming trial, something that suggests even more that the killing is more significant than just killing a sick animal. When the police come to fetch Ama, she is ready, "as if she knew all along what was going to happen" (78). Omishto observes Ama as she leaves the house: "She is at peace…more at peace than any of the women at Mama's church" (78). This example also illustrates the dilemmas self-determination on an individual level versus a community level may cause. Ama, by mercifully killing the tormented animal, and then sacrificing her own status within the tribe in order to give hope to the few remaining tribal people, becomes a Messiah-like figure, something that in the end inspires the change in Omishto to make the choice to continue to fight. From the day of the trial, Omishto observes her 'modern' surroundings with a new perspective: "In the store, amid the smell of engine grease, I look at the candy and soda and chips and their bright wrappers and they don't seem real to me" (81). The killing causes Omishto to reflect on what is ethically right or wrong, and her maturity develops at that point, when she realizes that the world is not only two-sided, but that there are many

situations that are both right and wrong. The dilemma Omishto and Ama is faced with, is, on a concrete (community) level, whether to kill the panther or not, but on an individual level, the decision consists of the right way to live one's own life and moving forward. In terms of the development of the coming of age story's plot structure, this is the moment where Omishto decides to continue to fight for her tribe. She commits to it by choosing at the end not to live in-between two worlds anymore, which is the basis for her final decision to go live with the elders at Kiili Swamp. Ama sacrificing her status within the tribe by not revealing the poor state the panther was in and thereby facing judgment and exclusion, inspires her decision, and her 'self-determined' choice provides hope on a community level as well, for the continued survival of the Taiga tribe.

Returning to the individual level of self-determination and women's unique situation in indigenous or ethnocentric communities, the concept of self-determination provides several challenges with regard to possibilities of achieving justice in cases of sexual and/or physical abuse. As explored in chapter 2, the reality in indigenous communities today is that the internalization of patriarchal colonial structures has resulted in circumstances where women often do not enjoy the same level of rights and protection as men. Confirming that this is not only a reality for American indigenous women, Kuokkanen refers to an example from Canada, where indigenous women also have experienced legal discrimination:

> From the Indian Act of 1876 until the passage of Bill C-31 in 1985, women were deprived of their Indian status upon marriage to a non-Indian man while Indian men were entitled to bestow status on their non-Indian wives… Colonialism and patriarchy have also enabled cooperation between male Aboriginal leadership and Canadian governments

> in order to resist the inclusion of Aboriginal women in Aboriginal governance. These perpetuate the exposure of Aboriginal women and their children to violence and consign many to extreme poverty (Kuokkanen, 234).

In *The Round House*, it is evident that women do not share the same possibilities and rights as their white 'sisters'. Louise Erdrich has stated herself that this novel is her literary contribution to shedding light on a precarious legal problem in indigenous communities with regard to how few cases of sexual abuse and physical abuse actually go to trial, simply due to tribal courts' not being allowed to process cases involving non-tribal men abusing tribal women. As demonstrated in the two previous chapters, the situation Joe's mother has to work through in *The Round House* certainly is an illustration of this situation. Both plots revolve around quests for justice, which climax in ethical dilemmas for both protagonists: whether to apply vigilante justice in a case where it is not possible to bring a clearly guilty perpetrator to justice in any 'western' socially accepted forum (*The Round House*), and whether to kill an endangered species in poor condition or let it die on its own because it is a sacred animal for the tribe (*Power*). Although Erdrich has been very clear of her motivation for writing the novel, it is tempting to see the dilemma Joe encounters both on an individual level and on a community level. The sense of responsibility he feels for his mother and his own desire for revenge on her behalf, but also for the other women Linden Lark has abused, affects Joe's self-determination. This causes an ethical dilemma where he, on one side, can choose to do what is best for himself as an individual, which is to leave the case alone. On the other side, he can sacrifice himself by killing Linden and redeeming many women his community, at the risk of being caught and ending up in juvenile court.

As explained in chapter one, the way Erdrich manages to show the ripple effect of abuse on not only the victim, but on the immediate family *and* on the community collectively, suggests that the novel demonstrates the duality individuals encompass with regard to self-determination on two levels. On an individual level, the dreadful experience Joe's mother has to go through is a highly intimate situation, and he has to observe the physical and psychological consequences the attack inflicts on her. In addition, he observes his father, a man in the most powerful position within the Tribal court system, failing to help his mother achieve justice within those boundaries, confirming that the Coutts family's predicament is an example of a situation that affects self-determination on a community level, shown through the other victims Linden Lark also has violated. The two young protagonists Omishto and Joe both face a dilemma where their respective ethical values are challenged, and they both 'come of age' during this process, in terms of having to make a difficult choice. In making that choice, they realize that in entering the adult world, some issues are more complex than just right or wrong. However, their choices have consequences. In Joe's case, he has to live with the fact that he took a man's life, however justified it may have been. Ama and Omishto have to live with killing an endangered animal that also is the most sacred animal in their tribe, where in the aftermath of the killing there are no clear answers to what choice will be the right one in order to ensure their tribe's future.

Returning to the initial argument in Kuokkanen's article about the concept of self-determination on a community level versus on an individual level, it has been a problem within indigenous communities when women have tried to voice their opinions on the issue. Kuokkanen states:

> In the quest for indigenous self-determination, women's rights have often been considered divisive and disruptive. Indigenous women advocating their rights have been repeatedly accused

> of being disloyal by their communities, corrupted by "Western feminists," and of introducing alien concepts and thinking to indigenous communities and practices. If not entirely disregarded, women's rights, concerns, and priorities are commonly put on the back burner to be addressed "later," once collective self-determination has been achieved. (237)

One of the intersectional factors Crenshaw claims needs to be included when dealing with women's issues in ethnocentric communities is "history of victimization" (see chapter 2), and this topic is closely related to self-determination on both a community level and an individual level. On a community level, it undeniably must be very challenging for tribal leaders to negotiate with their former oppressors, who have possessed all the power historically, and at the same time protect all individuals' rights in the community. Kuokkanen's study shows that for the sake of achieving the right to self-determination, women's rights have been under-prioritized. Adding a factor that Erdrich illuminates in *The Round House*, that most cases involving physical or sexual abuse, will not go to court, it is not unlikely that more women in these areas simply do not report abuse. Who would go through the trauma of reporting an abuser, knowing that he most likely will not be prosecuted?

A third factor taken from Crenshaw's survey is culture and tradition. As discussed in chapter two, it is more common in ethnocentric communities to solve things internally, maybe also because these communities may have experienced lack of assistance from the 'western' authorities earlier. Kuokkanen refers to several Indigenous scholars including, Jennifer Nez Dene, Joyce Greene, Emma LaRocque, Dawn Martin Hill, who have pointed out that traditions do not necessarily protect women's individual rights or advance women's leadership, but instead have been employed to re-inscribe domination and patriarchal structures. Kuokkanen concludes

by stating that "while recognizing the obvious differences between conceptions and constructions of gender in different societies, it is also necessary to note that claims for the specificity of gendered identities have contributed to a situation where women's human rights are proclaimed as private, cultural, domestic affair" (240). If this is a common practice in other indigenous or otherwise ethnocentric communities in the world as well, it is evident that it may cause serious negative consequences for all women, both as individuals and as a group.

There are several examples of incidents where women endure abuse in *The Round House*. What is interesting with regard to individual self-determination is that none of the people involved seems to demonstrate what I would call 'appropriate' reactions to someone abuse; it seems to be a commonality, and something dealt with behind closed doors, except for in the case of Joe's mother. After watching Sonja being beaten by Whitey and nearly being hit by a glass bottle flung at him, Joe witnesses Sonja striking Whitey so he falls down to the floor unconscious the second he is about to attack Joe again. As briefly referred to under the subtitle *Intersectionality and history of abuse* in chapter 2, the next morning Sonja talks about the incident as if it were maybe an occasional, but still reoccurring happening: "He's gonna walk it off in the woods…Don't worry, he'll be good for a long time now. But maybe you better stay with Clemence tonight" (*Round House* 188). Neither Joe nor Sonja appears shocked or terrified, and there is not any reflection on Joe's part about the incident later. When he arrives at Auntie Clemence's house, all she has to say about it is: "Oh. They at it again? Whitey's back at it? Yeah. You stay here then" (189). Another example is the story of Linda Wishkob, which is a tale of abuse on so many levels, as mentioned in chapter 1. However, neither of the incidents she talks about were reported, even those which took place when she was a child, as explained in

chapter 2. Her love for her foster-parents, who by the description Linda gives, were not very kind and were even abusive to her, suggests that this is all she knows, that abuse is 'normal' to her.

Linda's story is heart wrenching to read, and becomes even more so because she tells it in her naïve, matter-of-fact way. Her self-determination has been affected on an individual level due to history of victimization to a point where she does not have the self-worth to refuse to donate her kidney to Linden Lark, in spite of his insulting her:

> I don't want your kidney. I have an aversion to ugly people. I don't want a piece of you inside me. I'd rather get on a list. Frankly, you're kind of a disgusting woman…You probably have a cat. Cats pretend to love whoever feeds them. I doubt you could get a husband, or whatever, unless you put a bag over your head. And even then it would have to come off at night. Oh, dear I'm sorry (*The Round House*, 134).

I included the whole passage here instead of a smaller section used in chapter 2 in order to illustrate the degree of personal insult and verbal degradation Linda receives upon offering her kidney to save Linden's life, and still, she goes through with it. She does admit to "abhorring him" but then she "felt guilty about hating him", and claims "he's not all bad" (135). These are some of the most common things said by victims of domestic abuse when asked why they did not leave their abusive partner at an earlier stage. In most cases of domestic abuse, the physical abuse comes after, or in combination with, psychological abuse, where the 'goal' for the abuser is first to isolate the victim as much as possible, enabling the abuser to slowly wear down the victim's boundaries for what is acceptable treatment until it affects the victim's perception of her individual right to self-determination. In Linda and Linden's case, it is 'only' psychological

abuse, but that does not mean it did not affect Linda. The period she has to be in close contact with Linden and Mrs. Lark makes her sick. As mentioned in chapter 1, officially, she contracts a bacterial infection, but in her words, she "contracted an infection of the spirit" (135). She recovers only when Mrs. Lark, her biological mother (and the reason why she gave her kidney to Linden in the first place), dies. The level of indifference against violations on an individual level in *The Round House* may also be read on a community level, symbolized by the duality in the aftermath of Joe's mother's attack. As Joe's mother in the role of the victim of abuse has no possibility for achieving justice, neither can his father bring the perpetrator to justice within the community's jurisdiction, rendering the collective community incapable to protect their women against non-Tribal predators like Linden Lark.

Both of these examples illustrate that history of abuse affects how people respond to violations. In addition, as this chapter has aimed to argue, among the various factors affecting the characters in *The Round House* and *Power*, examining their perception of self-determination is an important factor to include. In addition, looking for dual levels (community level and individual level) in characters' actions is another factor contributing to a more accurate understanding of their actions.

Conclusion

This thesis has aimed to uncover intersecting factors pertaining to certain groups of women, and furthermore to demonstrate the need for extended paradigms when analysing indigenous characters that include such factors, in order to understand the characters' choices better. There are multiple intersecting factors affecting the characters in Linda Hogan's *Power* and Louise Erdrich's *The Round House*. Both novels are coming of age narratives dealing with issues concerning indigenous people collectively and individually, illuminating certain circumstances for indigenous women in dire need of change, in addition to illustrating ethical dilemmas indigenous people, women in particular, often are faced with. The introduction has provided a brief overview of the role feminism has played in achieving equality between genders so far. No matter how many goals feminist activists have successfully achieved, this thesis has argued how important it is to realize that, as Hogan and Erdrich illustrate in their novels, because the rights for women achieved in our part of the world do not apply to all women, there is still urgent need for changes. The theoretical introduction in Chapter 1 has provided an historical overview of the development of characterization due to social developments, demonstrating that paradigms for character analysis must expand parallel to such developments, before moving on to an overview of the development of the coming of age genre and its ubiquity in current fiction. The analysis in chapter 1 has claimed that the choice of genre in *Power* and *The Round House* enables a reading that uncovers multiple layers of the issues the authors want to illuminate. Chapter 2 has examined two articles by Kimberlé Crenshaw, who introduced the term 'intersectionality' in 1998, demonstrating that there are factors heightening the risk of physical and sexual abuse for black women, and that these factors are also affecting other women from ethnocentric

communities, such as indigenous women. The following analysis demonstrated how such factors are present in *Power* and *The Round House*, arguing the need for an extended paradigm in order to include these factors in a character analysis. Chapter 3 introduces an additional factor affecting indigenous women in particular, self-determination, reasserting the need to include factors affecting individuals' perception of self-determination in an analysis, in order to provide a better understanding of the characters' choices in *Power* and *The Round House*. The main goal for the project has been to exemplify how similar feminist readings might contribute to attract attention to important issues in the ongoing struggle for equality for *all* women.

No woman living in the 21 Century should have to regard verbal or physical abuse as a negative, but still socially condoned occurrence, or part of her culture. I believe that this is a very important issue for anyone regarding him- or herself to be feminists to spread information about, in any media. It should not be a part of any culture to condone or overlook violations. Feminist analyses of literature by and about indigenous women or women from minority groups focusing on unveiling and confirming aspects of this practice may become valuable contributions to 'spreading the word' to even more readers as part of the ongoing struggle to achieve equality for ALL women.

Notes:

[i] In this context, when explaining feminism, I refer to the development that has happened in (North-West) Europe and the USA, not other parts of the world where women are still fighting the same fights for basic human rights as our early feminists did a century ago.

[ii] According to Judith Flanders, around the time of the emergence of the Newgate novel (1830s), men argued among other things that women's "physiology made them especially vulnerable to excitement and to over-identification […] [and] that they would waste time on exciting novels when they could be more usefully occupied around the house." Flanders, Judith: «Penny Dreadfuls», at British Library online site: www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/penny-dreadfuls.

[iii] Georg Brandes' *Hovedstrømninger i det 19de aarhundredes litteratur* (1872–90 (*Main Currents in 19th Century Literature*) caused a great sensation, not only in Denmark, but throughout the rest of Scandinavia. His demands that literature should concern itself with life and reality, not with fantasy, and that it should work in the service of progress rather than reaction, provoked much discussion.

[iv] It would certainly have been interesting to compare *Tracks* to *The Round House,* especially since they are written by the same author. However, Linda Hogan's *Power* addresses the same issues with a focus on women's position and purely from a female perspective, in addition to also being a coming of age narrative, which rendered it more suitable for comparison in this context.

[v] The BWCA Wilderness Act of 1978 (Pub.L. 95-495) created the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW or BWCA), which was previously known as the Boundary Waters Canoe Area. The bill was introduced in October 1975 by United States Congressman Jim Oberstar and was a source of major controversy and debate. Topics of major concern were logging, mining, the use of snowmobiles and motorboats. After much debate, the Act was signed into law by President Jimmy Carter on October 21, 1978. Stephen Wilbers. "Boundary Waters Chronology", retrieved on www.wilbers.com/chronologyshort.htm.

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