

OTHER CULTURES OF TRAUMA: META-METROPOLITAN NARRATIVES AND
IDENTITIES

By

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This dissertation draws on psychoanalytical theory (both by reclaiming its use and dispelling its myths), queer theory, and post-colonial literature (and theory) to propose new ways of analyzing trauma (personal and communal, the two being intricately linked). This work is grounded in traumatic history and seeks to recuperate and analyze the erased traumas of history in order to think about new, sometimes uncanny, methods of coping with or seeking reparation for the bodily, psychological, and political disaster that is trauma. These new methods are born out of an analysis/critique of conventional psychoanalytical responses to traumatic events, an analysis which involves a conversation between different frames of thinking (psychoanalysis, queer theory, and postcolonial literature/theory as mentioned above) through which I can unveil the characteristics of irresponsible responses to trauma and propose what I believe are productive, performative responses to the forgotten disasters of history.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Trauma studies today are the preferred site of both subtle (or blatant) rivalry and useful sharing between theorists who use psychoanalysis (often in relation to literature as its twin theoretical framework), history and postmodern theory as the main contexts for thinking about trauma. If these aforementioned theoretical frameworks seem to be the most conducive to discussions of trauma and its consequences in our thinking about time, memory, witnessing, and history, this list is of course far from being exhaustive. As a matter of fact, brain specialists, feminist theorists, sociologists, political scientists, and others have discussed trauma-related issues using (and oftentimes critiquing) the context, the theoretical positions, offered by their field for better or for worse. Even though I will include a discussion of an important book by queer thinker Ann Cvetkovich in Chapter 2, a chapter which outlines the theoretical perspectives I will develop in subsequent chapters, my archeology of trauma in this first chapter will essentially be influenced by authors who dwell in the fields of psychoanalysis, history, and postmodern theory. If some of these authors often rely more heavily on one of these three frames of reference to think about trauma, they often do so in order to critique certain conservative aspects of these very frames, as well as describe a series of points of convergence between progressive discussions taking place in these different fields--hence these authors' complex and challenging additions to the area of trauma studies.

In my first chapter, even though I briefly outline in the beginning the evolution in time of main discussions in the field of trauma studies, a circular pattern quickly replaces

this linear introduction. Together, the authors whose work I will be looking at draw knowledge circles ad infinitum around this theoretical and practical challenge that is called *trauma*, encircling and speculating around this hypothesis, agitating and intermingling theoretical frameworks in the process. My purpose in the coming chapters is to problematize and add layers to contemporary conversations on trauma through 1) a critique of certain theoretical perspectives on trauma which have originated in Europe and the United States; 2) a focus on the most useful ‘first-world’ discussions on the aftermath of trauma and an opening up towards the multiple, performative possibilities offered by these discussions in thinking about recovery, remembering, history as memory, the status of the victim, testimony and other important concerns I will expose and develop in Chapter 2; and 3) an implementation of these perspectives through a discussion of traumas that either have been erased or have not been discussed sufficiently. This implementation will involve a digging into the work of Non-Western authors so as to unveil other, discounted traumas, as well as non-Western responses to and symptoms of trauma. My work is certainly not a claim for “inclusive representability” (*Bodies that Matter* 53), a practice coined and critiqued by Judith Butler which implies the absorption of the phagocyted other¹ through the theoretical membrane that defines the limits of main discourses about trauma. Butler argues against that process when she writes, “to include, to speak as, to bring in every marginal and excluded position within a given discourse is to claim that a singular discourse meets its limits nowhere, that it can and will domesticate all signs of difference” (*BM* 53). This difference

¹ A phagocyte is a white blood cell that travels the body to ingest any kind of foreign matter.

is what I want to preserve and think through in relation to, as an addition to, sometimes as a critique of, present discussions on trauma that need to be modified.

In *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, Dominick Lacapra writes, “One may recognize the need for and question the function of the founding trauma that typically plays a tendentious ideological role” (82). My goal in the chapters to come is on the one hand to acknowledge the importance of conversations about the great traumas of history; and on the other hand, to voice the selectiveness of a history that remembers certain traumas and forgets others. I want to address these other traumas from perspectives which, despite their ‘westernness,’ are useful in understanding trauma differently: in the critical works under scrutiny in Chapter 1, the tragic consequences of trauma are acknowledged alongside the possibility to survive without forgetting, to recover without healing, to partially repair what has been broken by sustaining and using one’s affective, sometimes violent, unmanageable, hysterical response to the trauma. However, I also want to consider other perspectives not as well known, other frameworks, other representations of trauma that are ‘non-Western’ and certainly not mainstream. My purpose is not to pit the ‘Western’ against the ‘non-Western,’ but to engage discrepant perspectives in a conversation that could help us think differently about trauma, its representations, its symptoms, its consequences upon individuals and communities, as well as other possibilities for coping, other definitions of recovery that do not necessarily involve complete healing.

Why Use Literature for That Project?

Today, political groups and/or polemical independent artists from all areas of the arts (be it literature, theatre, visual arts and other spectacles) are relying on unusual archives to represent trauma. One of those groups, the Atlas Group, which is known since

1999 in France for its *Conférences Spectacles*, has used all possible archives gathered since 1999 to publicize the trauma of the Lebanese war (1975-1991). On May 26 and 27, 2004 at the Centre Pompidou in Paris, one of these *conférences spectacles* entitled “My Neck is Thinner Than a Hair” gathered historical material documents (photographs, objects, notebooks, testimonies, etc.) and made-up, fictional archives fabricated for the purpose of the exposition, a fabrication that helps blur the boundary between fiction and history and helps us rethink the notion of archive.² Here, the definition of archive expands to include material that is not historical proof, but which encircles history, puts it in the hands of the fiction maker, the creative worker, so that the memory of trauma be preserved differently.

Writers about trauma like to disrupt the boundary between fiction and history, and for Shoshana Felman, Laurie Vickroy and Cathy Caruth, literary fiction becomes an important tool, “an imaginative medium . . . to gain an insight into . . . historical reality” (Felman and Laub 105). It is for Felman 1) the preferred medium to imagine the unimaginable, the unthinkable, trauma itself; and 2) the place where one can “confront [one’s] own destructiveness” (Felman and Laub 114) and become historically conscious. In *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction*, Laurie Vickroy recognizes the importance of literatures that deal with trauma for their ethical functions (8), ethical since this literature speaks of secrecy, unveils it, and forces the reader to “adopt a new consciousness of history” (33), a consciousness that is responsible to others. As a matter of fact, “readers are challenged to enter into a multifaceted examination of the past that is

²See article entitled “Atlas Group, une esthétique du trauma,” published in *Le Monde* on May 25, 2004.

dynamic, uncertain, and always unfinished process, one that recontextualizes traditional historical, psychological, and narrative boundaries” (Vickroy 35).

Vickroy also acknowledges the possibility, in literature, to present certain personal and collective experiences both from a rational and emotional perspective, a strategy of reading trauma I will develop in the first chapter. Vickroy and Lacapra both acknowledge that “fiction can be truthful and reveal the emotional experience of historical phenomena” (Vickroy 21). Vickroy also notices the endless possibilities in literary representations of trauma, the strategies, techniques such as “textual gaps (both in the page layout and content), repetition, breaks in linear time, shifting viewpoints, and a focus on visual images and affective states” (Vickroy 29), hence the possibility to destroy conventional chronotopes if not the notion of chronotope³ itself. Trauma fiction is also the space where the partial recovery of memory takes place, where the personal and collective memories of marginalized groups come to the foreground and help us rethink the impersonal, sometimes inhuman, often crippling mainstream historical narratives which erase traumatic suffering and death.

In *Joyce, Derrida, Lacan and the Trauma of History*, Christine Van Boheemen-Saaf thinks of literature as a “form of theoria” (2). She writes, “Some forms of writing . . . re-enact an occurrence of an act of violence which affects symbolization itself, and add to history a new dimension” (9). To look at literatures of trauma as theory is certainly part of my project since I want to redirect discussions on trauma towards certain unspoken traumas and their consequences, as well as implement upon the traditional

³ In an essay entitled “Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel” published in *The Dialogical Imagination* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), M. M. Bakhtin defines the chronotope as expressing the inseparability of time and space. The chronotope is the material representation of this inseparability, of the fixation of time and space into one element. For example, Bakhtin talks about the chronotopes of encounters that are parlors and salons in the literature of Balzac or Stendhal.

theoretical perspectives on trauma. This project is meant to counter the trend I noticed in reading about literatures of trauma. In almost all the literary critiques of trauma texts I have encountered so far, I either found very useful analyses on Western and metropolitan novels, or very problematic readings of ‘third world’ literatures of trauma--readings which relied on strict, monolithic theoretical perspectives simply applied to the novels under scrutiny. I would like, in the coming chapters, to reverse that trend and look at trauma from the perspectives put forth by other, non-metropolitan, literatures.

Psychoanalysis, history and postmodern theories are, again, very useful frameworks to think about trauma. I will indeed continue to use those frameworks (Chapters 1 and 2 discuss their usefulness), but I also want to acknowledge the fact that there exists other perspectives, less familiar ones, which I will address in Chapters 3 and 4. These other narratives can thus be read as *theoria*. They are “hieroglyphic narrative[s]” (26), to use a term coined by Van Bohemeen-Saaf, since they are only partially readable or decipherable within the context of trauma studies defined by the three discourses mentioned above. My purpose in these last two chapters is to bring to the front line these other traumas, these other perspectives on trauma in a way that is not anthropophagic.

This project has been greatly influenced by Ronald Granofsky’s *The Trauma Novel*. This is the only critical work I have encountered in my research (I am still searching) which focuses on representations of trauma in non-Western literatures. His analysis of the novels under scrutiny is problematic for the reasons I am going to expose below.

In his introduction to *The Trauma Novel*, Ronald Granofsky states that his purpose is “to set out the claim that it is useful to differentiate the trauma novel from other novels

as distinct sub-genre of contemporary fiction” (5). He continues, “I reserve the term ‘trauma novel’ for those contemporary novels which deal symbolically with a collective disaster” (Granofsky 5). These two statements are problematic for several reasons. His first statement leads Granofsky to define some basic characteristics of the trauma novel so that future readers will be able to clearly see whether or not the novel they are reading is indeed a trauma novel. He assumes the veracity of psychiatrist Robert Jay Lifton’s three stages of trauma--stasis, disintegration and resymbolization—and renames them to make them “more literary.” The three renamed stages are regression, fragmentation and reunification, and mime Lifton’s stages. Granofsky then proceeds to look for these stages in novels, a move that serves only to clarify trauma by defining its nature according to a series of stages--a very reductive move that completely ignores the complexity of trauma, its multiple faces and consequences, its irreducibility to a set of mechanical steps that turn suffering into a normative process. His method of reading is anthropophagic since Granofsky simply applies a Western theoretical framework to non-western literatures. As Jenny Edkins points out in *Trauma and the Memory of Politics*, “Not only can the export of western trauma treatments be culturally inappropriate . . . and detrimental to local coping strategies, it is a form of ‘therapeutic governance’ that pathologises and depoliticizes population” (51). Granofsky’s work *The Trauma Novel* produces the problem outlined by Edkins.

I like to think about the novels I have chosen to work with in Chapters 2, 3 and 4 as extended purloined letters about trauma which should be read both inside and outside, or rather at the limit between the inside and the outside, of the determinate contexts proposed by contemporary studies about trauma. In the following chapters, what I foresee

is a discussion taking place between the theoretical frameworks we know and other possibilities to envision trauma and its aftermaths.

Moreover, for Granofsky, the term “trauma novel” is linked to symbolic representation. He considers the symbols that can be found in trauma novels to form a “meta-encyclopedia” (Granofsky 6), a symbolic collective memory that enables the reader to confront safely a historical traumatic experience. I have two issues with this aspect of Granofsky’s project: first, symbols are not the only markers of trauma and one should also take into account more literal, material, emotional responses. Second, the reader cannot always be protected; she cannot and should not always be safe: to read about trauma means wondering about the possibility for human evil within ourselves. It means questioning our assumptions about political or social institutions which for some are ‘normal’ and for others traumatic. It means thinking about which traumas are being spoken of, and which are being ignored. Moreover, setting trauma as irreducibly pathological from the start prevents any kind of productive treatment of trauma and implies depoliticization (a comment Jenny Edkins makes in *Trauma and the Memory of Politics*). What my project entails is a pluralistic reading of non-Western literatures that deal with certain traumatic experiences, whether individual and/or collective. However, I want to move away from the kinds of cannibalistic readings such as the ones proposed by Granofsky, and rather engage the conversation between the theoretical perspectives I will present and develop in my first chapter, and this other literature as *theoria*.

Other Literatures about Trauma

The reason I am focusing so much on the work of women writers in my project lies in the fact that I inscribe my project in a process Alice Jardine calls ‘Gynesis’, which refers to “postmodernity’s resorting to the use of gender to give figure to its own

projective stepping beyond the logos or the fabula/story of western philosophy” (Van Boheemen 135). Trauma studies still lack diversity in terms of addressing racial, gender and sexual traumas, as well as larger historical traumas from the perspective of the so-called ‘gender minority’. The authors whose work I will engage with address those issues fearlessly.

Chapter 2 outlines contemporary Western theoretical perspectives on trauma. As I mentioned in the beginning of this introduction, psychoanalysis, history and postmodern theory will be my three preferred theoretical frameworks. The discussions under scrutiny in this chapter all participate in the formation of new, productive discourses about trauma which take us away from a conservative, monolithic envisioning of the relationship between trauma and memory, trauma and history, trauma and witnessing, trauma and time. This chapter opens the way towards a dialogue between Western contemporary theories on trauma and the perspectives that come out of literatures that have been ignored or misread in trauma studies.

Chapter 3 focuses on the work of Algerian women writers who write about linguistic trauma in Algeria. Historians of North Africa have agreed to the fact that plurilingualism has always been a prominent characteristic of the Northern regions of Africa. The history of these regions involves a series of invasions beginning in the 600s when the Greeks and Romans came and occupied the Berber territories. This linguistic pluralism is evidently the result of colonization, genocidal interventions which left tragic, traumatic imprints on the bodies, lands, institutions of the colonized. After centuries of colonization, decades of a struggle that became adamant around the turn of the 20th century, and finally, after the war of independence against the French which ended in

1962, Algeria was granted independence and complete sovereignty over state affairs. My purpose in this chapter is to think about the ways in which French and Arabic became, and still are today, sites of trauma. Political camps have formed around the association with one or the other language, few people promoting the importance and the desire to reconcile the two languages. This linguistic trauma, which I will define more specifically in Chapter 3, has been a sad inspiration for contemporary Algerian women writers (I will focus on Assia Djébar in this chapter) who address its consequences on the construction of a national Algerian identity; its omnipresent, inescapable symptoms in the lives of the traumatized (the writers, their families, their friends, their community); and the ways in which writing about trauma is performative and has a reparative role in the process of thinking about the reconstruction of individual and national identities that dismiss political calls to homogeneity. I will discuss the Algerian linguistic trauma alongside a revisiting of the relationship between mourning and melancholia. This revisiting promotes different ways of looking at trauma and measuring its impacts, and offers other possibilities for healing by moving away from narrow, traditional notions of traumatic recovery.

Chapter 4 focuses on Native-American traumatic history, more specifically on the work of author Leslie Marmon Silko's two famous novels: *Ceremony* and *Almanac of the Dead*. This chapter is a critique of the notion of traumatic origin (and the psychoanalytical desire to find one). It is also a revisiting of historical moments that have been traumatic to Native-Americans, and it continues the work of trauma theorists and other writers who have begun to uncover the relationships between victims of trauma across cultures in order to counter separation through difference. To construct that

critique, I will thus rely heavily on the rather uncanny work of Silko. This author insists on looking at trauma not as a catastrophic event that comes to disrupt the gentle flow of a peaceful human history and thus is regarded as an inhuman accident, but as a signifier of omnipresent evil which she defines as one of the most common, almost familiar faces of humanity. Human evil, and thus trauma, is not catastrophic but omnipresent, almost prosaic. It is everyday.

Those two novels will help me continue my discussion of the relationship between language and trauma, though in *Ceremony*, language is not synonymous to idiom but to discourse. *Ceremony* will help me think about the performative power of words when used in a ceremonial context created for the purpose of healing the traumatized, hence also the need for a discussion about the relationship between history and mythology within the traumatic context.

Silko tells us that words can be both sites of destruction (they can be traumatizing, as is the retroactive prophecy Silko includes in the middle of *Ceremony*) and reparation (ceremonial words heal). If my intention is to consider these properties, I want to focus specifically on this healing power, witnessed in the process of story-telling, and its being pitted against the 'healing power' of mainstream medical responses to trauma which are not always sufficient in responding to pain--individual or collective. The ceremony replaces the psychoanalytical session: words are pronounced, stories are told, songs are sung that perform the coming together between past and present through a retelling of secular or sacred stories that belong to the past. The forgotten genealogical memory of Tayo, the main character in *Ceremony*, is recuperated in the process of healing trauma (not in the healing itself, which does not take place). These progressive stories or

mythologies, these stories of the past modified by the present, are a site of both trauma (their forgetting) and healing (their remembrance). The title of Native-American author N. Scott Momaday's famous essay "The Man Made of Words" (as well as its content) shows the power of language in creating humanity and identity: humans are made of words; they are made and re-made through the repetition with a difference of culturally meaningful stories and songs (the songs and stories evolve with the times), and not remembering those words, always differently since sacred stories and songs have to be modified according to historical/cultural changes, is a sign of trauma. *Almanac of the Dead* does not specifically deal with Native North-American traumas but outlines the trans-historicity of trauma (without denying its local specificities) and the intercontinental, intercultural impact local Native traumas have had on a multiplicity of Native cultures.

The reading of the two novels will happen along side an analysis of the traumatic features of 9/11. My purpose in this chapter is also to point out the relationship between literature and theory and the role of writers such as Silko (through her literary interventions) and Butler (through her theoretical interventions) in promoting the need for cultural sharing and understanding, in acknowledging the relationship between traumatized cultures. I want to argue that there is, or there can be, in the context or aftermath of a war, a way for "enemy" cultures to find common features in their respective traumas, to realize that the trauma of whom one believes is one's enemy is in fact intertwined with one's own trauma. This chapter will also point out unfamiliar or unacknowledged sites and symptoms of trauma and new sites of memories, which all are here to deterritorialize trauma and readers of trauma.

In Chapter 5, I want to discuss specific representations or signs of racial trauma in the work of contemporary Caribbean writer Michelle Cliff. In the introduction to a collection of texts entitled *Caribbean Creolization*, Kathleen Balutansky and Marie-Agnès Sourieau define creolization as a “process of transverse dynamics that endlessly reworks and transforms the cultural patterns of varied social and historical experiences and identities” (3). This process counters colonial and neo-colonial desires for the homogenization and sometimes problematic authentication of cultures. Creolization came as a theoretical and practical polemical response to colonialism in the Caribbean islands and can be linked to postcolonial thinker’s Homi Bhabha’s notion of hybridity which counters the “production of discriminatory identities that secure the pure and original identity of authority” (*The Postcolonial Studies Reader* 34). In this last chapter, I want to put trauma studies through the work of creolization by defining new figures of trauma, new sites of trauma that have not been considered by traditional conversations around trauma. I want to unveil the colonial/patriarchal unhealthy desire rooted into certain areas and arguments of psychoanalysis, and rethink these arguments through an analysis of the work of Cliff in which traditional psychoanalytical concepts about self/identity formation do not function to explain the characteristics and possible resolution of the main character’s identity crisis.

It is important for me to state that in this dissertation, I am not trying to specifically locate the changes I point out through conversations around the theme of trauma within certain cultural/literary groups. I am not at all arguing that, for example, the issue of originology is only problematized inside the field of Native-American literature, that only Algerian authors deal with linguistic trauma, or that only Caribbean authors include the

critical categories of gender and race in conversations about trauma. My intention is not to draw narrow conclusions as to what a particular literary group does (as I realize that the very process of defining those groups can be problematic), and what another does not do in the context of trauma studies. I am dealing with specific writers who have indeed been associated with certain homogeneous cultural or/and geographical groups. Such authors have written literature subsequently named and defined through those very cultural or geographical attachments. However, I consider the authors and their work (though their writing indeed alludes to traumas that have touched the specific groups for which they have become, willingly or not, representatives) as peculiar loci from which to begin a conversation/revision on the work of trauma. Their dealing with trauma is in no case representative of the cultural/literary groups to which they are associated. Their work is the localized site of meta-metropolitan critiques and re-envisionings of trauma studies, re-envisionings that are continued in the work of other authors localized elsewhere.

CHAPTER 2
AN ARCHEOLOGY OF TRAUMA: PROGRESSIVE CONTEMPORARY
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS FOR TALKING ABOUT TRAUMA

A Linear Timeline and Beyond

As outlined in the introduction, my dissertation project is in fact a rethinking and critiquing of the discourses around and about trauma that prevent an analysis of ignored traumas; an analysis of the consequences of such erasures on the very victims of trauma; and the possibilities offered by the recuperation of such analyses in the context of very practical struggles such as intra-national and international cultural wars. I hope that I can demonstrate the political role trauma studies, and thus psychoanalysis, can play when allied with other theoretical frameworks and recalibrated, readapted through a heterogeneous and thus performative envisioning of human relations. When Freud developed this body of knowledge known today as psychoanalytical theory, his conclusions on the development of human sexuality; on the role of culture in shaping human selves and human relations; on the functioning of the human mind and body under trauma, were all received or rejected as new, highly controversial theories. My purpose here is to remember this potential of psychoanalysis and thus trauma studies to recover a controversial space, a radical site from which, toward which, and through which thinkers looking for kind and productive forms of knowledge can travel in order to reevaluate much less kind theories and practices of human relation. However, before trauma theory can play such a role again, it has to be reevaluated through the work of thinkers who can help strip it of its unproductive assumptions; give it back its performative power; and

sever its associations with very narrow, conservative notions about human evolution and the possibility for human connections. If theorists of trauma in Europe and the US have begun that process of reevaluating psychoanalytic theory in the post-modern and post-colonial context, this reevaluation should also come from the very places where trauma studies were exported and applied as one more colonizing ideology. For trauma theory, and thus psychoanalysis, to be relevant as a global theory of human evolution, it has to take into account the very places, cultures, communities that can offer it transcultural relevance through the influence of non-Western and/or non conservative ways of imagining and thinking the human. It is nonetheless important to remember psychoanalysis as a historically and culturally grounded inheritance with its specific root-theories, and speak about the beginnings in order to better understand and move beyond them through the delicate inclusion of other post-modern, non-modern, non-Western theories of trauma, which is what I will employ myself to accomplish in the chapters to come.

Freud was and remains the most influential thinker on traumatic disorders, and his first conclusions on the study of hysterics placed early (childhood) sexual trauma at the origin of traumatic symptoms experienced in adulthood. This theory was coined the “seduction theory,” which Freud later abandoned to focus instead on the repression of early fantasies as the axis of hysterical disorder. According to this theory, Freud defined traumatic disorders as a dialectical process which involved two steps, two traumas: the first trauma (sexual trauma in childhood), not grasped thus not traumatic at first is given its traumatic meaning after a second trauma takes place which brings back the memory of

the first one. This is the concept of deferred action or *nachtraglichkeit*.¹ Freud also introduced the idea that this site of repressed fantasies and memories that is the unconscious must be penetrated, and that repressions should become accessible through narration, hence the development of Freud's psychotherapeutic methods of Astorytelling. His reflections on the seduction theory and his later questioning of it, as well as his extensive work on mourning (among other things) are cornerstones to a body of work immersed in conversations about the role of memory in the process of defining and overcoming a traumatic experience--conversations that played a crucial role in shaping the work of subsequent thinkers about trauma. One of the main concerns in the chapters to come will be the ways in which, in the field of trauma studies, the relationship between trauma, memory, and history has been dealt with; and the ways in which certain aspects of that promiscuous relationship have been erased so as to sterilize the political potential of trauma studies and its preferred theoretical framework, psychoanalysis--a sterilization that prevents us from looking at trauma as a multi-faceted event that critically changes bodies, and as a mode of cultural and historical encryption that deals with perturbations that take place as much at the level of the human body as the social or cultural body. Trauma studies, and thus psychoanalysis, can play an important part in rethinking the norms, laws, impositions under which or according to which violent social systems are kept in place through the rejection/erasure of certain culture groups, their history, their characteristics, their traumas.

The erasure of the political implications intrinsic to conversations around trauma is oftentimes a signifier of the medical/scientific community's lack of vision concerning the

¹ "The Aetiology of Hysteria." *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychoanalytical Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey. London 1953-73: 3: 191-221.

performative role modern and post-modern conversations around trauma can play when they leave the medical community and become reconfigured after a passage through the very fields that want to give psychoanalysis back its performative Freudian touch, that is its innovative and positively disturbing characteristics. In the fall and spring of 2004 in France, discussions about the fate of psychoanalysis threatened to render it obsolete by limiting its applications to the field of medicine: the Amendment Accoyer came out of a desire on the part of the French medical profession to force the medicalization of an area that I believe should remain profane. The existence of this amendment leads to the critical diagnosis on the side of its opponents that medical doctors who practice psychoanalysis and request its medicalization are suffering from archive fever; they feel a nostalgic desire for the medical archive, a need to bring psychoanalysis back to its original home. The Amendment Accoyer was proposed in October of 2003 by the French National Assembly and deals with certain changes to be made in terms of health practices in France. Article 18 specifically concerns psychoanalysis and limits this practice to psychiatrists and doctors in psychology. This amendment was modified by two successive amendments: the Amendment Mattei and the Amendment Dubernard. This final amendment, adopted on April 7 this year, erases Accoyer's demand to limit the practice of psychoanalysis. However, it states that psychoanalysts should follow a theoretical and practical training that is recognized by associations of psychoanalysis, and publicize their educational background in the national registry of psychoanalysts. Even though this last amendment does not enforce the return of psychoanalysis to its originary archive, psychoanalysis is now under the surveillance of those who want to make it more aloof than it already is by repressing its political scope.

To the tendency towards archival repetition is then added the risk of archive withdrawal in terms of the theoretical frameworks at our disposition. This double jeopardy renders arduous the development of culturally inclusive and politically coherent and convincing discussions on the challenge that is trauma. My project here is to further demonstrate the political potential of psychoanalytic theory when used in conjunction with other progressive frameworks and to critique any call to an origin in defining trauma, in analyzing the traumatic--a concern that will be developed further in Chapter 4.

Only after WWI did the interest in the study of traumatic disorders begin to develop impressively within the medical community as the disease known as war neurosis (or shell shock) spread out in Europe. As Ruth Leys points out in *Trauma, a Genealogy*, doctors turned to Freud's work on the unconscious and the idea of dissociation (absence from the self) to understand and try to cure shell shock using the cathartic method developed by Freud and Breuer. Trauma was then defined in the following terms:

an experience that immersed the victim in the traumatic scene so profoundly that it precluded the kind of specular distance necessary for cognitive knowledge of what had happened. This meant that the amnesia held to be typical of psychical shock was explained as a kind of post-hypnotic forgetting that risked being irreversible since, according to the hypothesis, the traumatic scene was never present to the hypnotized subject and hence as constitutively unavailable for subsequent representation and recall. (Leys 9)

Hypnosis reproduced this state of being but added the necessary distance to recognize and then start incorporating the trauma. WWI, WWII and the Vietnam War (the great traumas of history as we could call them today) impacted the evolution of trauma studies though the interest in this area wavered in between those three traumatic historical moments. After the Vietnam War the American Psychiatric Association finally granted an official pathological status to trauma diseases and gathered them under an umbrella

term. This term, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), was used to acknowledge the suffering of war veterans and victims of sexual abuse.

One of the main theorists, and thus proponents, of PTSD is Bessel A. van der Kolk. His work is useful since it involves an element sometimes forgotten in theoretical discussions about trauma: the body. However, it is also problematic for the reasons I am outlining below. His research is geared towards finding “the neurohormonal basis of [traumatic] memories” (Leys 7), thus partially reducing trauma to its inscription in the body (here the brain, and more specifically the central nervous system), and looking at traumatic disorders as the consequence of this inscription. Van der Kolk’s work follows up on the research of Herbert Spencer who coined the term “phylogenetic memory,” a memory that arises not from the experience of an individual, but the experience of a species. Phylogenetic memories are already inscribed in the body of an individual before birth and are responsible for instinctive responses to certain situations. In the Freudian context, the Oedipus complex acted as a phylogenetic memory, the instinctive “normal” response of the male child in his interaction with mother and father, a process already inscribed in the book of human evolution. A process also already disrupted as it is inscribed.

Hacking speaks of the work of Herbert Spencer in an essay entitled “Memory Sciences, Memory Politics” and explains,

This kind of memory begins as an individual experience. To say that an experience is remembered means that it has left a neurological trace. These traces (which include memorized action patterns) tend to fade over time unless they are periodically recalled and/or reenacted, in which case a trace evolves into a permanent neural pathway. Pathways grow progressively deeper as the organically registered experiences of multiple generations are accumulated. (Antze and Lambek 92)

As Ruth Leys and other thinkers of trauma point out, such a narrow perspective on trauma and memory is problematic because it “testifies to the existence of a pristine and timeless historical truth undistorted or uncontaminated by subjective meaning, personal cognitive schemes, psychological factors, or unconscious symbolic elaboration” (Leys 7). This punctual historical truth inscribes itself in the brain through a modification of hormonal secretion which should be controlled and reversed in order for healing to take place. This conceptualization of trauma erases the possibility of thinking about traumatic disorders as complex, multi-faceted and pluri-dimensional reactions to a trauma (or series of them)--a possibility which Freud, despite his attachments to certain ahistorical, static and thus problematic concepts such as the Oedipus complex, was one of the first to point out and develop. For example, his writings on the concept of the death drive², a concept which is grounded in civilization, in culture, in history, in our relationship with the world, are symptomatic of Freud’s desire to portray human life as the site of interaction between the biological and the socio-cultural, the one influencing the other and vice versa. A purely neurological explanation to traumatic behavior crystallizes trauma by pointing out a specific, physical site which is modified by a traumatic experience, and which supposedly needs to be modified again so that behavior may be normalized. It puts aside the fact that, as Jonathan Crewe argues in “Recalling Adamastor: Literature as Cultural Memory in White South Africa,” “memory is always subject to active social manipulation and revision. It is accordingly more akin to a collective fiction than to a neurological imprint of events or experiences” (Bal 75). Moreover, it erases the possibility of thinking about the relationship between trauma and the complex work of

² In *Moses and Monotheism* (1939), *Civilizations and its Discontents* (1928) and “Three Essays on Sexuality,” *Standard Edition* Volume 7.

memory (both individual and collective, mournful and melancholy) when memory comes to redefine history, for example. It erases the possibility of reflecting upon the relationship between trauma and race, trauma and gendered bodies, trauma and language, as well as other relationships which will be discussed in the chapters to come. If the struggle between theories of trauma that spring from a biological or physiological focus and theories that rely on the workings of the mind from a non-anatomical perspective have marked the evolution of the field of trauma studies until today, other issues or questions concerning the consequences of trauma upon individuals and groups are being raised, notably in relation to the political implications found in modern and postmodern discourses about remembering, forgetting, witnessing and healing.

One cannot but remember the tragic historical consequences of the reduction of a human being to its biological characteristics, a remembering that fosters paranoia. Agamben critiques what he terms “biopolitics”--concept which springs from that of the Foucauldian biopower³--or “the transformation [by a state power] of a political body into a biological body, whose birth and death, health and illness, must then be regulated. With the emergence of biopower, every people is doubled by a population; every democratic people is, at the same time, a demographic people” (85). In concentration camps, Jewish (and other) prisoners were depoliticized, dehumanized, degraded and reduced to their mere biological presence to be eventually turned into “corpses.” They were “non-humans whose deacease [was] debased into a matter of social production” (Agamben 72). If his context for the discussion of biopolitics is the *Shoah*, one can certainly expand that

³ Foucault defines biopower in *The History of Sexuality*, Volume 1, as “what brought life and its mechanisms into the realm of explicit calculations and made knowledge-power an agent of transformation of human life” (143). Human life is thus restricted in its cultural development by the imposition of knowledge (or norms) that define the place of bodies (though this restriction as it is imposed implies the very possibility for escape) in the socio-politico-economic realm.

context to include the innumerable examples of racial or ethnic purification performed by certain state powers in the past and in the present. What does it mean for one to adopt a vision of trauma that stands mainly from a biological, more specifically neurological perspective? Does such a vision not support other, more subtle, kinds of trauma notably the way in which the medical field conceptualizes and implements recovery (cure at all cost)? Doesn't an exclusively medical response to trauma imply a definition of human subjects as these monolithic biological entities who should all respond in the same way to treatments of trauma? Where does the victim's agency come into play in the process of recovery within the sole biological context? In *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, Dominick Lacapra states, "the use of psychoanalysis should not become a pretext for avoiding economic, social, and political issues" (ix). I think that this type of comment or critique can be expanded to the medical field in general and that theories which pretend to locate the origin of traumatic symptoms only in the material body are taking backward steps in the study of trauma (even though I want to stress that the body does need to be taken in account). From the medical field to psychoanalysis, from body to mind, then from psychoanalysis to all imaginable fields of study, discourses on trauma have moved forward. Today, conversations on the political implications of trauma are leading the way toward a different understanding of certain events, certain moments in history, and a rediscovery of others. I want to continue this conversation in the chapters to come.

Testimonies about Trauma: the Re-writing of History and the Re-birth of the Subject

In *Testimony, Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*, Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub discuss the importance of testimony in the context offered by psychoanalysis. For them, psychoanalysis "rethinks and radically renews the

very concept of testimony . . . one does not have to possess or own the truth, in order to effectively bear witness to it . . . and the speaking subject constantly bears witness to a truth that nonetheless continues to escape him, a truth that is, essentially, not available to its own speaker” (15). For Laub, the narratives of Holocaust survivors are indeed sites of exploration which should never be thought through in terms of accuracy, expectations, or fallibility. Laub argues that there is no such thing as a false testimony, a false description of events or places on the part of a victim. Testimonies cannot be pitted against each other to the benefit of doctors, historians, or archivists who are looking for the truth (a truth they often define and use as a basis to judge the validity of certain testimonies). If it happens, then the witness is silenced, erased from history: it is the “voiding of the act of witnessing” (Felman and Laub 183) which opens the way for a history “of not knowing and not looking” (Felman and Laub 184), of forgetting the other, the victim, the dead; a silent and blind history will then repeat itself and let other traumas occur. One must acknowledge the importance of testimony as well as the specificity and uniqueness of every testimony, whether the one who testifies is the survivor, her child, her friend, the writer of her story in biographies or fiction⁴. This chain of story-telling affords the past a useful place in the present and is replete with information about the past which circles around the traumatic experience so as to understand its before and after.

Rather than looking at a testimony as the (impossible) retelling of a victim’s past, one needs to think of a testimony as “a verbal action of resistance which, as such, is not a simple statement or description of the historical conflict it narrates, but an actual

⁴ Of course, one also needs to pay attention to whom is speaking, whom is witnessing. Not everyone can claim the status of witness, and witnessing is not the answer to the desire for healing. It is not sufficient to witness a trauma and share it through testimony to see this trauma remedied (and I am not looking for remedies here). Narrativization is needed, but again, not sufficient.

intervention in this conflict” (Felman and Laub 98). Through their narratives, the victims and/or witnesses of trauma both resist history as truth and become the agents of history as memory. The novels I will discuss in the coming chapters are testimonies (fictional but not false) to other traumas, ignored traumas, and the characters of these novels bear the symptoms of these traumas in their narratives. The relevance of genealogical memory in the healing process will be one of the themes discussed in Chapter 3.

According to Agamben in *History and Memory after Auschwitz*, “The subject of testimony is the one who bears witness to a desubjectification” (120-1), a silencing, and the place of testimony is the “place of coincidence between the human and the inhuman” (135). Many characters in the novels I chose to discuss are victims of this desubjectification but strive to find ways to gain agency and limit—since complete erasure seems impossible—the influence of certain traumas upon themselves and their communities. This limitation takes place through the differentiation between what remains human in their lives and the memory of what was and still is inhuman in what they had to live through. This differentiation does not necessarily imply separation or splitting. Rather, it should lead to the acknowledgment that ‘human’ and ‘evil’ are not separate entities, and call for a response to trauma that is at the same time human and inhuman, emotional and rational.

For Agamben, “the archive is the unsaid or sayable inscribed in everything said by virtue of being enunciated” (144). By contrast, testimony is “the system of relation between the inside and the outside of language, between the sayable and the unsayable in every language--that is, between a potentiality of speech and its existence, between a possibility and an impossibility of speech” (145). The fictional stories or testimonies I

chose to scrutinize in the chapters to come call for archival research, the unveiling of “the unsaid or sayable” hidden behind non-Western figures of trauma. (I will address these new figures in Chapter 5.)

Rethinking the Theory of Origin: Trauma Beyond Originology, Beyond the Singular Archive

Cathy Caruth, in *Unclaimed Experience*, focuses upon the fact that a particular traumatic event remains unknown to the traumatized person, and that it is this gap, this absence which comes back to haunt the trauma victim. The traumatic event fails to be symbolized or narrativized, inscribed within the memories of the victim, experienced in time, thus preventing any kind of working through: “What returns to haunt the victims . . . is not only the reality of the violent event, but also the reality of the way that its violence has not yet been fully known” (6). For Caruth, there is no direct access to trauma and one can only analyze its aftermath in order to understand parts of its complex structure and acknowledge the incisive characteristics of trauma, the many cuts and punches inflicted upon this insubstantial matter that is the mind (Caruth ignores the body most of the time). Caruth uses the so-called literature of trauma and trace in this literature “a different story, the story of the textual itinerary of insistently recurring words or figures” (5). Thus, Caruth relies on repeated linguistic entities which are, according to her, indices of trauma. She uncovers certain “key figures,” among which the most important are the figures of “departure” and “falling” (5), which bear witness to trauma and must be decoded for the presence of trauma to be unveiled. One of my projects in the coming chapters is to expand the list of these key figures.

Moreover, Caruth does not simply equate trauma with an actual traumatic event, but wonders, “Is the trauma the encounter with death, or the ongoing experience of

having survived it?" (7), thus preventing any kind of narrow imposition of an originary event as being the one and only site of a trauma. She thus moves away from Freud's notion of originary trauma, though keeping with Freud's "tradition" of looking at literature in order to understand the complexity and nuances of traumatic disorders, the only "tradition" I am ready to preserve and repeat in my discussions on trauma.

Is there such a thing as an originary trauma (in the way Freud conceived of it) in the history of an individual or a group whose "abnormal" behavior is symptomatic of trauma? Can we remember a beginning? Is there an actual moment or point of reference we can go back to, point out, recuperate and "make speak out" so that one specific time and place of trauma from which to depart, on which to rely, can be framed? Can we name the origin of trauma so that this so desired healing process may begin somewhere for the sick at loss within their trauma, living beside themselves? In *Glossalalia*, Julian Wolfey, on the subject of thinking (or rather the impossibility of thinking) the origins of deconstruction, asks the question, "Does [this phrase, the origins of deconstruction] give us to read a disabling and impossible temporality in the same place as the desire for an identity?" (213). The same question should be asked in thinking of the origin of trauma (deconstruction is indeed a traumatic moment in the history of French philosophy, and is sometimes seen as an origin to post-structuralist thinking--a rather structural assumption).

Caruth argues that it is illusory to think of trauma as an event that has a spatial and temporal specificity, a determined monolithic material presence: "trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past" (*Unclaimed Experience* 4). She argues that trauma is locatable "in the way that its very unassimilated nature, the way it was precisely not known in the first instance, returns to haunt the survivor later on" (4).

The material presence of trauma lies in its aftermath, its *après-coup*, and its key figures which Caruth wants to determine. Trauma, though structurally unknowable as Caruth argues, that is not reducible to particular moments in time and places in space though indeed manifested in such moments, can be partially grasped through its material representations, its symptoms, its multiple manifestations.

As Jenny Edkins points out in *Trauma and the Memory of Politics*, in order to understand trauma despite its limited representability, one needs to get close to it through the process of encircling: “We cannot try to address the trauma directly without risking its gentrification. We cannot remember it as something that took place in time, because this would neutralize it. All we can do is ‘to encircle again and again’ the site of the trauma, ‘to mark it in its very impossibility’” (Edkins 15). In other words, trauma is a phantom, haunting a forgetful idiot, full of sound and fury signifying something that we cannot literally grasp because meaning is not available as there cannot be any clearly conscious, remembered experience of the traumatized event. Caruth’s definition (or lack thereof) of trauma both uses and does away with the traditional notion of event. Yes, trauma can be this: something happened that did a thing to someone who does not remember or understand that thing because the something in question did not become part of that someone’s conscious memory or experience. But it is also that: some things keep happening to someone and there is no one thing to go back to in order to understand the reason behind their happening. Caruth’s argument on the absence of originary event is the first step towards a holistic (though not solely plural, and certainly not universal) envisioning of trauma and psychoanalysis, a productively paranoid one since there is no point of reference, no easy answer, no facile retracing of one’s history towards a visible,

memorized moment in time, hence the recovery of multiple reasons behind the syndromes-- reasons sometimes hard to unveil, sometimes expected or else shattering. To be clear, this not at all to say that traumatic events do not exist, that they have no material reality, or that history is meaningless since it is the science of collecting those particular events that are not ones. This is, however, to say that recording and memorizing according to the rules of traditional history-making, though necessary, will always be insufficient in helping the process of reparation for victims of violence because history's linearity and desire for the factual leave out the possibility of thinking about individual stories, cultural histories or national histories (so crucial for the identity formation or reformation of certain groups and nations) as complex, incomplete, true and false at the same time, and interconnected not just in and with the past but also in the present and with the future. History as we know and learn it in school is oftentimes the site of a lack, a gap both inside and outside time and space that certain historians miss through the repetition of dates and facts accumulated with the purpose to point out the specificity of a trauma, symbolize it, turn it into a myth at times, and separate one traumatic moment from another, one history from another.

Trauma, as well as history redefined, should be plural and both of the present and the past. Histories should come together in time in the shape of a knot, the agglomeration of temporality in one big archival proton made out of and always tracing uncountable turns and returns so that the notions of space and temporality also become defined as indefinable, so that the origin of trauma always be now and singular at the same time that it is past, future, and plural. The particular traumatic (and celebratory) moments pointed out by historians are important (when they remain within history) because they are the tip

of one iceberg; they are singular points of connection that should be linked to each other so as to form the necessary “narrative webs,” to use a phrase by Valentine Cunningham (Wolfreys 353) that link personal, social, international experiences of violence. It is not only the role of the historian to ravel and unravel the narrative threads that make the web, but the role of the witness, of the traumatized, the one who can testify and rewrite history, to reweave it, break down its structure, pull out its threads and put them back together differently. In the same way, psychoanalysis, history, Western and non-Western theories of human relation should come together and help untie the tight knot of traditional trauma stories.

Caruth deconstructs the concept of origin and opens the way towards a kaleidoscopic envisioning of trauma, an envisioning I will take up and promote in Chapter 2 as I look at the work of Native-American author Leslie Marmon Silko, a work which forces readers into a movement away from conservative, solely Western theories of trauma. This new envisioning finds room for Edkins’ process of “encircling” which implies a narrativization of the trauma, a telling of it, and an acting upon it. It also implies a fluid, non oppressive memorialization of the trauma which is not linear, not fixed and not promotional of one group’s desire to misrepresent or erase a particular trauma. In order to encircle and thus get closer to understanding trauma, the deconstruction of false national or collective myths about trauma is crucial, as well as the struggle against the disappearance, erasure of trauma.

In *Unclaimed Experience*, Caruth’s discussion of survival and trauma relies on a kind of mirroring of life and death and the constant interaction between the two, between what is human and what is inhuman, a mirroring that gets transferred into responses to

traumatic experiences CI will discuss this issue further in Chapter 5, a chapter on the need to creolize trauma studies and rethink its assumptions through the work of Caribbean writers who define trauma and offer the possibility for a cure only through homeopathic treatment, that is the ingestion in the body of what hurts, which is not always the traumatic event itself but the very cultural and/or social framework in which this traumatic event was possible.

Catastrophic Traumas, Everyday Traumas: Rethinking the Texture of History

In *Testimony, Crisis of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*, Felman incorporates the poetry of Mallarmé and Celan in her discussion on trauma, and compares free verse to the process of free association described by psychoanalysis. Free verse springs from an accident in the case of Mallarmé, and a historical disaster in the case of Celan. For Felman, trauma springs from an accident/disaster. The trauma qua accident appears as a punctual tragedy that takes place within the larger, mostly placatory, progressive and non-aggressive framework of history. Felman's support of this conceptualization of trauma as catastrophe is common, important in certain instances, but also limited. Here, I want to address both its importance and limitations.

In *Spectral Evidence*, Ulrich Baer gives us the same perspective on trauma as Felman within the context of the process of witnessing. He writes, "To bear true witness . . . means to account for catastrophic events without turning them into a continuous story" (105). If trauma is still defined as a disaster in Baer's work, he adds that this catastrophe, as it is narrativized in its aftermath, often becomes "a story of rebirth and renewal," which "amounts to a story of forgetting" (105). He continues, "Unless viewers suspend their faith in the future in the narrative of time-as-flux that turns the photographed scene into part of a longer story (whether melancholy or hopeful), they will misconstrue the

violence of trauma as a mere error, a lapse from or aberration in the otherwise infallible program of history-as progress” (Baer 180-1). For Baer, photograph and trauma are comparable in terms of their standing outside of time and in terms of their archival nature (they represent the unsaid, the unseen of history). Thus, for Baer, a disaster should remain catastrophic and not be stripped from its lasting traumatic consequences through positive narrativization, a desire for healing at all cost which often means covering up the wounds, a desire not to think about the possibility of human evil.

Caruth’s vision of history symbolizes this association between trauma and the desire for renewal. In *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, Caruth presents a limited, quasi-postmodern view of trauma which both repeats and departs from psychoanalytical considerations of trauma. She constructs her new vision of history as human beings’ “endless repetition of previous violence” (63)--an accumulation of crises-- in a search for survival and the “endless possibility of a new [brighter] future” (68), search which is, according to Caruth, directed by Freud’s ignoble death drive itself (a drive which materializes, among other things, in monotheism). These crises in history Caruth mentions appear as successive catastrophic events which repeat or reproduce the violence of the past in a traumatic way since the repetition takes place without a difference.

One of the aspects of my work in the coming chapters will be to think through individual and cultural traumas (in relationship with each other) as possible spaces for 1) a rethinking of which events should be regarded as major historical crises, major catastrophes, major traumas 2) a rethinking of the relationship between trauma and the desire for renewal, which does not always imply identical repetition but can be

performativeCan idea I develop further in this introduction under the heading “Mourning and Melancholia,” and 3) the discussion of a concept which I define in the following paragraph, and which moves beyond Felman, Caruth and Baer’s conversations on the relationship between trauma and history.

In *An Archive of Feelings*, Ann Cvetkovich introduces the idea that history has had a tendency to erase what she names “everyday traumas” (3). She encourages us to find different ways of thinking about trauma as “connected to the textures of everyday experience” (5). For this author, the traumatic is everyday (which is not to say that history is in fact the history of trauma) and if her work essentially consists in pointing out sexual and gender traumas as structural to the life of certain communities, her argument can be expanded to include racial trauma⁵. Cvetkovich also points out the lacunae of history when it comes to denouncing, studying, and integrating these other historical traumatic events within the field of trauma studies since the many racial and sexual traumas imposed upon certain groups have been and still are oftentimes erased, buried under the weight of the great traumas of history. Writers about trauma promote remembering certain traumas on the one hand, and worship amnesia on the other since they ‘forget’ to extend the conversation on trauma to the ignored stories of colonial

⁵ If I believe that Cvetkovich’s argument is crucial in thinking about the way racial and sexual traumas are woven into “the everyday” for groups that have been historically, and still are, the victims of these traumas, I also acknowledge the relevance of Lauren Berlant’s point in *The Queen of America goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship*. For Berlant, this idea of everyday trauma has been co-opted by certain individuals and groups (i.e. older white American men) that have lost their positions of privilege with the rise of communities that critique and resist conservative notions in terms of race relations, gender, sex, and other political perspectives. These nostalgic ex-privileged pose themselves as victims of the destruction of the so-called American dream and demand a return to the real America, the America of traditions. They see themselves targeted by critical communities who have demanded the revision of the concepts of democracy, family, normalcy, and the deconstruction of all the problematic “founding features” of the U.S. nation. My understanding of everyday trauma is geared towards thinking through the position of legitimate victims of abuse, not pseudo-victims whose arguments are dangerous, unfounded, and should be deconstructed.

resistance. I am using Cvetkovich's arguments as one of the theoretical cornerstones to my dissertation. Both other, non-Western historical traumas and everyday traumas will be discussed in conjunction in the chapters to come.

Cvetkovich also focuses on the possibility for the "cultural production that emerges around trauma" to produce "new practices and publics [as opposed to identities]" (9), new public trauma cultures which come up with new representations, new performative ways of thinking and framing trauma by relying on narrative recovery (simply writing about these other traumas, make them subjects of study again, produce counterhistories) and the study of affective, emotional responses to trauma (whether genuine or manipulated). Trauma is always synonymous with loss, and traumatic loss is itself often synonymous with destruction and death. The very attempt to work through trauma (not the working through itself) can counter the destructive pattern associated with trauma and have a reparative influence as it can lead to thinking about what has been lost in a different, if not positive at least performative, light. Can idea I will develop further in Chapter 3 where I will discuss the political implications of rethinking the relationship between mourning and melancholia in order to uncover new ways of coping with trauma.

New Methods of Coping with Trauma: Beyond Rational and One-dimensional Theoretical Responses to Trauma and Towards Hysterical Readings of Trauma Narratives

Historian Dominick Lacapra, in *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, despite his unfair critique of (Derrida and) poststructuralism (which he dismisses instead of poaching on it and using it as tool in his process of challenging a conservative conceptualization of history), introduces the useful notion of "empathic unsettlement" (xi). He argues that the role of historians (and readers in general) is to "critically engage professional identities or research strategies that marginalize or even eliminate the role of empathy along with

dialogic exchange and affective (in contrast to narrowly cognitive) response in general” (38). To put it differently, Lacapra wants historians to walk out of what Michael S. Roth has called the ironist’s cage, “the prison of cultural critics who realize that they have no position from which to make their criticism” (Roth 8) because the position defined by their field is unacceptable, the criteria of legitimacy unbearable. Lacapra defines empathy as a form of virtual, not vicarious, experience related to what Max Scheler has termed “heteropathic identification” (Bal 9), an experience of the other’s trauma which fosters an emotional response that comes with the acknowledgement that the other’s experience is specific, not one’s own, and that this specificity should be respected. Thus, empathic unsettlement implies a rapprochement between victim of trauma and outsider/reader/listener of the victim’s narrative; however, it considers identification, transference, appropriation to be unproductive, even dangerous as it erases the specificity of the victim’s experience or even silences her voice. For Lacapra, “fascination” or the desire to identify with the victim is not productive at all.

In *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction*, Laurie Vickroy uses literature as a framework to think about representations of trauma and adopts this simple methodology of reading/responding to trauma proposed by Lacapra. Felman and Laub, in *Testimony*, also argue that empathy without identification is crucial in understanding trauma, and always stress the importance of remaining critical as one empathizes with trauma victims. Empathic unsettlement combined with an analytical (more “reasonable,” a bit inhuman sometimes) framework will be my preferred method of reading the texts under scrutiny in the chapters to come. It is also the ‘method’ used by some of the narrators in the novels I will discuss to cope with the trauma of others as well as their own. This critical middle

space between reason and emotions, this constant interaction between reason and oftentimes madness, is performative as it promotes the repetition of trauma with a difference (as opposed to traumatic reenactment), a possibility for working through on the side of the victim, and a possibility for a better understanding of the complexity of trauma on the side of the listener. It prevents the fall into, on the one hand, an excessive emotional response to trauma the intensity of which can have unproductive consequences both for the victim and its listener/reader (madness does not remain unchecked), and on the other hand a detachment from the emotional pain inflicted by trauma.

As I will discuss in coming chapters, the main characters in the novels under scrutiny are either trauma survivors (the trauma is either individual and/or cultural) or witnesses of the consequences of trauma upon their surroundings, and in that sense, indirect victims of that trauma. These two positions need to be addressed in conjunction and separately as they both share characteristics and depart from each other in some instances. However, even if the goals (in terms of recovery) of the characters who find themselves in these positions are different, their method of dealing with trauma is comparable. Their common use of both empathy and analysis, their relying on emotions and reason together so as to reach understanding and maybe a form of healing, is performative. One should empathize with the trauma of others and with one's own traumatic experience. To stress the need for victims of trauma to empathize with themselves might seem like a strange concept since empathy with one's own pain would appear as the normal, healthy, and logical response to dealing with pain. However, this emphasis is not so singular anymore if one considers the fact that oftentimes, the political, social or cultural structures in which the trauma victims evolve on a day-to-day

basis fear pain, fear difference, promote the forgetting of trauma and thus sometimes force, consciously or not, dissociation (between a traumatized self and a reconstructed, ‘fake self’ that can function ‘normally’). Including ‘the emotional’ in the analytical equation that trauma has become might enable intriguing redefinitions of the ways in which we conceptualize recovery; a coming through of other, ignored symptoms of trauma; the discovery of new indices of trauma in emotional responses not often referred to as traumatic symptoms, such as laughter, humor, and the performance of happiness. One of my main goals in the coming chapters will be to 1) address traumas that have not been addressed qua traumas, as I have already mentioned; 2) address traumas which require an expansion of the list of traumatic symptoms determined in the work of Western authors as other symptoms, other representations of and reactions to trauma should be analyzed; and 3) use memory as a ‘tool for a reevaluation of the grand narratives of history.

In *Spectral Evidence*, Baer introduces two visions of history that oppose each other: The Heraclitean view looks at time or human history as fluid, moving slowly forward, progressing in a linear fashion. The Democritean model looks at history as “occurring in bursts and explosions, as the rainfall of reality, privileging the moment rather than the story, the event rather than the unfolding, particularity rather than generality” (Baer 5). This Democritean approach is the one he chooses to explain the impact of photography on our vision of history. The photograph represents one of these explosions that come and disrupt the gentle flow of history, in the same fashion as trauma does (if one considers trauma to be a catastrophic, foreign rather than familiar event, which Baer does and a writer such as Cvetkovich does not). A photograph can potentially reveal to the

viewer a different experience, a different version of the viewer's experience, an event that could have been experienced but was not, a trauma that took place but was not remembered qua trauma. The photograph is a priceless archive. For Baer, this realization, this return of the traumatic, this coming of the explosion is hysterical. The photograph is the hysterical symptom of trauma. The technical apparatus that is photography reveals these hysterical symptoms (Baer mentions Charcot's experiences with hysterics and his use of photography to bring certain symptoms out in the open).

If Baer's focus remains the study of the possibilities that come out of a technological preying of the body, that is the creation of the photograph which unveils different, 'hysterical' narratives of history, he takes his argument further by stating that any body, "as referent of history, is always subject to the kind of technical mediation that could provoke a hysterical symptom" (Baer 60). Thus, one's hope is that individuals under the control of social or political groups which--through the technologization of memory (the building of memorials, monuments, the construction of national narratives through the use of modern technology)--control remembrance and the construction of history, will eventually react hysterically and disrupt the stability of those who define legitimacy in terms of who tells, what is told and who belongs (whether those "who" are cultural collectives, social formations, political entities, nations, etc.). A witnessing of this hysterical reaction is the basis of the struggle against forgetting. If history, if institutions and their impact upon the construction of individual and national identities can be read through the technique that I would term "controlled hysteria," then a change in those very institutions and in the way we conceive of history can take place. This concept of hysterical change, of history as *hystérie* (hysteria), is one of the frameworks I

want to use to talk about the texts under scrutiny in this dissertation. Not only is my reading of the texts under scrutiny hysterical in the sense that it both acknowledges, uses and critiques traditional readings of trauma literature (if I recognize the usefulness of certain Western theoretical frameworks to think about trauma, I also depart from them), but I am also witness to the work of authors, the words of their narrators, who are both hysterical as they put trauma to use so as to reclaim their memories and reconstruct history from them.

Further into the Politics of Emotion: Trauma, Mourning and Melancholia, an Awesome Threesome in the Search for Identity Reparation

So far, I have outlined my interest in the association of extremities, the deconstruction of binary oppositions and their intermingling, their collusion. This short list of oppositions (Western/non-Western, human/inhuman, emotional/rational) needs to be implemented since the couple mourning/melancholia will come into play in discussions about the aftermath of trauma and the possibilities for recovery.

In *History and Memory*, Lacapra clearly articulates a useful relationship between history and psychoanalysis, and specifically discusses the relationship between history and memory. He relies on Freud's work on mourning and melancholia which poses melancholia as this ambiguous, even tricky concept, "both a precondition to (or even necessary aspect of) mourning and that which can block processes of mourning insofar as it becomes excessive or functions as an object of fixation" (183). In an essay entitled "Mourning and Melancholia" published in 1917, Freud stressed the separation between those two processes (despite their similarities in the way they materialize) and the necessary ending of the melancholia period so that mourning can take place. However, in *The Ego and the Id* (1923), Freud defines melancholia as a step in the process of

mourning. According to that new, non-binary equation between mourning and melancholia, the memory of what was lost, instead of being detached from the present and future of the melancholy person or group, can remain for Lacapra a “modality or component of working through problems. Memory in this sense may become a manner of recalling misguided ventures and critically taking leave of less desirable aspects of the past as well as of attempting to honor other aspects or make them the bases of a constructive action in the present and future” (185). Instead of detaching oneself from the memory of the lost object, which is a narcissistic move, the subject preserves this memory which can, in a positive and performative way, impact present and future. The subject, still impressed by this memory of the lost object, will refuse to give it up for her own benefit (healing) and to substitute this loss with a consolation prize (such as imposed empty narratives of remembering, monuments, or other techniques of memorialization)--hence the possibility for regenerating responses to loss, to death through a preservation of their memory. Hence also a reconceptualization of what it means to recover. Recovery here is not a selfish move towards self-wholeness, but a productive but difficult progression towards a future that does not erase the memory of the past and uses it to think through the possibilities for reconstructing one’s identity (a group’s, a nation’s) while keeping the past, its traumatic aspects, in mind. Of course, danger lies in desiring the partial preservation of melancholia as one takes the risk of falling into a destructive pattern--the destruction of the self or the other responsible for the loss. This outcome, however, can be prevented.

In *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, Lacapra thinks through the relationship between trauma, absence and loss. According to Lacapra,

When absence is converted into loss, one increases the likelihood of misplaced nostalgia or utopian politics in quest of a new identity or fully unified community. When loss is converted into (or encrypted in an indiscriminately generalized rhetoric of) absence, one faces the impasse of endless melancholy, impossible mourning, and interminable aporia in which any process of working through the past and its historical losses is foreclosed or prematurely aborted. (46)

Through a discussion of the loss-absence connection, his goal is to warn us against the manipulation of these two concepts to foreground a rhetoric of victimization (of the other or the self, whether individuals, cultural groups or entire nations). To Lacapra, the concept of absence (an absence which is oftentimes an invention) is often associated with structural trauma: something absent at the starting point of one or one group's identity formation creates a gap which, if exaggerated, can turn into endless melancholia for the group and its individual entities (i.e. the Jewish landlessness). The result is melancholia for what never was. He then associates the notion of loss with historical trauma: something happened to an individual, a group, a nation along the way that took away part of their identity, their wholeness. The result can be nostalgia for what was and is not anymore.

Even though I think that Lacapra's discussion of the consequences of nostalgia is useful, I disagree with his differentiation of melancholia and nostalgia and their respective relation with absence and loss. Melancholia has been defined as a pathological response to the loss of a love object. Unless Lacapra performs a resignification of the concept of melancholia, which he does not tell us he is doing, then his association between melancholia and structural loss is awkward and hard to accept. In my opinion, melancholia can only be the response to an absence if this absence is defined as loss—with the love object remaining theoretical, known, part of one's identity formation, but unknown at the same time, ungraspable, non-representable (i.e. the garden of Eden in

Christian theology). Historical loss (which is not structural since it is a historical event, but is indeed destructuring) can be transformed into absence through the narratives imposed by certain groups of nations about a particular historical trauma--the political rhetoric of effacement of the atrocities of the Vietnam war in the U.S., the partial erasure of France's past as a collaborating country during WWII, the denial of the existence of concentration camps by certain fascist groups in France among other countries are good examples of the transformation of what has been lost into what is absent. Even if this pretended absence becomes a structuring basis to the formation of certain groups or the reconstruction of individual or national identities, it will remain loss in the eyes and hearts of the witnesses to these erased traumas and the lies that followed them. Thus, melancholia will remain the retort to this absence that is not one--this loss. In both cases, melancholia will be the witness/victim's response, and nostalgia might become its ally in keeping the past alive in the present and the future, in thinking about the future through a careful remembering of the past.

In "Mourning Beyond Melancholia: Freud's Psychoanalysis of Loss," Tammy Clewell brings to the forefront of psychoanalytical thinking a later Freudian theory of mourning which counters Freud's earlier reflections on the relationship between mourning and melancholia. Clewell reminds us that in the essay entitled "Mourning and Melancholia," which came out in 1917, Freud defines mourning as the process through which the grieving subject will completely detach herself from the lost object in order to reinvest her libido somewhere else. In that process, the act of "hyperremembering, a process of obsessive recollection during which the survivor resuscitates the existence of the lost other in the space of the psyche, replacing an actual presence with an imaginary

presence,” (*JAPA* 44) is necessary. It will eventually enable the subject to “convert loving remembrances into a futureless memory” (44) and put an end to mourning. Thus, according to Freud’s earlier accounts, mourning is the process of crystallization of memory, a memory which comes to be meaningless because detached from history, gradually pushed outside the spatial and temporal life narrative of the grieving subject. Remembering becomes obsolete in terms of its interaction with the present; memories are fixed into a past forever separated from now and tomorrow. This separation, this forgetting, enables the grieving subject to become whole again when mourning finally comes to an end. As the memories are reclaimed and put aside, “the mourner reclaims the libido invested in the lost object and returns this emotional investment to the ego as a necessary prelude to forming a new attachment” (47). Thus, the narcissistic recuperation of memories comes to be the process through which the pathological response to loss—melancholia—can be avoided.

In *The Ego and the Id* (1923) Freud moves away from the afore-mentioned theory of mourning and begins to explore the possible performative effects of looking at melancholia not as a pathological response to mourning, but as its *sine qua non* condition. He “redefines the process of identification [with the lost object] associated with melancholia as a fundamental part of both subject formation and mourning” (*JAPA* 60). The subject becomes formed and re-formed through her losses and the lost object becomes an integrated part of that re-formation; this reformation is continuous and might never end. Melancholia is not defined anymore as a pathological refusal to let go of the lost object, a theoretical *persona non grata*, but as a crucial element in the process of mourning that fosters remembering and redefines the roles of past memories and lost

objects which come to intervene in the making of the future history of the mourning subject. These elements become priceless in the subject's process of re-imagining her future through loss, through death, and never against them.

In order to continue to live after a loss caused by a specific traumatic event, and in order to recover one's psychic integrity and one's place in the social realm—the very community which is always the site, and more often than not, the very root of trauma—one needs to remember constructively. This constructive remembering will intervene in preventing the erasure of trauma and fostering the telling and re-telling of what can be remembered, recovered. This remembering and re-telling of the mourning subject is for Felman an act of resistance to trauma and to history as truth (Felman and Laub 98), and a re-definition of the work of history-making: history becomes memory work. Instead of disappearing under their traumas, instead of becoming desubjectified as Agamben argues in *History and Memory after Auschwitz*, traumatized subjects—whether indirect victims of trauma, mourners who have been traumatized by the circumstances of a loss; or direct victims who are still alive to speak the trauma and need to mourn the past—can turn into retaliating, sometimes hysterical, storytellers who utter the unutterable in ways peculiar to their own desires and means of expression. Of course, one should stress the difference between mourners when they do not speak from the same epistemological position (or lack thereof). One could talk about circles or loops of mourning that intersect with each other but never equate to each other, loops that can be compared to Moebius strips with their dissolving edges that prevent the coming of an end to mourning and its definition as a linear process. The Moebius strip is a useful metaphor to think about mourning as a strange and non-orientable process. With its unique surface,

the strip collapses the dichotomy inside/outside trauma, a fall the characteristics of which Freud was already studying when he introduced the concept of *nachtraglichkeit*. Of course, witnesses to a trauma experienced by others will mourn differently and for different reasons not equitable to those of the others in question. Friends, family, witnesses to a trauma they have not been encircled with--a trauma they have not experienced, forgotten and maybe remembered, in their body and mind--do not speak from the same loop as a direct victim of that trauma. However, indirect victims become direct victims when their mourning comes as a result of the fear and pain of living with the traumatized or having lost them. All testimonies are significant in the larger political process of demanding reparation, and the authors whose work I will discuss in this chapter are all mourners participating in the creation of a Moebius chain of mourning.

Dominique Lacapra argues that melancholia and its bedfellow nostalgia can become crucial personal and historical tools, the sites of a crucial personal remembering of the traumatic past. This personal remembering dispersed through testimony can then participate in the distortion, re-evaluation, and maybe the fall of official narratives about particular traumas. In *Trauma and the Memory of Politics*, Jenny Edkins argues that “What we call trauma takes place when the very powers that we are convinced will protect us and give us security become our tormentors: when the community of which we considered ourselves members turns against us or when our family is no longer a source of refuge but a site of danger” (4). The testimony of the mourner (a position of power, a place from which to speak and denounce abuse) can become a powerful political tool in the process of critiquing the very institutions responsible for the erasure of personal and

historical memory, and their desire to turn traumatic stories into normalized narratives deprived of the mourner's emotional ties to the lost object.

Remembering does have its limitations when melancholia and nostalgia keep their traditional definitions and come to foster desire in the mourner for the elimination of oftentimes constructed dangerous others in order for the traumatized self (a nation, a people) deprived of a cherished object (land, rights, language, a certain amount of freedom) to regain a sense of unity, security, even sometimes a sense of its own sublimity when healthy narcissism replaced with its pathological alter ego leads to the construction of a self-image (for an individual, a particular cultural group or even a nation) that can only be re-born out of the ashes of guilty others (real or constructed). This desire to inflict death so as to live again beyond the death of a loved object is what Kristeva calls "blank perversion" (Kristeva 82), a perversion "that is dreamed of, desired, even thought through" (82) though not attainable.

If both melancholia and nostalgia brought together and kept in check can have positive influences on the rethinking of history through memory and enable a critique of the grand narratives of history, their exaggerated expression can be dangerous. For Lacapra, nostalgia fixes memories in the past and prevents evolution or change. Nostalgia supports the idea that there was "some original unity, wholeness, security, or identity that others have ruined, polluted, or contaminated and thus made 'us' lose" (58), an unproductive way of thinking that often promotes the elimination of this 'crippling other' and the transformation of the identity of the victim as one that was and could be, again, sublime. As Lacapra points out, "the quest for sublimity for the self or the in-group may require the abjection of the other" (135).

In my chapter on Algeria, Chapter 4, I will discuss the Algerian linguistic trauma after the war of independence within the context offered to me by Algerian women authors who discuss both the possibilities, in terms of identity formation, offered by a melancholy response to trauma. Their work also raises the issue of unchecked melancholia, the repercussions it has on the relationship between the different groups that compose the Algerian nation and the difficulty encountered by successive Algerian governments to construct the desired stable Algerian national identity--a political desire that has become today a site of trauma. This chapter will help me stress the potential political value of psychoanalysis redefined in reading and critiquing the violence that comes with the imposition of conservative, crippling notions of national identity.

History, Memory, Performativity, and Identity

If the introduction to Caruth's book *Unclaimed Experience* focuses on individual experiences of trauma, her first chapter redefines conservative notions of history through the recognition of "the possibility of a history that is no longer straightforwardly referential (that is, no longer based on simple models of experience and reference)" (11). History is also about what we know and what we cannot be known; what has been hidden, consciously or not; what has been forgotten, buried alive sometimes as a result of religious or social pressure; what needs to be desecrated, profaned for a careful 'autopsy' of this dead body history can be to take place. In this chapter, Caruth rereads Freud's *Moses and Monotheism* and reasserts Freud's reconceptualization of Jewish (and Christian) history as the repression and then return of a doubled figure of trauma, that of Moses. Caruth uses Freud's piece to insist on several points: first, the history of the Jewish people does not begin with the realization of the desire to be free, but, on the contrary, with the fall into monotheism and the subsequent infusing of relentless and

inarguable absolute power of God over humans, God being a ur-site of trauma. Thus, the history of the Jewish people is based upon a traumatic displacement (a traumatic error about the origin) and the traumatic imposition of the law of one, two defining factors that are recognizable in definitions of national identities.

Second, Caruth argues that “the Hebrews’ departure . . . or their arrival as a Jewish nation, is also an arrival within a history no longer simply their own . . . the traumatic nature of history means that events are only historical to the extent that they implicate others” (8). Caruth introduces the idea that trauma implicates the traumatized and the witnesses of trauma (whether it be human beings or larger institutions who make use of it to construct a national history): “History is, precisely, the way in which we are implicated in each other’s traumas” (24). Caruth goes further and insists on avoiding betrayal: we cannot betray the trauma of the other, and it is in the very fact that individuals have in common their not-knowing their trauma that an exchange between them can take place, and that different cultures or groups can witness each other’s traumas. This lack of understanding becomes common ground and leads to the possibility of awakening (another key figure defined by Caruth) to the pain of the other. Thus, it has much importance from the perspective of a History that would call itself ethical. Caruth sees trauma as a possible site of encounter between individuals, groups, nations, et cetera; an encounter that could reveal itself performative. An encounter which, I hope, will take place in the coming chapters and more specifically in Chapter 2 as Silko’s work addresses the historical, geographical and political intersection of certain traumas.

The performativity of the common experience of trauma defined by Caruth is further developed by Anne Cvetkovich in *An Archive of Feelings*. Ann Cvetkovich uses

postmodern theory and historical specificity as starting points for thinking about traumatized subjects beyond identity politics and redefining sites of knowledge (or the notion of archive) in the process of understanding trauma.

On the one hand, Cvetkovich resists medical discourses of trauma which are much too structured. On the other hand, she resists Caruth's conclusion that it is impossible to know trauma structurally speaking, and she denounces Caruth's definition of trauma as "catastrophic event" (Cvetkovich 19). For Cvetkovich, the danger in Caruth's writing lies in the fact that, by stressing a gap in knowledge as far as the structure of trauma is concerned, Caruth denies the "specificities of trauma in a given historical and political context" (Cvetkovich 19), specificities that are indeed structured by that context. I disagree with Cvetkovich's reading of Caruth on that point as I would argue that Caruth does immerse her study of trauma in historical specificity, as well as propose and promote our awakening to the specific traumatic history of "the other" towards the end of the afore-mentioned book. However, I agree with Cvetkovich's desire to resist certain medical discourses on trauma (a resistance I have already expressed) that promote healing through forgetting.

In *History and Memory after Auschwitz*, Lacapra moves away from the definition of trauma as unclaimed experience, a definition that "occasions the paradoxical witnessing of the breakdown of witnessing" (183). One should acknowledge that certain aspects of trauma are unknowable, more specifically its very structure (if it has one) which nobody has been able to define clearly. However, these very gaps, the memories that revolve around those gaps, the multiple signs or symptoms that convey an absence are useful indices in the process of understanding trauma, individual and collective, and

more importantly in the process to promote recovery without forgetting (a theme I will address in Chapter 3).

In *Vectors of Memory*, Nancy Wood relies on Maurice Halbwachs' and Pierre Nora's work on collective memory to develop the very popular notion in works about trauma that "collective memory--or national or public memory-- [is] essentially performative" and "come[s] into existence at a given time and place through specific kinds of memorial activity" (2). She uses the term "vectors" to "designate the conduits of this performativity, whether commemorations, historical narratives, political debates, or other cultural forces" (2). This term, she mentions, was first coined in Henry Rousso's *The Vichy Syndrome: History and Memory in France since 1945*. If Halbwachs focuses more on the temporal aspect of memory-making and the reliance of certain groups upon certain past events in order to maintain their cohesion, Nora looks at the ways in which certain groups claim, not to say "own," preferred physical sites (which he calls *lieux de mémoire*) upon which social, cultural or national memory has constructed itself and remains dependent for its liability and enforcement. These sites are "invested with affective ties of longing and belonging" (Wood 3). Nancy Wood argues that these markers, these sites of memory (whether as narratives or as stone), are sites of manipulation since they erase certain embarrassing stories, other versions of history--they thus become "*lieux d'oubli*" (10), and thus permit a remembering, a memorialization, a turning sites of memory into "symbolic fixations" (18), a fraud that fosters forgetting (the forgetting of entire historical moments or mother versions of history).

The goal of political or social communities who are in positions of power is to shape certain understandings of trauma and produce memory (national memory for

example) in a way that does not disrupt the functioning of those very communities, which betrays a desire for closure, healing, wholeness, especially in practices of testifying and memorialization. States want their citizens to remember the heroes and forget the foes within (i.e. France's erasure of her collaboration with Germany during the second war). They want citizens to remember their dead as heroes, not as victims of violent nationalism. States want memorials that erase memory. They want carefully constructed stories of trauma, Edkins uses the term "mythologisation" to describe the process of creating 'safe', controlled narratives. Thus, as Paul Antze and Michael Lambek point out in *Tense Past: Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory*, "there is [sometimes] nothing liberating in narrative per se. Hereby to transfer the story from embodied symptoms to words is not necessarily either to integrate or exorcise it. Development may be foreclosed when a particular version is granted complete authority" (Antze and Lambek xix). The terms "myth" and "sacrifice" appeared in the speech given by President Chirac on Friday May 7th 2004 during the homage rendered to the soldiers who fought during the battle of Dien Bien Phu 50 years ago, a battle which put an end to the war of Indochina and marked the defeat and retreat of the French colonial powers from that area of the world. Mr. Chirac's version of the colonial "adventure" (a word he uses in his speech) is one of fraternity between fighters, sacrifice, military honor and heroism. Chirac speaks in the name of the whole nation and expresses France's fidelity and gratefulness to the soldiers⁶ (parts of this speech were quoted in an electronic article entitled "Jacques Chirac rend hommage aux soldats de Dien Bien Phu" published on the website of *Le Monde* on May

⁶ Parts of President Chirac's speech were quoted by *Le Monde* on May 7, 2004. The article in which the quotes appear, "Jacques Chirac rend hommage aux soldats de Dien Bien Phu," can be found at http://www.lemonde.fr/web/recherche_resumedoc/1,13-0,37-853376,0.html.

7, 2004). This constructed narrative represents the kind of mythologization of history Edkins warns us about. It erases the violence and the very inhumanity of history and promotes national unity and consensus on an issue that is in fact still a site of disagreement and tension. The texts under scrutiny in the following chapters have removed this kind of sterile narrative and replaced it with chaotic stories about the past. Wood also argues that modern societies live without memory, or rather that they replace memory with stone. She writes, "Identity politics that promotes the accumulation of patrimonial capital as the key asset of national belonging necessarily excludes from its embrace those diasporic groups who do not have the same emotional investment in *les lieux de mémoire of la patrie*" (30-1), which they consider as space, not as places. Paul Antze and Michael Lambek, in the introduction to *Tense Past*, stress the fact that "identity is realized in a temporal plane; both unified selves and nations legitimate their being by means of memories elaborating a narrative of continuous existence" (Antze and Lambek xxiii). Thus, multiplicity comes as a danger because it threatens the grand narrative of national unity and thus supposedly shatters national identity, hence chaos, hence the need to prevent this chaos. Those groups that promote multiplicity and difference are marginalized when they refuse to worship memory sites which are cornerstones to the construction of a cultural or national identity. These outsiders are the subject of this dissertation and Chapters 4 and 5 will specifically focus on the ways in which certain specific Native Americans and Caribbean groups have 1) defined new sites of trauma and more fluid sites of memory, and reconstructed historical narratives about their groups by moving away from "the law of the one," whether the one is another group or an entire nation, 2) stressed the relationship between past and present in the process of

dealing with certain traumatic moments, 3) implicated themselves in the trauma of other groups. These approaches to trauma are performative approaches that permit redefinition of the concept of recovery and reflection about identity reformation after trauma, a reformation that would promote difference instead of preaching monolithic unity (an approach I am trying to think through in Chapter 4 and 5).

Trauma and Language

One of the most problematic *lieux de mémoire*, and a *lieu d'oubli* as such, is language itself. In the part of this chapter on mourning and melancholia, I started a discussion on the consequences of unchecked nostalgia on a group or nation which has been the victim of trauma. Colonization and its 'evil progeny' racism are ideological sites of trauma which have materialized in the discussions on language choice during the years of the fighting for independence and the post-independence era for many people. Algerians are one of these people and I will address their national trauma in Chapter 3.

Writers such as Caruth and Felman insist that one cannot know the origin (as there is no one origin) or the structure of trauma. They insist that one can only know trauma metaphorically. Writers such as Lacapra and Cvetkovich develop that argument by showing that trauma can be known and addressed through its consequences, its symptoms, and its expression in different contexts. Therefore, language becomes the site of exploration, a testimony, to the trauma not to be known literally. Language is spoken from blindness, to paraphrase Jacques Derrida (*Memoirs of the Blind* 4). Language itself becomes "a testimonial *project of address*" (Felman and Laub 38)—a description Felman and Laub use to define Celan's poetry, and which I recontextualize here. Language not only remembers the trauma but is "it" in certain instances. Language is a meaningful site of cultural history and cultural trauma. A study of the evolution of a national language

and its political attachments and detachments through time is crucial in understanding how national identity is constructed around the choice of a language. Such a study will always be indebted to the work of Freud who, through his inquiry into the world of linguistic parapraxes,⁷ has demonstrated that in an individual, language can be the ambiguous site of a manipulation, an unconscious one, but one that fosters forgetting (of words), the replacement of one name with another, and many other linguistic mishaps. At the level of the nation, these same parapraxes have often been used as political tools that redefine the role and characteristics of a particular language according to the specific ideological models put forth by governing instances.

Since 9/11, one cannot but notice the enforced affluence, in leftist or alternative public discourses about trauma, of arguments that point at political, social, or cultural institutions/communities of power as perpetrators of trauma. Nation states being the most oppressive, abusive entities. In *Trauma and the Memory of Politics*, Jenny Edkins argues,

trauma takes place when the very powers that we are convinced will protect us and give us security become our tormentors: when the community of which we considered ourselves members turns against us or when our family is no longer a source of refuge but a site of danger. This can be devastating because who we are, or who we think we may be, depends very closely on the social context in which we place and find ourselves. (4)

The social, cultural, and political realms that compose a nation define and are defined by the linguistic apparatuses which themselves shape and are shaped by institutions and their participants or opponents. Within the same country, certain languages are invested, often for political reasons, with powerful, even divine, characteristics. Others are demeaned, rejected because of the role they played in the process of colonization. There are

⁷ See Freud's *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*. The Standard Edition. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc. 1965.

historical as well as political reasons behind the way certain languages are represented, reasons which must be understood and critiqued at the same time. Linguistic use and abuse require analysis and will be preferred sites of study in the chapter on Algeria in which I will try to discuss the tense relationship between trauma, language, and national identity, as well as the possible positive outcomes to a rethinking of that relationship.

Susan Brison, in an essay entitled “Trauma Narratives and the Remaking of the Self,” argues that “Trauma reveals the ways in which one’s ability to feel at home in the world is as much a physical as an epistemological accomplishment” (Bal 44). She continues, “In order to construct self-narratives we need not only the words with which to tell our stories, but also an audience able and willing to hear us and to understand our words as we intend them” (46). What happens when the words writers choose to tell the story of their traumas (collective and individual in the case of Algeria) are the words of a language that is unacceptable because of its associations with a colonial nation, or a language that is imposed upon the writer/victim who feels no emotional ties to it? How is a nation’s recovery from trauma possible, how is the reconstruction of an Algerian identity that would be inclusive of difference and reject violence against this difference possible if this structural entity—language—in the process of identity construction remains indefinitely a site of trauma?

The linguistic issue becomes even more complicated with Jenny Edkins who analyzes trauma in terms of “the unspeakable” not only because trauma is unknowable to the victim, but because victims of trauma cannot use language to express or describe what they have been through for the simple reason that there is no linguistic community at their disposition that could understand them: “there are no words for it” (Edkins 8), for

the trauma, as the words they would be using are “the words of the very political community that is the source of their suffering--this is the language of the powerful, the words of the status quo, the words that delimit and define acceptable ways of being human within that community” (Edkins 8). The very important issue of silencing as well as its traumatic roots and repercussions will be addressed in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 3
QUEER THINKER, NATIVE THINKER: BUTLER'S AND SILKO'S RETHINKING
OF TRADITIONAL NOTIONS OF TRAUMA AND THE RELATIONSHIP
BETWEEN TRAUMA, PSYCHOANALYSIS, AND HISTORY

Trauma and History: The Problem of Entangled Threads

Isn't the obsessive re-delineating and re-demarcation of certain traumas, the process of separating them from others in time and space in order to decide of their place in or erasure from personal, cultural, national, or international memory, not a lethal and ultimately impossible task? It seems another myth of Sisyphus, the very myth supported by the bulk of contemporary trauma theorists who often keep a very conservative agenda in their discussions around trauma. This attitude is a bit unnerving. As a matter of fact, isn't one of the main aims of psychoanalysis to make connections, to synthesize (rather than symbolize, a process I will discuss later) history, to bring a certain kind or degree of awareness or consciousness in thinking through the circumstances of trauma? Why isn't there in the field of trauma studies, in historical narratives about trauma, more conscious and responsible conversations taking place about the relationship between traumatic stories and not about their difference and uniqueness? On the one hand, certain trauma theorists in love with structure like to talk about trauma in specific historical contexts: we know the trauma of the Holocaust, the trauma of the Vietnam War, the trauma of 9/11, and these uber-events often appear detached from history. These specific names are synonymous to the catastrophe that stands alone outside of the more linear, tranquil flow of history. On the other hand, writers about trauma run into the danger of speaking about trauma in very unspecific terms: the trauma of genocide, the trauma of fascism, the

trauma of terrorism. This utter lack of specificity makes the heads turn in all directions as reference is unavailable in the context of very global, universal notions of trauma. This non-specificity sometimes leads to mistakes as the reaction to it can be a desire to point our moral fingers towards available targets, visible targets, scapegoats upon which to focus our fear and violence.

All these representations (specific and non-specific) are important to look at (though problematic) because they point out a desire for the recognition of the specificity of trauma, as well as the desire to see trauma as a global phenomenon and thus recognize its collective characteristic (or rather its possible use as a link between traumatized people, traumatized groups, traumatized nations). They are also limiting as they function in opposition to each other; they are split while specificity and plurality should work hand in hand to help us think about the possible performative political roles trauma can play in bringing traumatized communities together and foregrounding their “relationality” (*Undoing Gender* 148) against trauma.

In this chapter I want to deal with contemporary traumatic issues at play in the work of Judith Butler and Leslie Marmon Silko, who are in more ways than one theorists of trauma. By doing so, I not only want to participate in the recuperation/revisiting of the Native-American trauma (here I use a very broad term without forgetting about the specificity of the colonial and post-colonial traumatic experiences lived through by different tribes, different Native cultures), but also continue the work of trauma theorists and other writers who have pointed out the relationships between traumatized individuals across cultures (without erasing the specificity of these traumas) through a careful analysis of the similarities found in state governments’ attitudes and policies meant to

maintain trauma with the aim of quietly promoting, in veiled ways, a racist political agenda.

As Judith Butler asks in her discussion of bodily politics, and, more specifically, in her examination of the relationship between individuality and community in dealing with issues of legal and political representations of certain bodies (individual, cultural, social, etc.), “if I build a notion of autonomy on the basis of the denial of . . . a primary and unwilling physical proximity with others, then do I precisely deny the social and political conditions of my embodiment in the name of autonomy?” (*Undoing Gender* 21). She continues, “If I am struggling for autonomy, do I need to be struggling for something else as well, a conception of myself, as invariably in community, impressed upon by others, impressing them as well, and in ways that are not always clearly delineable, in forms that are not fully predictable?” (21-2). The answer to this last question can be and should be positive. To continue with Butler’s words, “We are compelled to speak of the human, and of the international” (37). In the context of our discussions on trauma, we are compelled to speak about certain traumatized bodies and point out the specificity of their traumas, but we are also compelled to prevent their unhealthy and unproductive pedestalization in the field of trauma studies, as well as the further hierarchization of traumas. We are also compelled to look at trauma globally (but democratically as Butler would write) and see how certain global or universal notions and theories of trauma function across nations and time, pending their rethinking in certain cases, and how other theories are not and should be critiqued for wanting to pass as global, democratic theories. Thus, specific traumatic moments can act as shifters, showing the plural character of trauma, its specificity as well as its globality, its autonomy as well as its co-dependence with history.

Lately, it seems as though the concern and desire for traumatic autonomy has conveniently erased the performative power of arguments that promote the co-dependence of nations as well as more global, collective notions of trauma. "The global" has come to mean danger partly because this global enemy that is terrorism has severely wounded the American people in a very specific way: the so-called "origin" of the terrorist wound in the US is the 9/11 event. The grieving process of America has been kept static by the promotion of a desirable fear for this "global enemy" which sometimes takes a human shape, and consequently the promotion of the kind of violence--a war waged against a visible enemy--that participates in maintaining that immobility. This blind and dangerously static state of grief is completely erasing the problematic policies of a government which uses and abuses the grief of its own people in order to tyrannize another. The purpose here is not even the transference of grief upon "a visible enemy" so as to relieve the American nation, which though troubling and unreasonable, could be humanly understandable. The purpose here is to reinforce a trauma and perform another in the name of nationalism, or put differently and more clearly, racism, and this to preserve and spread the values of "Western democracy." It is a very strange feeling to find oneself agreeing with the now best known international terrorist whom before the 2004 American elections appeared on American TVs to tell U.S. citizens that their fate was not in the hands of the president or the presidential candidate, but simply in their own. The present conservative government in America is widening the gap between two already dissentious cultures, and half of the country stands behind the government's traumatic policies. Others, however, are choosing to move beyond the false rhetoric of freedom and want to uncover the oppressiveness of Western democratic systems as

defined and imposed by governmental powers. These “others” have already found common grounds between the American trauma and the Iraqi trauma, two traumas which are of course entangled, which have come to signify governmental terrorism (in the shape of a governmental dictatorship and a relentless American imperialist sweep across the world).

Within that context, death and grief might be the very human elements that will foster reconciliation between individuals of the same nation and different cultures. Death is our common ground, our common “cultural instinct,” our linking thread. The rapprochement between cultures can become possible if a connection between common traumatic experiences takes place, the common points being death and governmental violence. Sadly enough, we have not gotten enough of those two elements in order for all camps to stand against imperialistic governmental policies. Unfortunately, the common arguments that promote the sacredness of life and the fight for the greater good through peaceful change seem to have no weight in the balance of justice. Our understandings of death, then, must be the answer for a reconciliation of fates across the world.

One Grief Leads to Another: Leslie Marmon Silko’s Critique of the American State’s Racist Agenda during WW II

Native-American colonial traumas and their repercussions on contemporary Native lives are forgotten issues for the field of trauma studies among other fields. If the field of history addresses the Native-American genocide through the retelling of past events and the remembering of traumatic dates, rarely does it address its consequences on Native people in contemporary America. One who is non-native would need to take a class in an (American) Indian Studies Department to be aware of the specifics of such repercussions, and such departments remain limited in number in American universities despite the fact

that the protagonists of the US history are in fact as much Anglo-Saxon as they are Native.

What is oftentimes forgotten is that Native people from all tribes not only had to live through a traumatic colonial era in the US that was synonymous with death, both physical and cultural, but were forced into the trauma of others without first being given a chance at recovering from their own. This statement should not read as an unintentional reinforcement of the myth of the vanishing Indian, but as a reflection about the seriously traumatic consequences of the European colonial endeavors upon native life. The native-American traumatic relationship with history seems never to end, jumping from 18th and 19th century policies of land-grabbing, extermination, and eventually forced concentration onto reservations; to the convincing lies that led to the enlistment and death of too many young Native-Americans in WW I (and in all US wars). The Great War is considered to be one of the uber-traumas of history in terms of the intensity of the fighting and the number of deaths it caused; it also marks a turning point for psychoanalysis since the study of combat fatigue and disorder led to important discoveries about the relationship between trauma, the body, and the psyche. However, neither the critical role Native Americans played in the war nor the problematic imposition of one more traumatic event upon a people already dwelling in the midst of trauma at home, have been addressed until very recently (and by Native authors mainly). Indians went to war against Europe without having yet been granted the right to vote in US elections (the Snyder Act was passed in 1924). Those not yet voters could, however, become soldiers for the very country that did not recognize them as citizens of the US, and the Selective Service Act of May 1917 forced young Native men into the war. They went to war on the side of the US only 24

years after the Battle of Wounded Knee, the ghosts dancers not having been put to rest yet; and at a time when Native cultures, languages, beliefs were being damaged through governmental policies searching to promote the erasure of cultural specificity despite a present though weak humanitarian concern for Native people.

One must also acknowledge that Native people enlisted in the war (before the Selective Service Act was passed) out of patriotism, a feeling the seed of which was planted into those who had to make an obligatory stop in government-funded assimilationist schools. Enlistment was, however, also the expression of a desire for a better relationship with the American government, a better life for Native groups, a real chance at freedom after having given proof of their faith in and respect for the powers in place. This desire was symbolized by Indian Chief Red Fox who went to Washington in 1917 and told the Secretary of war that his people were offering their service in WW1: “We beg of you, give us the right to fight. We guarantee to you, sir, our hearts could be for no better than to fight for the land we love, and for the freedom we share.”¹ Despite their involvement on the frontlines in Europe and in the war effort in the US (Native Americans purchased more than 15 million dollars in liberty bonds according to several historical sources), stories about the Native-American involvement in WW I were mostly forgotten by the US government and mainstream America after the war, except for certain problematic symbolic representations of the Indian at war that stayed in the popular imaginary—one of them being the image of the primitive, bloody Indian warrior. This stereotypical image was prominent in war time and reinforced by army officials who gave those “bloody warriors” dangerous tasks to perform and even used the stereotype to

¹ Chief William Red Fox. *The Memoirs of Chief Red Fox*. Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett Publications, Inc., 1971: p. 31.

scare the enemy. As Joseph B. Porter states, “Once they entered the services, Indian soldiers faced popular stereotypes, which often dictated their assignments. Many officers believed Indians were natural warriors, born killers with an instinctive sense of direction. Consequently, officers assigned Indians to hazardous duties as scouts, snipers, sappers, and message runners.”² He adds, “Stereotypes about Indian ferocity also prevailed in the German army, where rumors of Indian soldiers on their front disconcerted German soldiers and caused fears of encountering them in battle.”

Of course, many Native people had refused to be enlisted because they were afraid they would receive the same poor treatment in the army as they did at home from the part of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (ill-treatment on the reservation was a common occurrence, whether physical or economic). Many believed they would be sent directly to combat, a convenient way for the American to continue its politics of extermination in a more subtle way. To counter the draft, mass protests took place in 1917 and 1918 involving Natives from all tribes demonstrating in front of draft offices throughout the nation.

What the war brought to Native cultures was more distress on the reservations as silence oftentimes became the way to cope with trauma despite the desire of some to promote the very opposite of silence, to speak about disaster. Leslie Marmon Silko, who deals with the consequences of WWI on Native people in *Ceremony*, points out this recourse to silence the main character chooses upon returning to his home; oftentimes, veterans could not explain to their communities what happened overseas for lack of words to describe the horror of the events. Moreover, when Native people came back

² Joseph C. Porter. “Review of *American Indians in World War I.*” *American Indian Quarterly*. Berkeley: Fall 1998. Vol. 22, Iss. 4: p. 538.

from the war, though they were granted official citizenship as well as the right to vote, policies of land-grabbing did not stop and medical services on reservations had collapsed due to the departure of health specialists from reservations to be drafted and be part of the war effort. Native Americans did gain citizenship and the right to vote, but this “gift” from the government did not lead to the recovery of other rights (the right to speak and learn their native languages, the right to practice religious ceremonies, etc.). It even became a poisoned gift since drafting was not subject to refusal now that they were officially American citizens.³ While WWI saw the drafting of about 13000 Indians, WWII doubled that number. The involvement of Natives in WWII followed the same pattern as WWI’s since Native groups went to fight out of desire to protect the ideal of freedom of rights and land. The Native effort in this second war was and still is symbolized by the Navajo Code Talkers who played a crucial role in forging the way towards victory against Germany and its allies through the creation of an undecipherable communication system. The consequences of Native-American involvement in WWII partially differ from the outcome of WWI involvement. WWII marks a turning point in Native inclusion into “mainstream” America and led to the birth of what has been coined the Pan-Indian identity, a new envisioning of Indianness coming out of a need to bridge the gap between Native cultures and Anglo culture through a departure from the reservation and an exploration of its outside. This involvement in the “White Man’s War” and subsequent integration (though limited and problematic as it also sprang from the severing of the connection between veterans and their Native community) in White

³ For more information on the outcome of WW I, see Diane Camurat’s *The American Indian in the Great War: Real and Imagined*. Master's Thesis submitted in 1993 to the Institut Charles V of the University of Paris VII.

America after the war was also a starting point to the weakening of cultural and racial barriers, and the eventual birth of the Civil Rights movement for Native Americans.

However, WWII was also the site of an identity crisis for some American Indian people since the desire for “integration” after the war meant departure from a way of life and loss of self in some instances. This loss of self might also arise from the participation in the war, which is an aspect of Native-American involvement in the war Leslie Marmon Silko deals with in *Ceremony*. Native Americans’ own grieving for the freedom and rights they had been deprived of in centuries of dealing with the racist policies of successive American governments led them to stand against the Nazis’ fascist project, the global desire to conquer Europe and impose Nazi ideology--a project Native Americans saw as a further threat to their own freedom. The rhetoric of freedom and post-war promises was used by the American government to promote enlistment. However, Native involvement was, among other reasons, the expression of the independent desire of helping others recover the very freedom they had not yet been granted. As far as the government’s attitude was concerned, the outcome of the war for Native Americans was not productive due to the lack of favorable governmental policies protective of Native rights. Its outcome was devastating in terms of its psychological impact on a population which, much in the same way as they did after WWI, had real difficulties coping with the traumatic events of the horror abroad, a horror that could not be spoken, a horror that caused trauma that could not be healed through traditional healing ceremonies. The “sick ones” coming back from the war found themselves misplaced in their own Native communities as they could not share or make understand their experience for lack of words to describe the tragedy of death and the methods employed to inflict it. In

Ceremony, Silko's Laguna character Tayo, a WWII veteran comes home after having fought in the Philippines against Japanese troops. In the Philippine jungle, Tayo witnesses the death of his cousin qua brother Rocky, a death which participates in Tayo's mental and physical decay after his return to America. Back home on Laguna land, Tayo's inability to speak his wartime trauma is emphasized by the lack of a community of understanding: "He did not know how to explain what had happened . . . [they] would not have believed white warfare--killing across great distances without knowing who or how many had died. It was too alien to comprehend, the mortars and big guns . . . Not even old time witches killed like that" (*Ceremony* 36-37). In Silko's text, the otherness of white warfare is responsible for the obsolescence of the healing ceremony (the Scalp Ceremony) that was traditionally performed after the Navajo warrior had come back home and before he could participate again in the daily life of his tribe. Old Man Ku'oosh, the first medicine man who tries to help Tayo heal from the trauma of warfare, is conscious of the change: " 'There are some things we can't cure like we used to', he said,' not since the white people came. The other who had the Scalp Ceremony, some of them are not better either" (*Ceremony* 38). To the grief caused by his involvement in white warfare, Tayo has to add and deal with the grief caused by cultural obsolescence which comes as the result of his fighting in WWII. The severed link between himself and his culture is however never rewoven or repaid by the very government whose values and interests Tayo was defending by going to fight. His return and the return of his Navajo friends from the battle field are marked by another return, that of racism. White America's xenophobia had been partially veiled as long as Tayo and his friends were wearing the U.S. army uniform which proved their participation as Americans to the

American cause of liberation: “They were America the Beautiful too, this was the land of the free just like the teachers said in school. They had the uniform and they didn’t look different no more. They got respect” (*Ceremony* 42). Once the war is over, however, the uniform falls and their identity and position in the geographical and cultural space of “the white man” are reconfigured: “The war was over, the uniform was gone. All of a sudden that man at the store waits on you last, makes you wait until all the white people bought what they wanted. And the white lady at the bus depot, she’s real careful not to touch your hand when she counts out your change” (*Ceremony* 42).

As he realizes this “return to normal life,” Tayo learns, and this will prove a positive healing method, to relate to the trauma of the enemy who is in fact not one; his pain is the pain of the dying Japanese warriors whom he can see in the dreams that haunt him after his return home. To this apparition of the soldiers in Tayo’s traumatic nightmares, the Navajo medicine man Ku’oosh responds by acknowledging the human connection between fighters from both sides. Silko begins a rethinking of the origin of Tayo’s trauma by relating this trauma to that of the Japanese men who fought against him and whose grief, whose need to cope with death and the effects of killing on one’s soul are identical to Tayo’s (*Ceremony* 124). Tayo’s slow process of relating to the grief of the other, the enemy, helps him understand his own trauma and realize that this trauma does not solely belong to him, that he does not have to bear the weight of death and cultural disintegration alone, that this trauma can and should be dealt with by the collective through a new, different understanding of the roots of grief.

Healing through Death: Contemporary Issues of Survival and the Role of Collective Understanding across National Borders

Today, the questions we see raised in newspapers and magazines worldwide: in the work of contemporary writers such as queer theorist Judith Butler (in *Precarious Lives*) and political analyst Nafeez Ahmed (in *The War on Freedom*); or in the work of popular polemical film-maker Michael Moore, to name only a few, are the following: why does violence against the West happens, and what are the conditions under which violence appears? This appeal to the critical mind has often been synonymous with sedition after 9/11 since a clear cut choice, no questions entailed, was demanded of Americans by a government employing a rhetoric of “good” versus “evil.” A majority seems to refuse the condemnation of violence in all its forms and is ready to accept so-called ethical justifications for violence committed onto others in response to violence committed onto the American people. In order to break that cycle of violence, critical thinking, though useful, does not seem to be the best weapon to fight off fear, hatred, and the desire for revenge. What could, then, if not death? I was astonished to turn on the TV shortly before the 2004 American elections, and read a headline at the bottom of the screen that said that a group of parents of soldiers who had died in Iraq were supporting President Bush in his “fight against terror.” It is understandable that in order to grieve a child and keep living beyond her death, parents need to find solace in knowing that this death happened for a very good reason. Their holding on to that reason might be one way of mourning the child--hence families holding onto governmental discourses about the worthiness of the cause for which these men and women died. On the one hand, we need to acknowledge the parents’ suffering and their response to the death of their child; we want to understand and accept their justification because they have a right to cope with grief as well as they

humanly can. But on the other hand, we can ask ourselves whether this grieving response unfortunately promotes the continuation of violence, whether the parents of a dead child who support the continuing governmental actions in Iraq will ever be able to mourn in peace. Their mourning is taking place through violence, in the context of death. For that reason, one can wonder if mourning can really take place, or if it will remain absent, as absent as the critical voice that could have afforded these parents an outlet for anger and grief, as absent as the need to historicize the death of their child so that her dead body does not become food for the cannibalistic governmental discourse of braveness and dutiful behavior to a nation—a discourse which turns human lives into symbolic deaths. What will be left to the parents of a dead child when the war is over, when dead bodies are counted and families are thanked and honored for their gift to the nation? Only this legitimizing symbol (which only legitimates the war) will remain a symbol which will either be destroyed or conveniently forgotten as the international community and a large portion of the American people will keep pointing a guilty finger towards the American government and those on its side. Who can mourn a fallen symbol? Isn't this symbolization of the dead one more traumatic event as it involves the creation and spreading of immaterial, ahistorical narratives of heroism, "airy narratives that make parents fall victim to the loss of access to the terms that establish historical veracity" (*Undoing Gender* 156)? How long will this symbolic justification suffice for these parents who have lost a precious life, that of a human deprived of her place in their lives and her place in history through symbolization, through her entry into the mythical space of false ethics and pseudo-democratic values? This gift of death to the nation is the wrong one. The historical presence of the American soldiers who died and will die at war in Iraq

should be preserved, their stories told, their faces remembered. On top of their material place in history, these lives can be symbolized in a productive way: not as the victims of a violence perpetrated by the constructed enemy of a nation, but as the victims of a violence that does not have a specific origin but a long history, as the victims of a violence that implicates not one nation, one people, but a web of events and decisions taken in the past by governmental powers. Then a productive, life-bearing gift of death can be offered not just to one nation, but to a community of people across the world. This gift of death is a version of Derrida's gift of death, an absolute duty towards the other that "demands that one behave in an irresponsible manner (by means of treachery and betrayal)" (*The Gift of Death* 66) and sacrifice ethics to be ethical. We sometimes have to fail willingly in fulfilling our responsibility to our nation, a responsibility outlined by our government as the people's duty to fear the outside and die for the good of the nation, in order to succeed in our responsibility towards that same nation. Like Antigone, we need to reach the limit of Até, to become "dead in life" (*The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* 271), to counter unethical discourses that pass as ethical, deadly decisions taken in the name of life (and whose life?), by refusing to associate oneself with narratives that promote death in the name of the state, death in the name of nationalism, the death of a constructed enemy who is not one: "to refuse this cycle of revenge in the name of justice, means not only to seek legal redress for wrongs done, but to take stock of how the world has become formed in this way precisely in order to form it anew, and in the direction of non-violence" (*Prekarious Lives* 17). In order to accomplish that transformation, one needs to start with death. But before a productive gift of death can be made, the literal death of

children is going to happen to American families as the violence of the war in Iraq escalates.

This is where the political impact of trauma studies, of psychoanalysis and its concern with death, comes into play. We are not to remain autonomous bodies or autonomous communities when we are traumatized. 9/11 is not just the trauma of America. It has become everyone's on different levels. It has become Iraqi, and theirs has now become ours through the event of the war. To think about human communities and their interconnection through death might be the first step towards eradicating violence, contradictorily enough.

Violence and Death: the Cement of history

Death is central to life according to psychoanalytical theory (and not central enough to trauma studies according to Cathy Caruth). Whether or not we agree with psychoanalytical theories about death, we can all take that statement, "death is central to life," more than seriously. Freud saw death as the drive through which all desires were expressed, and this death drive appears as a symptom of an individual's autonomy; it marks her separation from the other. For Freud, the death drive was an instinct at the core of the structure of every being, of its biology, its "nature," hence preceding symbolization⁴. For Lacan, however, it is an expression of the symbolic order which regulates humanity's being in the world⁵; it is thus an index of humanity's relatedness, but a relatedness that is not sufficiently grounded in history by Lacanian psychoanalysis.

⁴ See Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.

⁵ For more development on Lacan's inclusion of death in the symbolic order, see the translation of his *Écrits* on the function and field of speech and language in psychoanalysis. London: Tavistock, 1977. 102-104.

What I want to do here is move away from a Freudian definition of death as individual instinctive drive, look at the ways in which death is indeed (though in ways that are problematic) part of the symbolic structure of being and grouping, and point out its crucial “forgotten” presence as the tangible, material stuff of history.

Death is synonymous to life. It belongs to the continuum, or should I say the web to use an image I have introduced earlier, of history. There is no history without death. There is no being without death, whether it is being in the world or being symbolically speaking. As a matter of fact, death is also symbolic in the sense that it is present in theory in every event, every sequence of history, every moment of living, every trace of life, and every movement we make as individuals or as groups. Death is a haunting symbol. In particular historical contexts, events or people can become agents of death and be dehistoricized to enter the symbolic (which is of course oftentimes a dangerous occurrence), another instance of death’s symbolic presence/absence.

Death is therefore symbolic and historical, structural and cultural. It is the stuff (not the origin, not the end) of human evolution; it is the stuff of life. Death intervenes recurrently in the making and unmaking of nations, cultural and social groups, or simply autonomous individuals. The most “innocent,” unthought of aspects of our lives, the very norms and laws we need to follow to remain in place in the world, to belong, to be coherent social beings, are deadly in the sense that in order to survive socially, we need to “hurt ourselves,” to subdue or eliminate the disruptive elements about us that threaten the norm, and thus threaten our place in a regulated world. If we don’t abide by the rules of normativity, the risk of literal death can become real, no matter how “democratic” and “protective of human rights” the nation in which we live is. As a whole, the social beings

we are tend to think about norms and laws as tools towards reaching a greater good for humanity, a world with less violence, less death, more happy living. Contradictorily enough, this journey towards the greater good which is not always one involves violence and death. Butler extends that argument to describe the normative as deadly coercion, as death itself (*Undoing Gender* 206). Death is what we know, and we know of it differently according to where we stand in the social sphere. But it always means something to us, no matter who we are. We know it will come eventually, we see its presence near and far. It makes sense; it is familiar whether on a symbolic or more literal level: it comes to mean symbolically and historically. It is a kind of indexical symbol to use a Lacanian term, though a symbol that always loses its position as symbol due to its indexicality, and an index that always becomes framework due to its symbolic position in the human mind. As traumatic moments are shifters between the autonomous and the plural, death becomes the alter ego of that shifter, another shifter that marks the difference as well as the connection between the symbolic and the historical, the symbolic and the social. The starting point in our conversation about trauma has to be death. Death is what we have in common with the other, and this common feature could very well be the promise of an individual and a national political recovery of sanity. Death is a common, specific and global site of trauma, and can become a site of understanding, the common human thread in the struggle against violence. One might say that life is also what we have in common with the other, but an overview of the world political situation makes one doubt as to the sole validity, in the fight against international violence and separation through difference, of positive, global humanist discourses about our common universal human attributes.

Now, I want to linger on the subject of ubertraumatism and point out its dangers. I want to ask why leaders such as Saddam Hussein and Osama Bin Laden have become the official uber-traumatic figures of contemporary history and politics, figures of death par excellence, when one could also argue that President George W. Bush shares responsibility for the death of 100 000 Iraqis as of October 31 2004, women and men who died at the hands of the American army. Why has North Korea joined the Iraq/Iran axe of evil and death in the American terrified imaginary when China poses as much threat since this imposing political and economic power continues to sell missiles to Pakistan and Iran? It seems problematic to blame single individuals or single nations that have been constructed as emissaries of death for wrongs committed by others, many others, in the past, in the present, and in the long term. September 11 is a specific trauma with very peculiar repercussions on certain communities in the U.S. and across the world, and thus should be recognized for its specificity. However, the trauma of one nation should not come to the forefront of history and stay there to propagate one singular narrative about violence and erase the possibilities to think differently about trauma, about death, and about the interconnectedness of traumas worldwide, the interdependency of traumatic stories. It should leave the position it has adopted in the American imaginary, a position which affords trauma an even more dangerous status, a symbolic position (in Lacanian terms) that is timeless, outside history. 9/11, an event defined by the media and the American government as a traumatic origin, became the reference through which uncontested surveillance, regulation, and manipulation by the state as well as changes in the social law took place. After logocentrism (the metaphysics of presence critiqued by Derrida) and phallogentrism (the Lacanian phallus), here comes

ubertraumatism which makes use of the first two to point to an autonomous trauma and foster paranoia, fear of an invisible enemy, and violence against visible targets that should not be ones. As Judith Butler argues, “Those who remain faceless or whose faces are presented to us as so many symbols of evil, authorize us to become senseless before those lives we have eradicated, and whose grievability is definitely postponed” (*Precarious Life* xviii). The responsibility of trauma studies today might be to deconstruct trauma as an autonomous, originary event and counter the entry of specific autonomous traumas into the symbolic order. Its responsibility is also to help redefine death as a possible transformative link between human communities who all live through death, though this living through takes place differently for everyone. Death could become the point of re-alliance between individuals within a nation and between “enemy” people. It could become a common knot, and a common symbolic and material site of knowledge from which to rethink our assumptions about “the enemy” and reconstruct what is being erased by nationalistic discourses--that is the enemy’s closeness to us in death.

In *Unclaimed Experience*, Cathy Caruth writes, “one’s own trauma is tied up with the trauma of another . . . trauma may lead, therefore, to the encounter with another, through the very possibility and surprise of listening to another’s wound” (9). In an essay entitled “Freud, Lacan, and the Ethics of Memory,” Caruth reflects upon one of Freud’s case studies first introduced in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, the case of a father dreaming about his burning child after the child has died of sickness. The body of his child lies in a room lit by a candle. The father who sleeps next door then dreams in response to the glare of a candle entering his room. This case is taken up by Lacan in

“Tuché and Automaton,” and within the context of the dream, Lacan draws the link between dreaming, which for Freud signifies the impossibility for the father to confront the child’s death, and awakening. For Lacan, awakening from the dream is an awakening to the death of his child through a call from the dead. It is “a site of trauma, the trauma of the necessity and impossibility to respond to another’s death” (*Unclaimed Experience* 100). Caruth states, “if Freud reads in the dream of the burning child the story of a sleeping consciousness figured by a father unable to face the accidental death of his child, Lacan, for his part, reads in the awakening the story of the way father and child are inextricably bound together through the story of a trauma” (*Unclaimed* 102). This awakening from the dream comes to replace the missed awakening which should have taken place after the sudden death of the child. For Lacan, this awakening is also the site of an impossibility that is the “impossible responsibility of consciousness in its own originating relation to others and specifically to the deaths of others” (*Unclaimed* 104), an impossibility which eventually transforms itself into “the imperative of a speaking that awakens others” (*Unclaimed* 106), that “passes the awakening onto others” (107) and promotes survival for the living by a movement away from the unproductive re-enactment of death and through an almost impossible acceptance of it. Caruth’s re-interpretation of the Lacanian reading of the dream stresses the importance of psychoanalysis in helping us live and think with and through death not just in order to accept our own mortality, but in order to link it with the mortality of others and think about the possibility that, within the contemporary political context, our friends and “enemies” are dying of violent death, unacceptable death, unimaginable death. We can think with and through death and stand up against the political apparatuses that promote

the violent death of human bodies, not keep quiet and not accept death without a fight with words, not repeat that violence but use it as a linking thread to communicate with the other, the enemy who is dying too; all this in order to survive and make survive with and through death.

Is it possible to desymbolize the symbolic?

More than a question of possibility, it is a question of duty. We are all social, co-dependent beings and in order to live in communities, we need to limit the impact of certain cultural myths (sometimes turned into symbols) about human life and human evolution. But is it really possible to negotiate a real theoretical peace treaty and put in place a productive coalition of theories, find a common ground between psychoanalysis and post-structural theory within the context of trauma studies, between Lacan and Butler, and eventually see this common ground expand and become the preferred site for conversations on the reconciliation of wounded cultural communities/nations? Can trauma studies become the preferred site for this negotiation? Are writers and theorists about trauma ready to expand and challenge their normative and repetitive (oftentimes without a difference) conversations about the kinds of traumas and traumatized beings which supposedly really matter? Can these same theorists detach themselves from the desire for an origin, for the tangible, for the resolution of trauma, the ultimate defeat of death before life? Can trauma studies begin again, with Butler, Caruth, Silko, to focus on both the tangibility and intangibility of trauma, its circularity and web-like characteristics, its complex and illogical relation to traditional notions of space and time, its spectrality and omnipresence in the making and unmaking of human relations, of history, of the history of psychoanalysis? In that process, shouldn't we acknowledge the need for death? As Butler argues, "To be injured means that one has the chance to reflect

upon injury, to find out the mechanisms of its distribution, to find out who else suffers from permeable borders, unexpected violence, dispossession, and fear, and in what ways” (*Precarious Lives* xii). In order to prevent its “second death” as Lacan would define it (that is the possibility for regeneration, which is a very human possibility) psychoanalysis really has to commit suicide and die once, die of its first death, move away from the psychoanalytical body of knowledge that prevents—because of its reliance on normativity, because of the over-determinacy of the symbolic order—a performative historicization of trauma. For that process to take place, for new conversations to happen in the context of trauma studies, for a renewed cultural understanding to take place between groups or nations at very local and more global levels, psychoanalysis has to become human again, rethink the norms that prevent this humanization and use whatever material is already there to support that process (such as its conversations around death).

In *Bodies That Matter*, Judith Butler argues that in our considerations of sex as construction, we need to take into account certain “constraints” which are insinuated into the norm—they reside inside the law, they are intrinsic to it—and they are also a consequence of citationality, the reiteration of the norm, a “ritualized production” (*Bodies* 95) according to Butler. Butler uses Lacan to define (she then critiques that definition) those constraints and their fixity. These constraints are symbolic and force subjects into assuming a certain normative position, and they are established as symbolic fixed positions with which a subject should identify (and this identification is described as a fantasy, a “wish” to get as close as possible to this fixed, almost timeless symbolic position). These symbolic constraints “mark the body . . . through threatening that body through the deployment/production of an imaginary threat” (*Bodies* 101). These symbolic

constraints force the relinquishment to inscription, “the imaginary alignment with the . . . position marked out by the symbolic” (*Bodies* 101). The symbolic thus governs the imaginary which in return has little to no impact on the symbolic order. According to Lacan, the imaginary is always formed through the symbolic, and the symbolic sets the limit to the possible reconfigurations of the social relations which inscribe themselves in the Lacanian imaginary. This separation and untouchability of the symbolic in Lacanian psychoanalysis is irresponsible in a social and historical context. If an event, a particular figure, a particular belief manages to become mythologized to the point of reaching a symbolic position, a timeless and unchangeable dimension outside history, what are the consequences of the omnipresence of that “symbolic authority” (*Undoing Gender* 47) for humankind in a historical context?

This dichotomy and the ruling of one realm over another are problematic and should be deconstructed in order to redefine the relationship between symbols and history. According to Butler, the symbolic order “is the sedimentation of social practices” (*Undoing Gender* 44) and it should be contested as such along with the practices performed in its name (whether the preservation of the heterosexist matrix in the contemporary Western world; the preservation of one nation’s way of life against another’s; the preservation of “democracy” whatever the cost; the disavowal of the other, the different, the enemy, etc.). Psychoanalysis must become out-law if it wants to regain its humanity; it must relinquish its desire to impose the symbolic order as the origin of the history of social life, and it must work to negotiate a new relationship between that order which cannot simply be erased and the movement of history.

Silko's Story-telling Performance: Against the theory of Origin, Against the Symbolization of Trauma

In *Ceremony* and *Almanac of the Dead*, Leslie Silko weaves what I would refer to as an extended Borromean knot of history. I use this Lacanian knot between the real, the symbolic and the imaginary a bit differently from Lacan, though not so differently. This knot can be resignified for the purpose of my discussion on trauma as the meeting place between different traumatic moments, traumatic circles that belong to the realm of the real. As a matter of fact, the real is the encounter with the traumatic according to Lacan. Such a knot, whose context is thus the real, will then, according to my redefinition, illustrate the interdependency of traumatic moments that can become a part of the cultural or historical imaginary of a group or nation, or which sometimes can reach a solely symbolic, thus static and therefore dangerous, position. This knot is one among many in the web of traumatic moments (the real) woven into the web of history (the imaginary)--two webs one can superpose but not assimilate as history is not the history of trauma.

As I mentioned earlier, according to Caruth and Jenkins, trauma is not locatable in a single event because it is structurally unknowable. However, we can recognize the ghostly presence of trauma in specific historical events. Their specificity is undeniable, but one should think about trauma in terms of the multiplicity of such events which at the same time create and are symptoms of trauma: a specific experience of rape can be pinpointed as a traumatizing moment in the life of a woman who is living with depression. The instance of depression can be immersed into a web of past events (past traumatic events or traumatic webs) that used the rape as a springboard for their coming out (conscious or not), their transformation into symptoms; or as an open door for other traumatic events or webs to come and attach themselves to that moment in time (the

intervention of a shaming community). This moment in time, though crucial in its specificity, belongs to another web of traumatic moments specific to the evolution of a raped woman. This is not to diminish the impact of her rape, or of any specific event that can be defined as traumatic for the physical body or the social body. This is to do away with the idea that a traumatic instance has to be dealt with in a vacuum or in a historical context that limits the very understanding of both the reasons behind the apparition of trauma and its very scope, its consequences. This is to do away with the binary opposition victim/victor.

Trauma is not 'one.' It is not a dot on the line of a human story or human history; it is a multidimensional web with its recognizable junction points, extended lines of sustenance, moments of departure, doubling, tripling of the lines in diverging directions, or possibly *points de capiton* as defined in Lacanian theory, illusory static moments that come to mean, to signify particular traumatic moments in a synchronic manner, and give meaning to other moments, past moments, in a diachronic manner, thus retroactively, *après-coup*. It is the making of meaning out of these points that are both singular and related to each other that will put Silko's traumatized character in *Ceremony*, Tayo, on the way towards recovery.

Native-American writer Leslie Marmon Silko's central notion of the interdependency of traumatic stories in *Ceremony* and *Almanac of the Dead* precedes the theory developed by Caruth, Edkins, and Butler and puts forth the image of the web to assert at the same time the non-singularity of trauma's representability and the multiplicity of symptoms or manifestations of trauma that which prevent and counter the desire for origin. In Laguna cosmology, Spider Woman also known as Thought Woman

is the creatrix, the story-teller, the weaver of the web of life: “Thought-Woman, the spider, named thing and as she named them they appeared” (*Ceremony* 1). Weaving and telling are intricately linked in Laguna cosmology, and this spirit being who is at the same time animal and human, weaves the web of human history, which is also her history. *Ceremony* opens with this story, the story of Thought Woman the spider who is thinking the narrative that follows (here Silko herself is the spider), the journey of Tayo, a young Laguna Pueblo, a mixed blood born of a Laguna mother and white father, who comes back from WWII with what any Western traditional medical body would recognize as PTSD (Post-traumatic Stress Disorder). Within the context of that war and of the fighting in the Philippines Tayo participated in, the specific trauma Tayo seems to suffer from is the death of his brother Rocky killed by Japanese soldiers, a death which Tayo was powerless to prevent. We begin the novel thinking that, again, the trauma of WWII will remain throughout the novel the uber-trauma, a symbolic trauma around which human history comes to attach itself without ever threatening its position.

Tayo goes home to his people after months spent in a Veterans’ hospital where the doctors and their treatments turn him into “white smoke [which] faded into the white world of their bedsheets” (*Ceremony* 14), drain his memory out and enact the numbing of the pain, his progressive disconnection from the images and stories he had kept inside since childhood—stories about his mother, stories about his uncle Josiah’s spotted cattle which will become the agent of his awakening, stories about Rocky and the war, etc. Tayo returns to his community as a man caught between depression and hysteria, either spending days in his bed incapable of standing up, weighed down by memories of the dead, or turning violently against the reminders of his pain—He tries to kill his Laguna

friend Emo whose obsession with telling stories full of his own unchecked violence and self-hatred drive Tayo into an uncontrollable state of anger.

Quickly enough, however, Silko moves beyond the specific/symbolic traumatic moment which seems to stand at the origin of Tayo's suffering, and connects this 'originary moment' to a multitude of other moments in order to recreate the traumatic web Tayo will learn to see, with all its connections, so that his healing process can start (and never end). Tayo's traumatic web is intermingled with the web of life, the web of human history that Thought Woman the spider weaves through story-telling—the telling of new human stories based on the old myths, connected to the past but in a constant state of evolution. Thought woman the spider, a spirit being in Laguna cosmology, is also a human figure and appears throughout the text in the shape of characters: Auntie, The Night Swan, The Katsina Spirit Tse, Betonie the medicine man. All share Thought Woman's story-telling power and are responsible for weaving the web of life, adding stories to it that either complicate Tayo's traumatic web or disentangle it. These characters are often found pulling threads from the fabric of their clothes when they are about to tell a story. When Auntie tells Tayo the story of his mother's fall into alcoholism and dementia, she "looked at Tayo and picked a thread off the bottom of her apron" (*Ceremony* 70). Auntie is a destructive figure in the novel; she is a product of acculturation: her obsession with and belief in the Catholic faith, her desire to see her son Rocky succeed in the world defined according to the rules of "mainstream white America," her dismissal of Tayo's worth as a mixed-blood, as well as her dismissal of "the old ways" of Laguna Pueblos prevent Tayo from growing up connected to the stories that "fight off illness and death" (*Ceremony* 2) and understanding the need to participate

in a healing ceremony in which story-telling is the instrument of connection between pain and memories, past and present, one story and the larger history of a community. Let us note that in no way does Silko gear Tayo's recovery towards accepting the loss of the mother. Neither the loss of the mother nor the loss of the father (whom Tayo does not know) is the originary trauma awakened by Tayo's war trauma. There is no retrospective understanding of a primal loss in Silko's *Ceremony*.

The Night Swan, Lalo, as she tells Josiah, Tayo's uncle, the story of her tricks on one of the many men in her life, "looked at [him] and pulled at a blue thread hanging from the sleeve of her dress" (*Ceremony* 86). The Night Swan, Josiah's lover, is a trickster figure who convinces Josiah to buy the cattle that will eventually kill him; Josiah dies looking for it after it is stolen by a 'white' ranch owner. Lalo likes to play tricks on men; she tells stories of connection and disconnection, of hurting and relief from suffering. She is herself the instrument of this hurting, as well as the instrument of relief and understanding, especially for Tayo. Together they share the same difference as both have blue eyes, the markers of colonization, in a community where brown is what one wants to see, what one knows. She is aware of the connections Tayo has yet to witness; she is the one who starts Tayo on the way to a reconnection with his past, his memories, the traumatic web which he does not see and the web of history as whole when she tells him, "You don't have to understand what is happening. But remember this day. You will recognize it later. You are part of it now" (*Ceremony* 100).

These threads that are pulled out by characters throughout the story help make visible, deconstruct, make meaning out of Tayo's traumatic web simply by narrativizing certain traumatic instances; by uncovering, revealing to him certain lines and trends

connected to each other that make the traumatic web. Tayo, through the process of listening to Betonie's stories, songs, ceremonial words, remembers them and remembers the existence of the web of history through, and not against, repetition. Repetition is not a symptom of trauma but the way towards remembering; it needs to become compulsory because it has the power to save lives.

The stories belong to the phenotype (properties both cultural and structural) of Native-American cultures and individuals. They are structural, they are symbolic, they are the language that is made and remade by history, and that creates and recreates social beings according to the changes brought about by social change. Their origin, their nature, is diffuse and unstable. They are composed of multiple layers, more or less archaic traces of versions of stories that have been modified, transformed by history. They are also historical/social because they constantly evolve with time, but they are also timeless. Their evolution, it should be noted, takes place through death as their modification comes as a response to the infringement of a violent other upon Laguna culture.

Old Ku'oosh, the first Laguna medicine man to take care of Tayo after his return from the Veteran hospital, fails in his endeavor to cleanse Tayo from his sickness as Ku'oosh uses traditional stories in order to do so, stories that speak a language which cannot cure what it does not know, what it cannot name. The structure of the old Laguna language Ku'oosh uses is powerless in front of events "too alien to comprehend" (*Ceremony* 36); an understanding of these events is unavailable through Ku'oosh's language, thus his cures are without effect since they rely on songs and stories cut off from history, with only a symbolic/mythical value. Ku'oosh, however, represents the first

step in the process of disentanglement as he speaks to Tayo using the old Laguna dialect, “full of sentences that were involuted with explanations of their own origins, as if nothing the old man said were his own but all had been said before and he was only there to repeat it” (*Ceremony* 34). Ku’oosh reiterates the argument that the past speaks through the present. This repetition, however, takes place without a difference and is significant of the non-productive, even dangerous, argument that assimilation has kept Native cultures static or has erased their cultural potential through Christianization and the imposition of the ‘language of the enemy’. The supposedly ‘disappeared’ cultural core of the Laguna nation, according to this argument, is the gap that can never be bridged, a historical loss that turns into symbolic lack and becomes the very root of ignorant discourses that claim the disintegration or degeneration of Native cultures--a very racist argument which materializes in Silko’s description of the Gallup Ceremonial, a celebration of Native-culture organized by “the white men there” (*Ceremony* 116), a ceremony during which tourists buy Native-American jewels from Indians who perform their culture for the entertainment of those same tourists. In the context of that ceremony, Indians are in fact the attraction to be purchased. Their culture becomes commodified, turned into a spectacle to be taken as symbolic of Indianness, a concept thus deprived of its social and political dimensions.

Ku’oosh also tells Tayo that as one speaks, as one tells a story or performs a ceremony through story-telling, “No word exists alone, and the reason for choosing each word had to be explained with a story about why it must be said this certain way. That was the responsibility that went with being human, old Ku’oosh said, the story behind each word must be told so there could be no mistake in the meaning of what had been

said” (*Ceremony* 35-6). These words are both symptoms and sites of trauma: symptoms of trauma because their repetition without a difference testifies to the traditional Laguna language’s unfortunate irrelevance in a contemporary context, and sites of trauma because Tayo’s limited comprehension of Ku’oosh’s traditional Laguna language further entangles the traumatic web and thus sets him apart from the web of history. However, Ku’oosh’s comment is positive despite Ku’oosh’s traumatic repetition of the old language since it implies that the linguistic monads that stories are become part of a web of meaning that comes together through the recovery of the past, the recovery of a history re-imagined not in relation to what has been lost, but in relation to what indeed remains but has been erased, forgotten, or misinterpreted. Here, “the story behind each word,” the Laguna community’s story of coming to mean, coming to be, opens the way towards understanding the stories made out of the accumulation and repetition of other versions of these stories. They come to mean through the past remembered, rehistoricized from the perspective of the victim who turns into victor through the recuperation and resignification of traumatic moments, of what has been; and thus through their reentry into the circles of signifiers that compose history.

The stories in Silko’s novel are sacred, thus symbolic (they are part of the cultural unconscious and regiment the behavior of the group and the self within that group); and secular, thus historical. They make and unmake, create and destroy, their performative power is without limits and they tell, they speak ‘humanity’ (meaning that they give birth to it again at every telling) as much as they are spoken by it. Both their symbolic and historical impact can only be preserved through repetition, however. This repetition, though traumatic in the context of old Ku’oosh’s linguistic work, becomes performative

in Betonie's world. The repetition of words and stories is not symptomatic of trauma, but becomes a challenge to trauma.

In *The Uncanny*, Nicholas Royle writes that "the uncanny seems to be about a strange repetitiveness. It has to do with the return of something repressed, something no longer familiar, the return of the dead, the constant recurrence of the same thing" (84). As Tayo struggles to regain balance by disentangling spider webs, the repetition of stories loses its Freudian sense as it moves away from Freud's repetition compulsion, a symptom of sickness and regression according to Freudian theory. It becomes a sign of overcoming trauma. It is not instinctive, it is not elementary as Freud would have it, because it is a consequence, not an origin. It came as the result of acculturation. This repetition is not primitive and unconscious, but conscious and desired. It becomes the condition for personal and cultural reparation according to Silko. It is the Freudian death drive resignified, partly "desymbolized" and rehistoricized, that comes to counter cultural death, and thus puts itself in the service of history, in the service of life. As Tayo listens to the stories repeated by Betonie, *The Night Swan* or *Auntie*, the structural/symbolic and the genealogical/historical come together to reminisce about the past and make it mean in the present, unveil its presence in the circles of the traumatic web. The symbolic order Laguna words and stories belong to in the world of Ku'oosh, loses its autonomy and is dragged back down into history, into the 'symbolhistorical' of Laguna people whose cultural imaginary renews itself through this process of rehistoricizing language.

However, in the end, there is no end, there is no Lacanian "pass" for Tayo as the ceremony never ends, the repetition never ends. Tayo's reconstitution in and through language is never over; his *parlêtre* and that of his people will always imply the re-

repetition of words, of stories which never stop to evolve in the context of social progress or social regression.

The Laguna traumatic web, which is part of the web of history, is composed of a multiplicity of stories that are linked together through one individual, Tayo, in this particular context of the novel. Tayo eventually sees all the points of junction between the words and stories he heard: Rocky's death and Tayo's sickness are linked, but not in the way Tayo had thought. They are only two elements in the traumatic web which do not function as autonomous traumas but need to be linked to others: the war, acculturation, the cursing of the rain, the Pueblo community's loss of balance, Tayo's loss of language, etc. Tayo's originary trauma is in fact non-existent. It is constructed through the Western desire to symbolize, not synthesize. To rely on it is unproductive and ultimately dangerous as its forced autonomy, its detachment from the complicated web of history, prevents a kaleidoscopic envisioning of trauma, as well as the beginning of mourning: if trauma is somewhat swallowed by the symbolic order, then trauma is beyond mourning. Silko refuses symbolization by multiplying the possibilities for thinking the origin of trauma as non-existent because multiple, untraceable in a straight line, in time and timeless, in space and beyond any kind of spatial restriction.

The notion of originary trauma is further dismantled as the novel progresses. The same dismantlement happens to the reason behind the demise of the whole Laguna Pueblo community. As the war seems to be the origin of Tayo's trauma at the beginning of the novel, Silko brings in, towards the middle of the novel, another originary moment, a traumatic moment of story-telling performed long ago, before the American colonial period, by a witch who participates in a contest in witchery and wins that contest by

foreseeing the arrival of colons to the Americas. This story, central to the novel in place and content, and which critics have often referred to as Silko's retroactive prophecy, is the 'rationale' for elucidating the losses the larger Laguna community is facing: the loss of a culture, a language; the loss of lives, the loss of a coherent communal identity as a result of assimilation, etc. This story is Silko's introduction into the novel of a mythological "primal scene" which seems to only make sense retrospectively, a scene which only comes to mean as traumatic originary scene through Tayo's traumatic war experience. So here comes another symbolic moment, one that replaces Tayo's symbolic originary trauma (which falls back into history), or so it seems. Such an explanation is of course a very structural and superficial definition of the meaning of that 'archaic' story and its relation to Tayo's trauma, and it falls back into the traditional psychoanalytical pattern of retroactive meaning, or retroactive recuperation of the primal scene, an explanation which does not fit our discussion of trauma, nor does it match, in fact, the reason for the presence of that story.

Silko plays with the symbols of trauma by replacing one symbolic moment with another and more importantly, by completely inventing, making up this 'crucial myth': this story is the only story about Laguna cosmologies that is not real, that is not part of the cultural make-up of the Laguna Pueblo community. This story is a hoax, as much as the concept of originary trauma is, and this is why it is such a crucial moment in the novel as it collapses the notion of origin. In *Ceremony*, the very root of history--the root of racism, colonization, loss and violence--appears in a single story told by a witch long before colonial times. This story is a prophetic story which narrates the demise of all that is Native. The witch comes to participate in a gathering of witches from all over the

world, a gathering which turns into “a contest in dark things” (*Ceremony* 133). As other witches show off their “big cooking pots . . . with red babies simmering in blood/ circles of skull cut away/ all the brains sucked out,” she does not make a show of any morbid power but begins to tell a story. The others laugh at her for such poor display of her gifts, and this is how the witch responds to their laughter: “Okay/ go ahead/ laugh if you want to/ but as I tell the story it will begin to happen./ Set in motion now/ set in motion by our witchery/ to work with us. Caves across the ocean/ in caves of dark hills/white skin people/ like the belly of a fish covered with hair . . .” (*Ceremony* 136). The story announces the coming of “white people” and the demise of native tribes, the death of entire cultures, and violence done onto the very land upon which Native cultures thrive. When the end of the story finally comes, the other witches declare the story-teller winner of the contest, but ask her to take the story back, which is something the witch is unable to do: “It’s already turned loose. It’s already coming. It can’t be called back” (*Ceremony* 138).

This myth is set apart from the other stories presented in the novel. Most of the book’s stories deal with life and the fight against evil and hunger, the fight for balance between nature and culture, while this one story deals with death and the desire for death as the origin of American history. Whereas most of the other stories in the book belong to Laguna cosmology and thus pertain to the Laguna cultural realm of knowledge, the presence of a lie, intruder within that realm, not only marks the infringement of Western culture and its lies (the promises never kept by successive governments, a history of land-grabbing, the stealing of Native artifacts, in short the murder of a people and its culture), but also denounces the falseness of the American myth of origin (the flight from

violence, persecution, death) and the subsequent myths that came out of it (for example, that of democracy for the people). In that story, the actual origin of white American history is death itself and the continuation of that history draws deadly, inescapable circles around that origin.

We could keep this very pessimistic and unproductive (other than in deconstructing a myth) meaning to the story or look for a more positive reason for its presence in the center of the text. This fictional story, this literary vision of the author, this fake dream of an origin, is quickly linked to the larger fictional narrative and thus historicized, demythologized; hence the possibility for taking our distance from symbolic constraints, set-in-stone images of cultures that promote stagnation covered under the pretence of progress in thinking the link between cultures and histories. If Silko wants to destroy negative myths of creation, she also strives to pull out the very threads that bring histories together through a deconstruction of certain myths concerning the representations of Indianness and difference in the non-native imaginary, and the representations of 'whiteness' and difference in the Native imaginary--a deconstruction put into simple words by Betonie, "Nothing is that simple. You don't write off all the white people, just like you don't trust all the Indians" (*Ceremony* 128).

This thread uncovered by the retroactively prophetic story/lie is hopefully prophetic as well since it awakens readers to the possibility for a rapprochement between cultures with and through one connecting point (thought not a point of origin) at once singular and plural, symbolic and historicalCdeath itself which shapes and is shaped by history and myth.

Silko's *Almanac*: Deconstructing the Western Lie with and through the Dead

In *Ceremony*, Silko defines both trauma and history as intermingled webs in the midst of which individual lives become interconnected despite their separate social, racial, or national status. Silko brings the notions of autonomy and community together in advancing an argument for relationality in the words of Judith Butler, helping us think about the ways in which “we are not only constituted by our relations but also disposed by them as well” (*Precarious Lives* 24). The concept of connectedness between human stories and histories is a theme that Silko takes up again in *Almanac of the Dead* not only in the content of the book as making connections between personal, historical and cultural traumas is one of Silko's purposes in *Almanac*, but in the very organization of the book.

The novel is divided into six parts: the first four refer to four traditional geographical areas of the world from the specific to the continental (The United States of America, Mexico, Africa and The Americas). The fifth refers to a theoretical concept that brings down national borders and geopolitical separations: “the Fifth World,” world in which Native tribes have taken their lands back from the territories we know today as nations, without worrying about notions of nation and citizenship. The last part of the novel is entitled “One World, Many Tribes” and outlines this reorganization of the geographical and political map Silko wants to achieve in her work--an organization not according to nations and national borders but according to tribal communities which show their autonomy and relationality in the (one might say unrealistic) process of recovering the land and the lives that were theirs before colonial time, an awakening in or from the other through trauma and through death.

The events of the book revolve around a specific geographical location, Tucson Arizona, and move away from it to connect it with other areas of the U.S. and Mexico where the series of events and stories of the book take place and are told. The first two pages of the book form a map. At the center of the map, Tucson is represented by a thick dot towards which arrows are pointed, arrows coming from all directions, different cities, in the U.S. and in Mexico. Beneath that dot, a straight horizontal line makes a clear cut on the map and marks the frontier between Mexico, the name written in large letters under the line, and the U.S. which, interestingly enough, is not named on the map. These arrows joined in Tucson delimit geographical segments and the names of the novel's characters, more than 50 of them, inhabit these segments, sometimes appearing twice as the events of the novel take them to different areas of the map. All these characters with different and related stories, traumatic histories, are major actors in the complicated and interrelated events of the novel.

On the right of the map towards the middle and next to the dot that marks the emplacement of Tucson, we read, "Tucson, Arizona. Home to an assortment of speculators, confidence men, embezzlers, lawyers, judges, police and other criminals, as well as addicts and pushers, since the 1880s and the Apache Wars" (*Almanac* 15). On the map, Tucson appears not as a point of origin, but as a meeting place, a place of death, a traumatic knot, a vortex of trauma in which characters and stories are swallowed, spit out and swallowed back again to form a web of meaning around what comes to be the central element of the novel: the almanac itself and its notebooks.

On the top left-hand corner of the map, we read, "Almanac of the dead, Five hundred year map. Through the decipherment of ancient tribal texts of the Americans the

Almanac of the Dead foretells the future of all the Americas. The future is encoded in arcane symbols and old narratives” (*Almanac* 14). The almanac is not only an archive for the past, but also already an archive of the future. Lecha, grand-daughter of a Yaqui woman who used to be the keeper of the almanac and who transmitted this inheritance to her grand-child, describes its potential power: “those old almanacs don’t just tell you when to plant or harvest, they tell you about the days yet to come--drought or flood, plague, civil war or invasion . . . Once the notebooks are transcribed, I will figure out how to use the old almanac. Then we will foresee the months and years to come— everything” (*Almanac* 137). Through a translation of the past, the almanac will reveal the future. The notebooks are key elements in performing that translation in time; they are the repository of stories and histories, and are always in the process of being read and written. As a matter of fact, the notebooks are fragmented and need to be mended. This mending, this re-weaving of the notebooks will take place through a translation of the preserved stories which come in a foreign language and sometimes are encrypted, made of signs the meaning of which is impossible to unveil if parts of the manuscript are missing. The stories do not mean autonomously; they mean when put in relation with each other. This mending will also take place through the recuperation of lost passages, lost stories that will come from afar as Yoeme points out: “the story may arrive with a stranger, a traveler thrown out of his home country months ago. Or the story may be brought by an old friend . . . But after you hear the story, you and the others prepare by the new moon to rise up against the slave masters” (*Almanac* 578). Each new story is a puzzle piece added to the notebooks, a new thread entering the web of history always already in constant evolution. Stories are sites of revolution, performative and prophetic

elements which come together to disturb the flow of Western white narratives of violence and death, elements which “reckon with the past because within it lay seeds of the present and future” (*Almanac* 311). This reckoning is needed but dangerous because the risk of listening to the wrong stories is always a possibility as Yoeme teaches Lecha: “Nothing must be added that was not already there. Only repairs are allowed, and one might live as long as I have and not find a suitable code” (*Almanac* 129). The “already there” alludes to the unveiling of the past, of erased truths, different truths from the ones offered by traditional logocentric and ubertraumatic Western historical narratives which justify or ignore deadly violence done onto some under claims of freedom and democracy for others. This past history is recuperated by Silko throughout *Almanac*, and whoever comes in the way of this recuperation is punished, found guilty of “crimes against history” (516).

These ‘other truths’ are moments of departures from which to rethink history. Only through the recovery of erased stories and histories can one make sense of the notebooks which are sacred but not static; the stories evolve, are told and retold, and this retelling performs changes in the present and future: “Yoeme had believed power resides with certain stories; the power ensures the story to be retold, and with each retelling a slight but permanent shift took place” (*Almanac* 581). The following words are found on one of the pages of the notebook: “Sacred time is always in the present” (*Almanac* 136). The sacred is a key a site of trauma. As I discussed earlier, myths and symbols are oftentimes dangerous since they keep history immobile, they transfix it, they crystallize it. Here, however, the notebooks do not have the status of a sacred manuscript in the Christian sense. As a matter of fact, the notebooks are a part of history and keep telling it. They

have a symbolic role in the sense that they are the teachings of the Aztec sacred snake, but its teachings are rooted in history; they already speak of and warn humanity against the desire for death and violence, and they will really come to mean only when the lost fragments of the notebooks have been replaced. A replacement which slowly takes place through human intervention, the replacement of the lost stories of the dead by the lost stories of the living which recall these lost fragments. The historical and the mythical/symbolic (which becomes historical) are warped and weaved together to form a new version of history. The notebooks thus foster the process of awakening to the death and suffering of erased bodies and cultures, to their vulnerability as Butler would put it. This awakening happens through death, through the exposition of violence as both structural and historical. Silko emphasizes the close relationship between life and death and the role of death as a site of knowledge (never a site of denial) from which to critique illusions of totality, immortality, and autonomy certain cultures or nations see as implicit to their existence.

These illusions are responsible for the waging of wars to preserve this totality. This preservation is oftentimes more important than the preservation of life, which is an argument Freud makes in "Thoughts for the Times on War and Death." Silko makes a reference to Freud in *Almanac* through the voice of Lecha who tells Seese, the woman who helps her put the fragments of the notebooks together, "Each story had many versions. . . Freud had interpreted fragments. Images from hallucinations, fantasies, and dreams. In terms patients could understand. The images were messages from the patient to herself or himself . . . Freud had sensed the approach of the Jewish Holocaust in the dreams and jokes of his patients. Freud had been one of the first to appreciate the

Western European appetite for the sadistic eroticism and masochism of modern war” (Almanac 173). Silko makes the point that Freudian psychoanalysis has been the medium through which illusions and delusions of power and totality have been made apparent. This unveiling has taken place through story-telling, the putting together of fragments, threads of human lives in order to re-weave history. However, despite its innovative effort and critical potential, psychoanalysis has also been and still is in many ways the very site of the totality it wants to critique. Psychoanalytical theory has created its own illusions, its own myths, and still has nostalgic feelings for the myths that have collapsed or are in the process of collapsing (heteronormativity, the omnipotent and untouchable symbolic order, the absolute need for complete mourning, etc.). It is the murder of these myths that will give psychoanalysis back its power as a humane theory, a story that enacts the evolution of history and is transformed by it. Psychoanalytical theory will have to turn itself into a serial killer to stay alive. It is through death, the death of unproductive cultural or national myths, that this re-humanization of psychoanalysis will take place.

In the context of trauma studies, psychoanalysis with its redefined role will participate in the process of reducing the split or dehiscence to use Lacanian terminology, between the web of trauma and the web of history. This process will take place through a critique of originology and ubertraumatism as participants in the mythologizing process of certain events that lose their place in the flow of history. It should also take place through a rethinking of the role of death in preventing violence, in looking at the traumatized other not just in terms of its difference and autonomy, but also in terms of its connectedness to me. It will also take place through thinking anew the relationship between mourning and melancholia, and considering the importance of being in-between

these two extremes in order to work through trauma away from desires of totality in healing (an issue that will be taken up in Chapter 4).

CHAPTER 4
MELANCHOLIC MOURNING: RE-ENVISIONING TRADITIONAL RESPONSES
TO MOURNING. THE CASE OF ALGERIA AFTER INDEPENDENCE (LINGUISTIC
TRAUMA AND IDENTITY REFORMATION)

In this chapter, I want to address the possibilities offered by a positive re-thinking of the relationship between mourning and melancholia, as well as the dangers of assuming the separation between two processes that are indeed intertwined. I will use as a context for such discussion the Algerian post-independence identity crisis. My specific concern is a linguistic one as I want to address the ways in which Algerian authors have struggled with the choice (or the absence of a choice) of language to discuss this identity crisis. As I mentioned in previous chapters, the authors whose work I am looking at in this dissertation are mourners who struggle to reshape the relationship between mourning and melancholia in the process of reconstructing themselves and rethinking their nation and identity outside the overtly jingoistic framework offered to them by successive governmental instances after the war of independence, and outside the rather conservative and patriarchal framework offered by modern theories of mourning. In this chapter specifically, I will focus on the work of Assia Djebar to introduce and develop the notions of positive/performative melancholia and negative melancholia. These two terms come out of the conversation around mourning I began in Chapter 2, and mark the difference between an unhealthy attachment to the past which prevents any movement forward and the possibility for healing; and a healthy, performative attachment to that past that can become a crucial step in accessing healing after a traumatizing loss. In this chapter, the issue of positive versus negative melancholic mourning (I will explain this

uncommon association between melancholia and mourning) will be addressed in the context of the Algerian identity crisis, with a focus on its repercussions on language, after the war of independence against France. This chapter will thus contain analyses of the link between individual, personal manifestations of this crisis and its larger impact on Algerian culture and national identity.

Languages in Algeria: Another Archeology of Trauma

Mohamed Benrabah, in a book entitled *Langue et Pouvoir en Algérie* (language and power in Algeria), states that historically, plurilingualism has been a prominent characteristic of the regions of North Africa. If the Berbers were the first inhabitants of Maghreb, the Greeks and the Romans invaded and occupied the Berber territories until the Arabs came from the East in the 600s. From this moment until the 12th century, Berber, Arabic, and Latin were used in Algeria. Turkish and Spanish invasions from the 15th century onwards added to the already present linguistic pluralism, and commercial interactions with Mediterranean countries (Greece among others) furthered the interaction between and mingling of languages, Algeria being in the midst of this polyglossia. The colonization of Algeria by the French beginning in the 1830s led to the introduction (or rather imposition) of French and the integration or further integration of European languages such as Italian and Spanish as other settlers from Europe accompanied the French movement.

The linguistic pluralism encountered at different moments in the history of Algeria is the result of a series of genocidal interventions which left tragic, traumatic traces on the bodies, lands, and institutions of the colonized (the Berbers and the Arabs in the case of French colonization) as dispossession was the leitmotiv of the colonizer. In 1847, Alexis de Tocqueville was already critiquing the colonial rule of pushing the colonized on the

way towards European civilization. The Algerian policy of Napoleon III, however, was conducted with the desire for, to a certain extent, an egalitarian purpose of reconciliation between two "races." Under his rule, a certain respect for Islam led to the restoration of the education system destroyed by the war, a system which involved the recuperation of Koranic schools and the teaching of both Arabic and French in elementary schools. In 1869, the French government even tried to give a constitution to Algeria, a text which was to reconcile the colonials' desires and the interests of the natives. Of course, these elements cannot erase the fact that under Napoleon, and despite his concern for the colonized, the move from a military regime to a civil policy of separation and dissension led to the dislocation of tribal organization and thus disorganization of the natives' economy. Muslim justice was replaced by French justice in 1854, and with the fall of Napoleon and the birth of a parliamentary regime in France in 1870, the colonials, who disagreed with Napoleon's desire to unite France and this 'Arab Kingdom' (the name he gave to Algeria, which he did not want to call a "colony"), conducted policies of submission with no concern for the fate of the colonized. The imposition of a civil regime was a major step in the process of developing these policies which led to further dispossession of land and culture. The result of European ethnocentrism, of the process of assimilation which was seriously accentuated after 1871, led later on to the hegemonic imposition of French at all levels of Algerian society. After 1870, Muslim institutions were targeted (a Muslim clergy was instituted by the French and put in charge of controlling dissenters) and a policy of total "francization" was established. As Benrabah states, under French (I would add "civil") colonial rule, Arabic became a language-martyr.

In response to economic oppression, colonized Algerians immigrated to France starting in the 1910s in order to ameliorate their way of life. As a result of economic and cultural oppression, nationalist movements developed in France in the 1920s and 1930s which demanded the recognition of Arabic as a national language along with French in Algeria. The E.N.A. (*l' Etoile Nord-Africaine*: the North-African Star), founded in 1925 in Paris by Messali Hadj, called for a free Algerian education in Arabic in Algeria, among other demands made by that political group. The party was unfortunately dissolved by Léon Blum in 1936, but Messali founded the P.P.A. (*Parti du Peuple Algérien*: Party of the Algerian People) in Algeria in 1937 and kept making the same demands. In Algeria, members of the movement *jeune-algérien* asked for the transformation of the colony into a province.

New linguistic requirements and the desire to put an end to the French intolerance towards Arabic¹ declared a foreign language in Algeria in March 1938, a decision revoked by De Gaulle in 1961¹ came alongside with nationalist Algerians' recovery of their history and religion as a way to counter the omnipresence and omnipotence of the French language and culture. In Algeria, the nationalist movement came out of the initiative of three ulamas¹: Abd-al-Hamid Ben Badis, Tayyib al Iqbi, and Bachi al Ibrahimi. Their reform enterprise was based on the desire for the arabization of Algeria. In May 1931, the association of the Muslim ulamas of Algeria (*muclihin*) gathered thirteen ulamas, among whom were Mubarak il Mili and Tawfiq el Madani who were the first to write a national Algerian history in Arabic. The ulamas's motto was: "Islam is our religion, Algeria our homeland (*patrie*), Arabic our language." They were against

¹ Muslims trained in religious law who also hold official positions as religious teachers/preachers.

assimilation (and thus opposed the *jeune-algérien* movement) and demanded political emancipation, complete sovereignty over "state" affairs. One of the organization's purposes was to create elementary schools where modern sciences would be taught in Arabic, thus educating an Algerian youth now turned towards the Arab world. The Arabization process continued with the coming to power of the FLN (though the FLN only sporadically associated with the ulamas whose later obscurantism was criticized by this party) after independence, and gave Arabic back its position as the language of Algeria. This policy, however, did not erase the influence and presence of French. My purpose in the rest of this chapter is to think about the ways in which both languages, French and Arabic, have evolved after the independence of Algeria. I want to think about the possibilities offered by the resignification of both languages in the reconstruction of positive melancholic Algerian (plural) identities despite the traumatic function of the Algerian historical baggage. In that process, I want to address the desire expressed by certain factions of the Algerian population to limit this reconstruction by imposing a kind of linguistic terrorism and fostering negative melancholia for a past constructed as timeless, a de-historicized past that is oblivious to the plurality of Algerian identities.

French Language in Algeria after Independence

French, despite its national and colonial attachments, became a crucial tool in the process of liberation of Algeria as many Algerian writers (Feraoun, Mammeri and Yacine² among others) used French--which remains the language of exile for many Arab

²Mouloud Feraoun (1913-1962), Algerian author who wrote in French, won the Great Prize of the city of Algiers for his first book *Le Fils du Pauvre* in 1950. He was killed by members of the OAS in 1962 in that same city. Mouloud Mammeri, defender of the Kabyle cause, became famous for his novel *La Colline Oubliée* published in 1953, novel in which he discusses the tensions between traditionalism and modernity in Kabyle culture after WW II. His writings are famous for their dealings with the desire to find a place for the Berber in a post-war Algeria whose government sought to erase cultural difference and homogenize its population. Kateb

writers despite the use they make of it--in order to denounce colonial exploitation. French is a language of exile because, as Benrabah states, "It is true that at this time [before the 1960s] diversity, the 'métèque,' hybridity, linguistic plurality, etc. were indices of impurity and were not popular concepts. The idea of cultural mixity was an aberration" (Benrabah 65). In any case, "after 1956, the only legitimate and prominent themes in the work of Algerian writers of French expression were the revolution and the independence of the country" (Benrabah 67). Already, French became designified and resignified. Even though its use has been pointed as problematic (even lethal) by certain Algerian writers and politicians as some argue that it will always only ever be associated with more than a hundred years of acculturation, exploitation, an irremediable loss of identity for many Arabs, it has become the language spoken by voices who demand liberation (voices which, however, often bear the culpability that comes along with the decision of writing in the enemy's language). Since the rise of Algerian nationalism, Algerians' relationship with the French language has been further complicated by the above-mentioned implications. If some writers have chosen to stop writing in French and use Arabic (Boudjedra³ is one of them; the creation of periodicals which published novels and poetry in Arabic, such as *Ash-Dhihab* and *Al-Basa'in*, helped promote writing in Arabic), or simply stop writing because French was the only language they mastered and they could

Yacine, journalist and author (of drama), is known for his strong involvement in the fight for independence and his haunting themes of loss and inaccessibility (to an Algerian nation free of colonial attachments).

³Boudjedra was known for his work as a FLN representative across Europe (mainly in Spain and Eastern Europe) before the independence of Algeria. He is also known as a fierce critic of the FIS (Algerian Islamicist Party). He became in 1983 (though Islamist violence did not start before 1989) the target of a fatwa (for heresy) which forced him to depart from Algeria (one of many departures), only to return to his homeland through clandestine trips. He is known for his accusations of fundamentalist structures and practices in texts such as *Fis de la Haine* (1992) among other writings.

not reconcile its use with independence (Malek Haddad did stop writing after independence for that reason), others have continued to use French as a tool for liberation (Djebar, Cixous, Dib, Yacine, and Mammeri among others) through its very distortion and subversion.

Charles Bonn, in an essay entitled “Le Roman Algérien de Langue Française, du thème historique de la guerre, à la guerre littéraire des discours,” argues that with the development of Algerian literature in French in the 1970s, French became a site of critique of imperialism and neo-colonialism. French, which had been and still was the language of the colonizer, became transformed into a subversive political tool used to strip a colonial power of its legitimacy (Harbi 551). French became both the site of a remembering of the colonial past which had to be mourned but kept present in the minds, a melancholy site which became at the same time the site of a departure from that oppressive past, the very medium through which post-colonial critiques were, and still are, constructed. In *Algeria in Others' Languages*, Hafid Gafaiti focuses on the observation and critique of the barrier that has been set up between the so-called language of the colonizer (French) and the so-called language of nationalism and liberation from colonial powers (Arabic). These two languages have been defined as connoting completely opposite realms, frames of thinking, cultures and identities. One of the projects of the writers in *Algeria in Others' Languages* is to denounce this error, this separation, and assert the undeniable commonalities—even an intimate relationship—between French and Arabic, whether these common features are positive or negative. Gafaiti argues that whatever identity one defines for oneself, this definition, if it involves limitation and rejection of a historically omnipresent other, is dangerous psychologically

and politically. One cannot deny or reject the importance and influence of the other upon the evolution of Algerian identity (or any so-called national identity), or rather identities, complex and multiple. Tammy Clewell in her essay on mourning and melancholia which I discuss in Chapter 1, stresses the “uniquely human predicament” that supports Gafaiti’s argument, “the predicament of being inhabited by otherness as a condition of one’s own subjectivity” (*JAPA* 65), hence the need for a performative melancholic remembering of the other at the level of identity re-formation, whether we are dealing with the identity of a subject or of a nation.

After independence, French was used by Algerian authors in order to pass on the revolutionary message to the world and speak against colonial violence, more specifically hoping to raise concern and interest in the minds of French metropolitans who had lived under a government which was oppressive to Algerians of non-European descent. French was used to express the frustration and humiliation of a people who had been deprived of their lands and identities by the French colonists. After independence, many Algerian authors kept using French in order to critique the policies of the successive oppressive nationalist governments (26 years of dictatorship followed independence) with the imposition of a unique party whose policies led to the social, political and economic crippling of the country. When Algeria became the site of a civil war in the 1990s, French was used to denounce the fanaticism of the FIS (*Front Islamique du Salut*; Algerian Islamic Party) and its army.

In “The Experience of Evidence: Language, the Law, and the Mockery of Justice,” Ranjana Khanna discusses the use of French in the mock trial which took place on March 8, 1995, International Women’s Day, in Ibn Khaldun, Algeria. This trial gathered

Algerian women who became accusers and judges for a group of political leaders responsible for incredible acts of violence perpetrated against women and men resistant to the politics of the FIS and the GIA (*Groupe Islamique Armé*; Armed Islamic Group). The accusers “were women who had themselves been violated, or who had been widowed, had lost children, and frequently, whose loved ones had been ‘disappeared’ . They spoke primarily in French, and stood up to condemn the torturers on trial [played by actors wearing masks], who defended themselves in Arabic” (Berger 108). In this dramatized trial, French became the language of symbolic legal retaliation. One cannot use the term justice here as the law cannot ever bring justice to the victim; Khanna herself uses the term “virtual justice” (Berger 113). The relationship between French and France was dismantled and the victims’ French became the language of hope, a resignified tool, a tool repeated with a difference, stripped of its colonial origin (though not of its memory and violent functions). Such a trial led to the deconstruction of symbolic linguistic constraints, of the idea that language is the site of representation of a national spirit. Every language, when used in a new context, is a new language. Here, “French has lost its taboo and has become the language of the performative possibilities of the future” (Berger 134).

In “The Impossible Wedding: Nationalism, Languages and the Mother Tongue in Postcolonial Algeria,” Anne-Emmanuelle Berger quotes a passage from Derrida’s *Monolingualism of the Other*: “French does not belong to France. It belongs to the structure of any language that it belongs to no one. A language is exactly what I cannot possess; all colonial and nationalist violences are the enactment of a will to appropriate precisely that which is inappropriable” (Berger 77). In *Schibboleth pour Paul Celan*,

Derrida writes about the multiple character of a language and argues that language can only make sense (in French *Atake* sense, '*prendre sens*') from a site, a *lieu*, either country, house, or "any situation in general from which, practically, pragmatically, alliances are tied, contracts, codes and conventions are established which give sense to the non-signifying [l'insignifiant], institute passwords, bend language to what exceeds it" (Derrida 54). According to Derrida, a language can be marked, unmarked, and remarked in multiple ways depending on location (or the absence of one). Thus, the French spoken and written by Algerians is not the French of France; it is another French, a new language specific to its site of expression, to the experience of the one who speaks it--a new language which, however, carries the melancholic traces of the French of France, but which will leave its own traces upon the tongue as well, so as not to sever the relationship between the two (the two languages, the two people involved) but only reconceptualize it through the process of mourning through positive remembering, through performative melancholia.

In *Love in Two Languages*, Khatibi acknowledges the possibilities born out of the encounter and intermingling of languages. Bilingualism brings disorder and leads to the creation of "multilingual assemblages" (as one language is itself multiple, influenced by others through contacts of all kinds and all times), assemblages which drive each of the languages that participate in this *mélange mad*, assemblages that liberate and disrupt "the whole string of genealogies and names" (Khatibi 112) associated with one language, one identity. This is not a loss but a disorientation which is positive as it brings together people and memories that cannot be separated in the case of Algeria. The French of Algeria becomes the site of this disorientation, of a departure from a crippling

genealogical origin that forbids linguistic difference. The French of Algeria is a site of trauma: it was born as a result of colonial violence. It is also a site of recovery as it remembers the trauma and strives to work through it by redefining itself. Through the work of contemporary Algerian writers, the French written or spoken in Algeria remembers its attachment to an original colonial tool (a form of positive melancholia since this remembering is very critical) and asserts its value as a powerful archive that speaks of historical understanding and cultural rapprochement through a denunciation of past and present violent actions performed to promote separation between cultures. In that sense, that language is the very site of positive melancholia.

According to Albert Memmi in *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, the colonized often has to deal with the issue of linguistic dualism. It is certainly true in the case of Algeria. Memmi argues,

The difference between native language and cultural language is not peculiar to the colonized, but colonial bilingualism cannot be compared to just any linguistic dualism. Possession of two languages is not merely a matter of having two told, but actually means participation in two psychical and cultural realms. Here, the two worlds symbolized and conveyed by the two tongues are in conflict; they are those of the colonizer and the colonized. (Memmi 107)

It is undeniable that such linguistic clash takes place in the case of a colonial enterprise. However, what happens when the language of the colonizer, of the other, is co-opted and resignified, even integrated within the language of the colonized through anastomosis? In the mist of such an undeniably violent physical encounter, osmosis takes place and colonial bilingualism or ‘multilingualism’ (as defined by Khatibi and resignified by me) can transform itself into an anti-colonial tool that remembers the violent past but uses it to construct a multicultural present.

French Language and the Nationalism of post- Civil War Algeria

In *Algerian White*, Assia Djébar writes about the reason behind the writing of this fictional piece: “I wanted, in this account, to respond to an immediate demand of memory: the death of close friends--I re-establish an account of the days--with sometimes innocent signs, presages--the days leading up to the death” (Djébar 13). The haunting of the ghosts or to put it differently, the effect of a traumatic past upon an individual, has to be dealt with in order for survival to happen, for life to continue. In the case of Djébar, ghosts are sustaining presences. They are, however, the reminders of a violent past, but their return is a movement against a forgetting which represents the erasure of history, of life, and of any kind of future--a movement towards recovery. The power and presence of these ghosts is so strong in the case of Djébar that she decides to give them a voice in her writing. Her writing springs from her relationship with these ghosts who speak to her so that she can write. The ghosts are not threats to the living. On the contrary, they are part of a legacy (a legacy of violence, yes, but also of writing against violence and terror) that should be preserved and publicized so that memory survives. Djébar’s haunted writing is the expression of melancholic mourning. Not only does she bring the ghosts back, but she also brings back the language of the enemy to mourn through remembering the violent past. As she mourns her dead friends, victims of both French imperialism and Algerian nationalism, she hears their voices which speak to her in French:

Thus there came to light, in a light, gray by its very glitter, the noise of language, their language, the language of all three of them, each in turn and all together, with me too: a French with neither nerves nor veins, nor even memories, a French both abstract and carnal, warm in its consonances. “Their” French, the French of my friendsCso they disappeared, will I finally end up knowing it, believing itCwhereas, freed from the shroud of the past, the French of the old days now begins to be generated within us, between us, transformed into a language of the dead. (Djébar 17-18)

Djebar, as well as her ghosts, uses the language of the colonizer, a language the ghosts have captured and transformed, a language stripped of its violent origins but which, however, speaks violence. This language, as Djebar argues, becomes a language of the dead. This language, which was and still is the language of the oppressor, becomes a tool for the victims who speak to her in distorted French language that speaks of ‘true’ memories instead of telling lies. Her rethinking of the purposes that the French language can be used for resonates with Cathy Caruth’s claim in *Unclaimed Experiences* that “history, like trauma, is never simply one’s own . . . history is precisely the way we are implicated in each other’s traumas” (24). I believe that we can make the same comment when it comes to the very means through which history is told: the language of the colonizer who has been telling history for so long. The imposition of the colonizer’s language upon the colonized is a traumatic experience for the colonized, but using this language with a difference in order to publicize and denounce trauma through positive melancholic remembering, throw it back in the face of its perpetrators, is a crucial step towards the rewriting of history that implicates forgotten others, forgotten voices. This melancholic remembering gives access to knowledges, facts, perspectives, memories, testimonies that have been erased and covered up by official narratives about a nation’s historical evolution. Even though writing happens in French, it happens *en retrait* from the nationalistic, colonialist framework determined by the French of France. This new “language of death” is not the language that kills but the language that unveils and denounces a murderous past--a past so many would like to see erased as its telling is a claim for accountability, a claim against the erasure of history and the belief that reconciliation between nations and between the multiple and diverse groups that form one

nation can only be based upon forgetting, the complete erasure of a traumatic past. Such a way of conceiving the rapprochement between enemy nations or cultural/religious groups within a nation is unproductive and even dangerous. Thinking through the danger of such an erasure, one is reminded of Walter Benjamin's image of the angel of history, a melancholic angel whose finger points towards the future while the eyes remain turned towards the past.

Algerian Literature as a Site of Linguistic Plurality

Djebar writes in *Algerian White*,

I ask nothing: only that they [her friends, the ghost from the past] continue to haunt us, that they live within us. But in which language? So it is, when my friends speak to me, if I could catch at least a little of their language 'linked with poetry'; Dante compares this language of the absent dear to us, who in order to approach us defy the freezing frontier of our lives behind which we take on weight, Dante compares this language--which is like yours, when you come back to me intangible--to the 'perfumed panther' of your voices the mythical animal of medieval bestiaries. (*Algerian White* 52)

In which language should the haunting, the telling and retelling of a traumatic, recovered history take place? Does it matter as long as the telling is poetic (*poesis*: making, remaking)? If the language is poetic, if it makes or creates something new, something good, then the idiom does not matter since poetry is the language of displacement and replacement, of positive transformation by the imagination. It is a kind of language that resists any kind of anthologizing, any kind of definite articulation of the truth. It is allegorical and permits a critique of or flight from commanding voices. It is performative as it takes us away from common systems of references. Anything but silence. The danger, according to Djebar, is when the poet is buried by the Imam (*Algerian White* 159), when fanaticism prevents the making and remaking of language, of identity. Here, French is used as the language that stands against fanaticism and repression. It is a

language, both *langue*--qua specific language--and *langage*--qua symbolic system/message that becomes a crucial paradigm for the reconstruction of new, healthy cultural identities in opposition to the desire of conservative discourses on identity formation.

Arabic and the Process of Arabization after Independence

As nationalism became stronger in the 1930s, especially after the failure of the Blum-Violette project which proposed the inclusion of Muslim representatives within the electoral body of FranceBAAlgeria (through the Algerian elite) was to be represented in the Parliament--the idea of assimilation (or integration) was replaced little by little with that of liberation. After many unsuccessful or promised but never achieved reforms which led to the Algerian insurrection against French oppressors, the Evian negotiations followed by the referendum for autodetermination in July 1962 led to the creation of an independent Algerian state in the midst of internal conflict. Despite much dissension among the different Algerian political organizations, M. Ben Bella, leader of the FLN, became the first president of the Algerian republic. And despite the France-Algeria cooperation policy between 1963 and 1970 which involved financial help given by France to its ex-colony, the arabization process was on its way. The search for cultural authenticity and identity led to the recuperation of classical Arabic, a legitimizing language (Benrabah 79) since it was the language of the Koran, as the national language. This linguistic nationalism sprang out of a desire for a national language that would help the process of uniting a country still depressed and divided by the war. Algerians had to remember that they had a history in common and a relationship to be re-built with the rest of the Arab world; this history had to be recuperated through this language which could “do miracles.” The recuperation of classical Arabic was thus the recuperation of a *lieu de*

mémoire, a “making reappear” of a cultural memory slowly dismantled by colonization, the recovery of a collective aura.

The process of Arabization was based on an “understanding of Arabic promoted . . . and adopted by the nationalist movement [which] associated Arabic with Islam, the past, and cultural authenticity” (Cox 58). If this desire to recover a cultural identity through the promotion of classical Arabic was certainly understandable after centuries of oppression, it eventually meant a rejection of linguistic plurality and the entrance on the political stage of the concept of linguistic purity (with the Ulamas as the keepers of this purity) and the rejection of otherness (Cox 58). The concept of linguistic purity was developed as classical Arabic was adopted as the official language; the nationalist endeavor was to leave aside dialectic Algerian, Berber, and to reject French. This hierarchization of languages and leaving aside of those which had always been (Berber) or had become (dialectic Arabic and French) markings of Algerian identities appears, to some extent, as another colonial move, this time from the part of the supposed enemy of colonialism.

This move is, as I mentioned earlier, understandable as it expresses a desire for identification, unification; this movement takes place towards an archive upon which to construct a national identity. As Derrida points out, “the meaning of ‘archive’, its only meaning, comes to it from the Greek *arkheion*: initially a house, a domicile, an address, the residence of the superior magistrate, the *archons*, those who commanded” (*Archive Fever* 2). The Algerian government appears as this archontic power and expresses the desire to reassert Algeria’s political and cultural existence or presence. In *Archive Fever*, Derrida points out the relationship between archive (*arkhe*) and commandment. The imposition of Classical Arabic, a language presented as originary as it is the sacred/divine

language--the language of the Koran--is a commanding move which forces the Algerian back to a pre-colonial beginning, thus erasing the historical evolution of a culture. The archontic power also consigns. For Derrida, “*Consignation* aims to coordinate a single corpus, in a system or a synchrony in which all the elements articulate the unity of an ideal configuration” (*Archive* 3). This linguistic ideal bases itself upon the concept of pure origin, pure singularity, which can, again, be viewed as problematic since it erases multiplicity and Algeria’s multilingualism.

According to Louis-Jean Calvet in *Language Wars and Linguistic Politics*, “Arabic, which is difficult to define linguistically, owes its status (primarily) to the fact that it is simultaneously the language of religion, the language of the Koran, and the language for unification of the Arabic world” (Calvet 33). However, Calvet makes the distinction between classical Arabic, which has been adopted by Algerian governments after independence, and modern Arabic, which springs from classical Arabic, and which is today the language of unification of the Arab world. Calvet argues,

The language of the Koran, classical Arabic, is primarily a written language, which can also be used for preaching or for some teaching, as was Latin in some countries of Europe in the Middle Ages. It is also, therefore, like Latin, a dead language. On the other hand, the form promoted to the status of national language today (what is called modern Arabic [or] middle Arabic...), which has developed out of classical Arabic through enrichment and modernization of the vocabulary, is most widely used in the media and in public life. (Calvet 33)

One can take issue with Calvet’s argument that classical Arabic is a dead language since it is still the language of literature, of the Algerian intelligentsia. Thus, it is far from being dead, and its importance remains crucial in the study of past and present Arabic literature. However, Mohamed Benrabah argues that after independence, Classical/Koranic Arabic was “without a community of reference” (Calvet 244)--and by community, I believe he does not refer to the literary community. Thus, he critiques the

imposition of classical Arabic as the official language after Algeria's liberation from France as it erased Algeria's other *langues* (among which everyday Arabic) and replaced them with a symbolic idiom (classical Arabic) that dismissed the possibility for other languages to represent Algerian identity. This desire for a pure, originary language implies the erasure of a post-classical past (yes, a colonial past), a move which compromises the promise of the future as it implies the erasure of memory, once again. One should not read this critique as a defense of the colonial enterprise at all, but as the expression of a desire to recuperate the linguistic exchanges and negotiations that took place under colonial rule.

According to Benrabah, the historical meeting of languages throughout the different colonial moments experienced by Algeria has forced "Algerian Arabic [to display] an exceptional vitality never encountered" (Calvet 71). It has Aadapt[ed] and assimilat[ed] all the new words to express varied and new experiences [and] it is the history of Algeria which finds itself carved within this linguistic variety" (Calvet 71). However, "purist Algerian elites take offence of these linguistic practices and consider the presence of 'foreign' words in their language a blow at their identity and national consciousness. The population's linguistic behavior expresses the true tolerance which has forged the Algerian people for 2000 years. It is far from considering these borrowings a loss of identity" (Calvet 72). Unfortunately, the leaders of Algeria after the war, with the exception of Boudiaf, looking for identity and authenticity after the trauma of colonization, officially turned to monolingualism in developing the process of Arabization of the nation and its reincorporation into the larger Arab diaspora. This negative melancholia for a long-gone past that becomes the new context for the

reformation of a postcolonial nation and national identity is problematic as identity becomes, according to Marie-Aimée Hélie-Lucas, Adefensive and closed upon itself. The concepts used to describe this secluded identity explicitly refer to a retro-movement: ‘going back to our sources’, ‘going back to our roots’, ‘going back to our authentic values’, ‘going back to our traditions’ (*Identity Politics and Women* 392). The constructed enemy becomes the outsider, the imperial (or neo-imperial) power, anyone who would want to redefine Arab identity away from this negative melancholia for a lost past, a lost social and cultural context set apart and protected from the modern era of transcultural exchanges by protectors of a static Arab identity.

The fate of Arabic in the 1990s

The recuperation of Arabic has had a positive effect in the sense that it has enabled, and still does, communication and the possibility for unity throughout the Arab world. Classical Arabic is not a perilous language. However, the use that was made of it was and still is problematic and lethal in the construction of new and healthy individual and cultural identities in Algeria. Monolingualism marks the death of a plurality which remains a characteristic of Algeria. According to Djamila Saadi-Mokrane, “Arabic, French and Berber languages are all connected to the country’s history, but in different ways. They exist as a collision of words, and endure all the fractures that destabilize society” (Berger 47).

In June 1990, the FIS (*Front Islamique du Salut*) won the first free elections (departmental and municipal) since 1962. This result was understood as the expression of the population’s discontent with the dictatorial and inefficient FLN-led regime (rampant unemployment, governmental policy of austerity). The FIS had no real political agenda.

Its focus was the preservation of Algerian identity and authenticity through a return to Islam. Losing power, the FLN witnessed its fall and replacement by the more and more powerful FIS. Chadli had to resign in January 1992. However, the FIS was eventually dissolved by the *Haut Comité d'Etat* created right after the resignation of Chadli to find a solution to this political turmoil. In 1992, a civil war broke out between members of the FIS (and its army, the AIS) and the FLN.

The FIS's goal was and still is, according to Charles-Robert Ageron, a rejection of the other, the Western, the Christian, the Jewish, the economic and political trajectory of European nations, accompanied by a return to traditions and morality dictated by a monolithic and oppressive Islamic law. Monolingualism is of course the way to that end, with the language of the Koran, a pure inimitable language, a language become fetish, being posed as a symbol of the superiority of what is Arab and leading to the development of racist ideologies and a fall backwards into the colonial past--with a different, less other, colonizer.

It is useful to turn to psychoanalysis and redefined, re-imagined notions of mourning pointed out by Clewell and Lacapra, redefinitions I speak about in Chapter 1, in order to shed light on the evolution of the language wars in Algeria. It is also useful to turn to psychoanalysis to critique and re-imagine its traditional definitions of the relationship between self and other, in order to also critique and re-imagine the relationship between West and East (two constructed geographical and cultural sites of difference) as a possible way towards the partial resolution of linguistic rivalries. In *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan argues, in his discussion of the relationship between subject and Other, "The Other is the locus in which is situated the

chain of signifier that governs whatever may be made present of the subject” (Lacan 203). Lacan continues, “The human being has always to learn from scratch from the Other what he has to do” (Lacan 204). This relationship self-other as defined by Lacan sheds light on the complexity of the patriarchal colonizer-colonized dynamics imposed by Western colonizing powers. One could argue that colonized subjects--those who survive the physical process of colonization--often infantilized, deprived of certain rights and essentialized, are forced into a process of reconstructing their subjectivity. They are expected to identify with the colonizer (though this identification is in fact not accessible as the colonized subject can never be the colonial other) who has come to impose a new set of symbols or references, a new set of signifiers through the imposition of another language, another culture, other organizational patterns for the colony’s institutions, etc. For Lacan, “The signifier, producing itself in the field of the Other, makes manifest the subject of its signification. But it functions as a signifier only to reduce the subject in question to being no more than a signifier, to petrify the subject in the same movement in which it calls the subject to function, to speak, as subject” (Lacan 207). The colonized subject, however, faces the impossibility to function as subject in the realm of the other--she will always be less, subservient, under-valued--and remains in a state of petrification. She is condemned to alienation, *aphanisis*, whether she refuses to enter the realm of the other and incorporate its new signs and symbols, or accepts the new law--this acceptance will never permit the colonized to reach a position of power that is other than imaginary, illusory. In this latter instance, the colonized is forced through a new, though similarly problematic, version of the Oedipus complex, an Oedipus complex *à la coloniale*: to become a good colonized ‘child,’ one needs to forget earlier attachments to “the mother”

(or motherland in this case) and obey the law of the newly found father who presents himself, however, as a she: France became 'La mère patrie' for young colonized Algerians under the colonial educational system. But this "she" is only a linguistic trick that never erases the patriarchal nature of colonization and of the French social system. Moreover, Algeria as ex-motherland only becomes so through Western patriarchal discourse of otherness, through the problematic colonizing process of infantilizing and "feminizing" the colonized. The arrival of the colonizer adds to the already existing patriarchal characteristics of the colonized system (hence my argument about the fake ex-mother) and comes to impose its own patriarchal system in which colonized men and women are both essentialized, deprived of cultural and political rights, and thus victimized. It is of course a double jeopardy for those (women and minorities) who come to live under two patriarchal systems, the one inside and the one imposed. The Algerian colonized subject must desire the other, the colonizer, the words and laws of the French father passing as "la mère patrie" so as to promote an easy attachment with this pseudo-surrogate mother, an attachment made natural, as "natural" as the child's for her or his mother according to conservative notions about child/mother dynamics . This transvestite patriarchal father (la mère patrie), as it imposes its rules and regulations, turns the "old Algerian father" into a "mother" to be abandoned, a site of knowledge whose cultural specificities must be left behind. In both processes (France becoming a transvestite father and Algeria becoming the mother to be abandoned), the word mother only is a linguistic *trompe l'oeil* covering the patriarchal characteristics of colonial France (inside and outside its borders) and the patriarchal characteristics of pre-colonial Algeria--two

realities that were recuperated by pro-independence discourses and anti-Islamist discourses respectively.

The French colonial symbolic power, this 'origin' of disasters officially failed and fell at the hand of nationalist movements in Algeria during the French-Algerian war. This symbolic order was in fact recuperated by post-independence nationalistic governments and fundamentalist movements who promoted the need for a monolithic conception of Algerian identity in order to protect Algeria from the ever-present threat of imperialist nations despite the fact that Algeria had already become a place where culturally polymorphous identities were meeting. It is impossible to undo what has been done to that country. It is impossible to right the wrong and erase a past of genocidal violence. It is possible, however, to think back through history and promote positive melancholia in order to find solutions to the resolution of Algeria's identity complexes and strip fundamentalist movements of their argumentative power, their negative melancholic desires.

In post-1990 Algeria, another version of the Oedipus complex will be composed by fundamentalist movements through the process of Islamicization, a Oedipus complex 'integrist fashion' this time, which reproduces with a difference the colonial desire to destroy the other. In this case, the non-Arab, with the concept of Arabness constructed upon the adoption of a divine language. This time, desire is to be directed towards a new symbolic order, a sacred order with its sacred language. The desire to mourn the colonial past by forgetting it, by fostering amnesia and throwing out a chunk of Algerian history in order to recuperate through destructive melancholia and then mythologize,

'pedestalize' the pre-colonial past, is of course dangerous as the historical threads that link nations and cultural groups within a nation become severed.

The sad irony lies in the fact that, as a way to redefine its identity away from the grip of Western values, Western cultural influences, Algeria has promoted the colonial model in the process of becoming an independent nation. It has thus accentuated the existing pre-colonial patriarchal Islamic notions of identity formation and created the unquenched, insatiable need for protection and separation from outsiders, non-Islamic cultures. This separation can only be a false one since Algeria and France shared after independence, and still share today, a patriarchal system which, if it takes different forms in each country, remains in place and prevents the access of many, mostly Algerian women, to a language and an identity that is plural, modern and Islamic (in both countries). The inability of the present Algerian government, despite a revision of family laws, to encourage and protect women's productive negotiation between religious attachments (forced or chosen) and presence in public/intellectual/professional spheres is exemplified in its insufficient revision of Islamic family laws. Though France has often been a refuge for Algerian men and women persecuted by the still omnipresent Algerian FIS, we cannot deny the government's inability to protect Islamic women from psychological and physical harassment after the law passed on the 15th of March 2004 forbidding students to wear ostensible religious signs in public schools. Though the government's responsibility is indeed to secure secularism in the public schools of a country whose social and political system is built upon the separation between state and religion, it is also its responsibility to counter the racist paranoid behavior fostered by this law--a paranoid behavior whose target is indeed mostly young women who used to wear

the Islamic veil to school before the law was passed. Newspaper articles (Le Monde and others) have indeed reported in the past year the departure from schools of young Muslim women who found themselves constantly “watched” after the law was passed—a “watch” performed by students and school leaders alike to make sure that no replacements to now forbidden religious signs were brought inside the school parameters. This psychological harassment and subsequent departure of young girls from certain public schools in order to integrate the less threatening long-distance educational system points to the State’s silent participation in the segregation of women of a different religious affiliation, and to its inability (or lack of desire) to intervene against racism the obvious targets of which are in this case women.

Historian Mohammed Arbi writes about Algeria today in “L’Algérie en Perspective” and argues,

Lorsque des intellectuels au service des prédateurs actuellement au pouvoir, ou des islamistes qui en sont l’inverse abstrait, forgent l’idée d’une Algérie précoloniale, sans contradictions internes, illuminées des splendeurs qui feraient penser à Grenade, ils effacent le fait que l’Algérie avant 1830 était un Etat et non encore une nation, que sa réalité était celle des inégalités sociales et de l’oppression des faibles et qu’on ne saurait oublier les châtiments corporels (lapidations, amputations, loi du talion), l’esclavage, le statut des femmes et des minorités non musulmanes. En occultant les hypothèques de ce passé, on est amené à le reproduire⁴ . . . (*La Guerre d’Algérie: la Fin de l’Amnésie* 43)

The successive Algerian governments after the war have supported a post-colonial (though still colonizing) patriarchal system by imposing the recuperated but crippling law of conservative Islamic ‘fathers’ to regiment human behavior and interaction in a country

⁴ When intellectuals at the service of predators in power today, and religious fundamentalists who are their opposite, come up with the idea of a pre-colonial Algeria without any internal contradictions, brightened by splendors that would make one think about Grenade, they erase the fact that Algeria before 1830 was not a nation state, that it was a place with social inequalities et where the weak was oppressed. One cannot forget physical punishment (stoning, amputations, the “an eye for an eye” rule), the status of women and non-Muslim minorities. If we forget that past, we are condemned to repetition.

that belonged to the Muslim world and had to remember at any cost, according to successive nationalist governments, its Islamic attachments. This time, the law becomes the re-appropriated conservative Islamic connections of Algeria (connections that promote conservative, thus non-progressive, readings of the Islamic law), connections that take place between governmental policies and conservative Islamic positions that promote a unified identity deprived of Western influence. What many modern Arab writers and others concerned with the fate of Islam and Muslim identity try to promote today is a movement away from this traumatic repetition of the Westerner's Oedipus complex and critique the "quest for a transcultural and transhistorical Muslim identity [which] completely negates the diversity of traditions and cultures into which Islam has been propagated, as well as their living history. It denies the re-interpretation of Islam and does not take into account the fact that Islam has expanded and is still expanding in all continents and in the developed West as well" (Moghadam 392).

According to Gafaiti, the process of Arabization which started full-speed after Algeria won its independence "stands as a sign of the FLN's solidarity with political allies from the moderate Islamic movement" (Berger 32), but the cultural and political claims of Arabization may be irrelevant if they limit Algerians' access to a wider (economic and cultural) world. According to Gafaiti, the process of Arabization should also be thought through in terms of Algeria's relationship with its 'outside' (other Islamic countries and the West), an outside rejected by the FIS. The issue that Gafaiti raises can be related to Huntington's discussion of the three possible reactions to the West on the part of Islamic countries: rejectionism, Kemalism or reformism (Huntington 73). How to deal with the West? How can a complete rejection of it (of French) be possible when

several languages remain intricately woven inside Algerian identities? It is one thing to reject the other (and it is problematic enough), but it is another thing to reject what has become a part of one country's history and identity. Many authors argue that French is very much alive in Algeria. Thus how can one get rid of a language that is so engrained within Algerian life? As far as Berber is concerned, people who speak Berber are many and cannot be ignored. Rejecting Berber means denying many Algerians their historical trajectory and their sense of belonging to a place, their very sense of identity. The same critique applies to the proponents of French and Berber who have had the same reaction of rejection towards Arabic. Unfortunately, walls have been raised between languages and the people who speak them.

Gafaiti writes, "Linguistic forms of monotheism and cultural dogma correspond to sociopolitical and ideological forms. In this case, it is not an exaggeration to say that Algerians are to a large extent the victims of their own perpetuation of what one might call the colonial subconscious" (Berger 43). The colonial rule seems to be very much in place still, though the colonizers are not the same.

Languages of Multiculturalism

Under Boumediene and Bendjedid, Arabic literature was mistakenly "generally dismissed as being a reproduction of state discourse, accused of being complicit in Authoritarian rule and suppression of freedoms" (Cox 38), which Debbie Cox argues was a very simplified view of Arabic literature then. "Many novelists writing in Arabic who have achieved critical acclaim have shared a leftist stance and an attachment to both modernization and Arabic" (Cox 68), the purpose being "to wrest Arabic away from a purely Islamic association, and to achieve, via the text, a desacralization of the language" (68) which because of its association with the sacred has been used and abused by some

as a tool for manipulation and the legitimation of hatred and violence towards the other. Some writers have argued that the simple act of writing performs this desacralization. In “The Scheherazade Syndrome” Lucette Valensi comments, “To write a novel is to perform an act that was unusual in the Algerian tradition. A solitary, silent form of expression, novel writing is not necessarily a form of protest. But it might be an act of individuation, an assertion that the writer has something to say for her- or himself . . . the purpose of quite a few one-time writers is to bear witness regarding their native town or region, to be the memorialist of their segment of Algerian society. When this is the case, the ‘I’ speaks for a ‘we’ and remains embedded in the primordial group. With others, however, the act of writing a novel is a sign of individuation, of liberation from traditional forms of literary and social expression” (Berger 141). She continues, “Confronted with lethal danger, the storyteller comes forward and delays the sentence. In the face of deadly threat, she not only postpones her own death but also keeps the killer hostage to her own voice. It is through the medium of the tale that she challenges deadly violence. It is through a poetization of a brutal reality that she unveils it to the public and to the protagonists” (Berger 153). This poetization of language destroys the concept of language as sacred, takes language away from its constructed melancholic origin and destroys the relationship signifier/signified.

In Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe’s *The Title of the Letter*, the authors point out that Lacan, in his study of the relationship between signifier and signified, has gone through the process of algorithmizing the sign: “To algorithmize the sign, if we can risk the expression, will practically mean to prevent it from functioning as sign. We could even say that as it is posited, it is destroyed” (*The Title* 34). In their

discussion of the relationship between signifier and signified, the authors state that the autonomy of the signifier rests on the fact that the bar [introduced by Lacan: S/s] resists access of the signifier to the signified. This resistance is conceived in such a way that whereas for Saussure, what is essential is the relation (the reciprocity, or the association), Lacan introduces a resistance such that the crossing of the bar, the relation of the signifier to the signified, in short, the production of signification itself, will never be self-evident (*The Title* 36). According to Lacan, “the logic of the signifier becomes a logic of desire . . . in the process of signification, and insofar as the bar forbids any signifier to reach its signified, signifiers can only slide along the bar in an indefinite deferral of meaning that Lacan identifies as a ‘metonymical chain’ . . . the metonymical sliding of signifiers ultimately rests upon the abolishment of meaning . . .” (*The Title* xii).

Poetic writing takes into account the Lacanian bar and the Lacanian chain. What is at stake is the working of the sign to the point of destroying it, a disruption of the system surrounding the sign, a deterritorialization of meaning, signs, thus language itself. To paraphrase Roland Barthes, there is not semiology which cannot be acknowledged as semioclastm (*Mythologies* 9). Arabic, like French, has to be deterritorialized, dismembered, disassociated from the kinds of conservative representations or definitions alongside which it has been presented. Arabic should appear as a ‘terrain’ in the sense given by Ulrich Baer in *Remnants Of Song*, a site detached from understandings of language and identity that are crippling for the language when it prevents its evolution or interaction and denies its plural characteristic and multiple meanings, and crippling for the individual who has to speak it and remain limited, enclosed within the linguistic walls erected by the regressive notion of language as monolith.

Thinking and Writing poetically with Language

In *I Saw Ramallah*, Barghouti writes,

Writing is a displacement, a displacement from the normal social contract. A displacement from the habitual, the pattern, and the ready form. A displacement from the common roads of love and the common roads of enmity. A displacement from the idea of unconditional support. The poet strives to escape from the dominant used language, to a language that speaks itself for the first time. (131)

If the Palestinian identity complex (and Barghouti's experience as a displaced Palestinian) is quite different from the Algerian one, Barghouti's thoughts on the process of writing poetically is useful to think about the Algerian linguistic problem. Whatever the language one writes with, if this language is used as a way to distort and disrupt a conservative or fanatical envisioning of its purpose, to welcome difference (the other) and remember the past instead of erasing or destroying it, and to use it to promote social advances, then the possibilities for the construction of fluid but healthy individual and cultural identities will be endless, which is not to say that the historical and political attachments of that language should be forgotten.

Derrida speaks of the position of the writer in relationship to language in *Of Grammatology* as he addresses the relationship between language/writing and identity, or rather the absence of such a relationship. Derrida argues that language is writing, that writing is not a simple mediation of language, and that writing transforms and deforms the languages we speak. Thus, writers are the ones who should not look at language as this powerful, singular, independent entity that defines one's identity,

constituting and dislocating it at the same time, writing is other than the subject, in whatever sense of the latter is understood. Writing can never be thought under the category of the subject: however, it is endowed with consciousness or unconsciousness, it will refer, by the entire thread of its history, to the substantiality of a presence unperturbed by accidents, or to the identity of the selfsame in the presence of self-relationship. Writing as writing is the becoming-absent and the becoming-unconscious of the subject. (*Of Grammatology* 69-70)

If someone should be certain about the usefulness of multilingualism as a deformation of the idea that one unique language is necessary for a fixed, national identity to be formed (which is a dangerous movement as it denies multiculturalism), it is the writer. If this acknowledgment takes place, the writer finds herself in a perilous position since many (politicians and theologians among others) cannot move way from the argument that language is identity, and that in order to recover an identity that has been lost, one language should be privileged over others. We are still in the era of identity politics: one often needs to recover one's identity before accepting a possible, peaceful blurring of that identity, or so the argument often goes. This is not to say that we should do away with identity politics. As Judith Butler argues, we have to endorse an identity when we demand for rights. We have to use the language of identity politics "to secure protections and entitlements" (*Undoing Gender* 20), and in the case of Algeria, claims to an official language that would promote reconciliation within the nation and relationships with other Arab nations had to be made. However, Butler writes, "perhaps we make a mistake if we take the definitions of who we are, legally, to be adequate descriptions of what we are about" (20). Despite the legal and political need for an official language, the history of Algeria can supersede that need so as to not become again a preferred field of desire for fanatics prone to negative melancholia.

In the second part of Assia Djebar's *So Vast the Prison*, a part entitled "Erased in Stone," Djebar tells the story of an undecipherable message, signs on a mausoleum that cannot be deciphered, a strange alphabet that "keeps its mystery" (*So Vast* 134) throughout generations. This mausoleum is the monument of Dougga. The language of its message, or rather the plurality of this language that gathers several idioms, is never truly

unveiled and involves a series of misreadings, confusion as far as the languages used in that message are concerned. Just as Derrida's stones talk in *Archive Fever*, so does Djébar's stone mausoleum. In this piece, Derrida discusses the work of the archeologist and writes: "If his work is crowned with success, the discoveries are self-explanatory: the ruined walls are a part of the ramparts of a palace or a treasure-house; the fragments of columns can be filled out into a temple; the numerous inscription, which, by good luck, may be bilingual, reveal an alphabet and a language, and when they have been deciphered and translated, yield undreamed-of information about the events of the remote past, to commemorate which monuments were built" (*Archive* 93). Of course, Derrida critiques the work of the archeologist whose desire for "originary finitude" leads to aggression upon the land, upon the monuments, upon the language discovered. The reading of the archeologist is linear, sequential and architectonic. On the contrary, there does not seem to be any origin or end result in Djébar's story. The deciphering of this 'foreign' alphabet is never complete, never finite. The knowledge of the "events of the remote past" do not come as a consequence of this deciphering, but belong to the process of deciphering. In the story Djébar narrates in the second part of her novel, the uncovering of the monument or the deciphering of the language are not points of origin from which the history of a people is determined; her writing, her telling this story counters the work of the archeologist and leads to what Derrida calls 'archive fever' or a going beyond finitude, a destruction of the way human stories--thus history--is perceived and told. Djébar's writing becomes different; it refuses linearity. It refuses transparency (or rather the pretended transparency of the history we know, a transparency that hides the history from which we are kept away). It refuses the disappearance of shadows, of the possibility for

other meanings, other translations, other interventions, and interventions from the other. Her writing and her self are undone (to use a Butlerian concept) by the intervention of ghosts, an undoing that speaks of the relatedness between past and present, an undoing one can also call positive melancholia, a not letting go of the lost other, of the influence of history upon oneself and one's writing.

Conclusion to the Chapter

For Butler, mourning “exposes the constitutive sociality of the self, a basis for thinking a political community of a complex order” (19), a community composed of individuals who are “besides themselves” (20), transformed by the loss of a friend, a child, a sense of belonging in the world, of being part of a cohesive nation in the case of Algerians. She continues, “One mourns when one accepts the fact that the loss one undergoes will be one that changes you, changes you possibly forever, and that mourning has to do with agreeing to undergo a transformation the full result of which you cannot know in advance. So there is losing, and there is the transformative effect of loss” (18). The authors the work of whom I analyzed in this chapter are all very much conscious of the possibilities that come with the tragedy of losing. Both France and Algeria have lost a great deal through and after decades of struggling against one another. Both nations have had to lose, in ways that are not comparable, and to mourn more losses. According to Jean-Pierre Rioux, because of France's genocidal involvement in the Algerian war, because of the French government's responsibility in promoting (directly and indirectly) the circle of violence and its generalized torture methods, France committed political suicide, and the survivors had to mourn the death of the Fourth Republic: Rioux critiques the government of the Fourth Republic and writes, “Leur IVe République est morte en 1958 du cancer algérien qui la rongait et la torture fut un chapitre parmi d'autres de

l'acte d'accusation dont furent accablés ses tenors puissants”⁵ (*La Guerre d'Algérie, la Fin de L'Amnésie* 25). The words *république* and *démocratie* had come to be meaningless in the midst of unchecked violence perpetrated by the imperialist, French in this case, crusader spirit. When de Gaulle came to power, the war had killed a political system that had rendered its language of democracy and modernity obsolete through its cautioning of terror--a 'honor killing' that could be seen as a crucial step in the mourning process of still alive opponents and victims to the French terrorist governmental power, and of all of those who were counting their dead. Another important step was of course the liberation of memory when in 1992 French military archives were finally publicized, and the “Algerian war” finally recognized by the French government in June 1999. However, the loss of the war did not foreclose the possibility for more loss, and the years that followed independence did not put an end to violence and terror though the source of it changed. From the imposition of colonial obscurantism to the politics of national homogeneity and the rise of Islamic fundamentalism, Algeria remains, like many Arab countries, a site of tension between Western definitions of modernity and Eastern Islamic values, thus a site of tension between the very languages which for many, unfortunately enough, still represent those two camps (French and Arabic). Algeria remains the site of a constant struggle between the democratic desire of some for social equality through a careful and performative melancholic mourning of the Algerian pre-colonial and colonial past, and the destructive desire of others to pick and chose what should be remembered and forgotten, and in what way it should be done for Algeria to become again an Islamic nation stripped of its Western ties. On a more optimistic note, we cannot deny Algeria's

⁵ Their Fourth Republic died in 1956 of this Algerian cancer which was devouring it, and torture was one chapter in the book of accusation which put the guilt on powerless governmental figures.

potential as a link, as site of encounter between cultures and people who are all still mourning the effects of colonization and post-colonial nationalism and conservatism (with its extreme expression, fundamentalism) on their lands, political systems, national and personal identity, and more importantly on their very bodies. Not only are they mourning these effects, but they are also expecting more to come as Algeria is still living with the very real threat that fundamentalist movements present.

Algeria's hybridity, the multiplicity of the cultural influences that make Algerian identity plural, is a subject of study and conversation for the authors I quoted in this chapter. To recognize the positive/performative power of this hybridity seems crucial to the process of reconciliation between the two geographical and cultural entities still defined as "The modern Christian West" and "The traditional Islamic East," a constructed difference that manages to survive on both sides despite the meaninglessness of such a clear-cut separation. This process of reconciliation requires that a positive melancholic mourning as defined in this chapter take place, however; and though this mourning process has truly begun for some, one can wonder if today's reconciliation between the French and Algerian governments will really come to be the embodiment of that process and the promise of a mutual evolution towards cultural understanding within and outside the borders of each of these two nations. Many thinkers would respond to that question in a positive manner. Doumia Bouzar, an anthropologist, a leading Islamic feminist in France and ex-leading figure of the CFCM (the Conseil français du culte musulmane), brings hope to the issue and points out in an interview published in *Le Monde* on March, 27, 2005, that though the dialogue to promote the reconciliation between Islam and the Republic in France is oftentimes difficult to begin and maintain,

but that it does take place and can lead to a reconciliation between Islam and the laic state, between Islam and evolving social contexts and individual roles in that very context. Arabic and French as redefined in this chapter have played and will continue to play a crucial role in the process of keeping this dialogue open at the local and global level.

CHAPTER 5
MICHELLE CLIFF'S NON-WESTERN FIGURES OF TRAUMA: THE
CREOLIZATION OF TRAUMA STUDIES

Recontextualizing Creolization

Creolization/hybridization was and still is a political project that offsets conservative notions of identity and promotes the idea of constant cultural mutation, of cultural sharing. Creolization involves interaction between cultural groups, an interaction which defines the heterogeneous origin of Caribbean identity/ies. This definition is a broad one which is modified according to geographical, regional perspectives. As a matter of fact, the meaning of the term creolization and the term itself will change according to location within this non-homogeneous, linguistically and culturally pluri-dimensional place called "the Caribbean." This notion of hybridity will, for some writers (i.e. West Indian author V.S. Naipaul¹), be synonymous to unrecoverable fragmentation and a life lived in the limbo of non-identity. For others (i.e. Barbadian author George Lamming), it will become a place from which to speak against and beyond colonial discourses and institutions that promote cultural essentialism and the hierarchization of cultural groups according to race/social status (the two being intricately linked). Yet others will move away from that problematic binary, these two mutually exclusive forms of displacement that become problematic either-or ontologies and thus reproduce the homogenizing practice of colonial discourse. Michelle Cliff is one these "others" who

¹ See Naipaul's *The Mimic Men*. New York: Vintage Books, 2001.

critique the transparency of these two opposite discourses and acknowledge the ambivalence and complexity of the creole/ hybrid position, a position of resistance that involves both traumatic fragmentation and the possibility for making one's voice heard, the two being intricately linked to each other in the process of countering problematic colonial/metropolitan binarisms--binarisms found at the core of trauma studies as we will see in this chapter.

My project in this chapter is to put trauma studies through the work of creolization as an ambivalent, multiple, complex process in order to bring forth complicated sites of trauma and figures of trauma that have not been recognized and analyzed by trauma theories. For that project, I will rely on the work of Jamaican writer Michelle Cliff, more specifically her two novels *Abeng* and *No Telephone To Heaven*. I see the process of creolization she describes as performative since it participates in the project of re-telling forgotten traumatic stories and modifying a narrow metropolitan, rather static, envisioning of what trauma is and can do to one's sense of being and belonging.

I want to ground that project in a hybrid theoretical framework that brings forth both postmodern and structural notions of identities. In *The Trauma Novel*, a text I criticize in my introduction, Granofsky argues that "in most trauma novels . . . the structure of trauma response, regression, fragmentation and reunification, has the function of allowing us to imagine a world after collective disaster" (147). He continues, "The modernist need for mending and the attempt to recover wholeness survives in the trauma novel in the face of cataclysmic events" (151). Healing thus implies reconstructing a unitary self (assuming that it was there before trauma), a homogeneous self freed from the fragmenting effects of trauma. Granofsky, in a rather expected

conclusion about the trauma novel, writes, “the trauma novel attempts (by contrast to the postmodern novel) to regain the shape and significance shattered by trauma through a radical remaking of identity” (170). This is a problematic conclusion if one considers it in light of Caribbean texts such as Michelle Cliff’s. In the two above-mentioned texts by Cliff, desire for a unitary, non-fragmented self is the very root of trauma, of violence, for the main character of both texts, Clare Savage. Throughout these two texts, Clare wavers between Jamaican stories of origin and both witnesses and works (consciously and unconsciously) against the homogenization and commodification of her own and her people’s cultural identity. She refuses the authentication of her origin through the construction of strict cultural attachments with the European side of the family, a process largely imposed by her father who is, for Clare, and as Jenny Sharpe would argue, one of the “representative figures that foreground the rhetorical strategies of the dominant discourse from which the truth-claims of [Clare’s] counter-narratives are derived” (*The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* 99). Clare will disturb that paternal/patriarchal/colonial imposition in *Abeng* to participate in cultural survival against the traumatic homogenization of her identity, a trauma brought about by the father’s desire to embody, and to see his ‘light’ daughter embody, a purely modern, colonial self.

If Michelle Cliff’s work is at the forefront of the Caribbean narrative stage due to her addressing the crucial issue of hybridization/creolization as an ambivalent process which seeks to offer a new form of healing for traumatized colonized (and neo-colonized) subjects, she was/is not the only writer seeking to redefine trauma as a site of resistance to oppressive social and cultural power structures. V.S. Reid participated in that process with the 1976 publication of *The Jamaicans*, a novel which promotes the recuperation of

the traumatic past and the productive reconstruction of Jamaican identity as a way to fight Jamaica's social and economic distress in the 1970s. Andrew Salkey, who was very much influenced by the work of Reid, wrote *The Late Emancipation of Jerry Stove* in 1968, which is a novel that explores in depth the aftermath of independence in terms of the impossible reformation of a coherent, cohesive post-colonial, national Jamaican identity. Guyanese author Jan Carew reformulates that problem through an analysis (in a novel like his 1958 text *The White Coast*, among others) of the racial/social tensions in the Caribbean (more specifically colonized Guyana) and their repercussion on the possibility for creating a national community beyond the colonial era. All these authors explore, from different angles, the possibilities offered by a critique of the colonial past, and by an analysis of the repercussions of the "Divide and Rule" colonial project on the different racial/cultural groups brought together in the Caribbean during colonial times. From the 1980s until today, authors such as Edna Brodber and Zee Edgell continue the conversation around the complex theme of Caribbean identity reformation. Brodber unveils and examines in *Jane and Louisa will soon Come Home* (1980) and *Myal* (1988) the psychological, cultural, and historical need for the recuperation of traditional African traditions in order to promote a seemingly coherent (though plural) national Jamaican identity. Zee Edgell, in *Beka Lamb*, constructs the character of a young Belize creole, Beka, to unveil the tensions between and commingling of traditional oral history and modern forms of history-telling. This tension/merger is symptomatic of Beka's hybrid upbringing (under the British colonial system) and identity, and comes back as a leitmotiv in literary works of Caribbean authors, the novels of Michelle Cliff being no exceptions to this "rule." Today, Caribbean writers such as Earl Lovelace, Caryl Philips,

David Dabydeen, and so many others continue the process of recuperating traumatic histories and critiquing the ever-so-present influence of old and new Empires upon the social and economic life of the islands. Lovelace, one of the few Caribbean authors who decided to live and write at home in Trinidad, strives to move beyond the common dangerous racial/social/cultural dichotomies still prevalent in Trinidadian society. He brings into his fiction Trinidadian carnivalistic performances as revelators of trauma and performative rituals that counter the “seriousness” of pervasive colonial institutions which accomplish the disordering of mainstream ideas about race and the reordering of Caribbean history and racial identity along hybrid lines. He offers hope for the creation of a positive national identity which integrates, even welcomes, the dissimilarities of cultural groups and experiences—a project Michelle Cliff, as we will see in this chapter, strives to promote through the process of creolizing normative notions of history and identity.

Caribbean Traumas

As discussed above, according to very conservative notions of healing after a traumatic experience, one needs to fully overcome trauma in order to recover a well-structured sense of one’s self, one’s identity. What then happens when identity is constructed upon one or a series of traumatic historical moments? How can one overcome trauma when it literally shapes one’s history, one’s cultural identity (or absence thereof). An archeology of the history of The Caribbean clearly points out the successive violent interventions of colonial outsiders upon the islands and their populations from the part of one or several colonial nations since 1492, be it the Portuguese, the Spanish, the French, the English. The colonization of the Caribbean islands often involved a succession of colonial interventions, a repetition of violence

without a difference except for the language in which imperial discourses and institutions were repeatedly constructed and imposed.

In Barbados, for example, the first inhabitants of the island, the Arawaks, were colonized by the Carib Indians in 1200. Then came the Portugese, the Spanish in 1492, and the British in 1625. The slave trade conducted by the European empires also brought to the island women and men from Africa, hence the added influence of other cultures which did preserve and disseminate various cultural heritages as a form of resistance to colonization, displacement, and death even. Independence ‘kindly granted’ in 1966, happened after series of traumatic insurrections, strikes, riots often from the part of workers asking for better status and wages. George Lamming partly discusses the traumatic characteristics and consequences of the Barbadian workers’ Strikes and Riots of 1931 in his book *In the Castle of my Skin*. Lamming also manages to describe, through the eyes of a group of young boys, the colonial matrix in place on the island before independence, more specifically in the colonial education system which disavows the plural history and cultural diversity of the island. Colonial education is called “the language of not-feeling” (*JCS* 154) and its imposition constitutes a repetition without difference of nationalistic (the nation being Britain), homogenizing songs and poems that only serve, as Homi Bhabha points out in “Signs Taken for Wonder,” to promote “a desire for domination by producing subjects that have to evolve within a hierarchical system” (*PSR* 34). Today, even if Barbados is an independent nation led by an elected Prime Minister, the British rule has not at all disappeared from the political and economic Barbadian life. Britain still “watches over,” through the governor general, “Little

England.” However, the Caribbean islands ex-colonies of Great Britain do not seem to benefit from the same social advantages as the British nationals.

The case is the same for the Caribbean islands/nations which remain constrained by the protective gaze and policies of European nations. The Martinique and Guadeloupe islands have never even been granted their independence from the French and do not even enjoy the status of ‘nations.’ After the name ‘colonies,’ they have become DOMs (Départements d’Outre-Mer) in 1946, and then DROMs (Départements et Régions d’Outre-Mer) in 2003. Though the name ‘colony’ has disappeared, the colonial language is still the official language, and the islands still have to submit themselves to the “legislative assimilation” project imposed by France since 1946 through the process of “départementalisation” (the islands/colonies became French departments). Though the economic and social status of these French islands seems to reach higher scales than their pseudo-independent anglophone neighbors, linguistic, cultural, and political assimilation is, unfortunately enough, still the “mot d’ordre” of the French State in its dealings with these distant territories. Both movements from department to metropolitan center and from center to department remains a theoretical “middle passage” which in fact involves a unilateral imposition of the values of the center (education, law, etc.) upon the margin. If the classical pattern of colonization has disappeared since recently, and if the above-mentioned examples are certainly not representative of the whole Caribbean experience, exploitation remains the leitmotiv though it takes various, more or less subtle, shapes--when discussing the political and economic positions in which Caribbean post-colonial nations find themselves.

Michelle Cliff, in *Abeng* and *No Telephone to Heaven*, writes about the trauma of Jamaica. The history of Jamaica shows similarities with that of its neighboring islands: The Arawak Indians from Venezuela and later the Carib Indians from Guinea were the first settlers of the island. Columbus arrived in 1494 followed by Spanish Juan de Esquivel in 1510 to continue the process of destruction of Jamaican lives and culture started by Columbus. Jamaica for the Spanish was of little importance except as a passage way towards Mexico which the Spanish wanted to conquer. The British arrived in 1655 and put in place the slave economy which lasted until 1834. Jamaica was granted political independence in 1962 though the presence of a governor general, in the same ways as for Barbados, who represents the British Crown on the island. Though the head of the government is an elected Prime Minister, the involvement/acquiescence of the governor general is still required in certain instances. This everlasting presence of the ghost of the British Empire is reflected in Cliff's work as she fictionalizes the near-impossibility for Jamaica in general, and Clare in particular, to escape the island's oppressive colonial past². However, Clare does manage to deconstruct the imperial and paternal panoptic gaze that holds her and her island still, and she manages to renegotiate her hybrid identity not by overcoming the traumas of the past, but by asserting them, recovering them, and by acknowledging trauma as the very stuff of her identity and history (though Cliff never lets Clare fall into the discursive trap of victimhood).

According to rather traditional definitions of trauma, trauma implies a splitting of

²For more information about Caribbean history, see Thomas G. Mathews' *The Caribbean: History, Politics, and Culture*. Ketty Rodriguez, ed. Publishing House unknown. Copyright in the United States, 1999. See also Thomas Bremer and Ulrich Fleischmann's *History and Histories in the Caribbean*. Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2001.

identity³. Recovery implies the mending of the wound. However, in instances that are not taken into account by trauma studies, splitting will be, against all odds, a sign of healing. This process also involves the recognition of new sites, new figures of trauma that are not discussed in psychoanalysis or trauma studies, and a rethinking of traditional psychoanalytical sites/figures of trauma.

Trauma as Site of Memory and Identity

In *Abeng* and *No Telephone to Heaven* by Michelle Cliff, the young light-skinned Jamaican Clare Savage stands at the center of the process of memorial recovery she begins as a child. This process of recuperating the silenced side of her cultural heritage proceeds from Clare's developing consciousness as to the existence of a gap, a lack, which splits her into fragments. On the one hand, Clare is aware of her colonial heritage through her father's repetitious grounding of his and his daughter's identity in White colonial history. This grounding takes place through series of legitimating narratives told by the father and the Jamaican colonial education system. These narratives are sites of indoctrination through myth-making and the totalitarian imposition of these myths upon Clare as she seeks to penetrate her obscured genealogical past. One of those myths appears in the social construction of the family name: "The definition of what a Savage was like was fixed by color, class, and religion, and over the years a carefully contrived mythology was constructed, which they used to protect their identities. When they were poor, and not all of them white, the mythology persisted. They swore by it" (A 29). On the other hand, Clare becomes aware of her mother's difference, her not fitting into the paternal/ colonial stories of origin because of her darker appearance, and her being

³See Ruth Ley's *Trauma: a Genealogy* page 125.

repeatedly silenced by the father. This silenced difference, Clare realizes, also defines her own identity, and Clare will strive to understand the wordlessness of her mother and make up for it through the recuperation of a rather female-centered Jamaican history of colonial resistance. Trauma as resistance becomes the leitmotiv of both novels and forces readers to analyze the history of Western myth-making (i.e. Western trauma stories and theories) and complicate that history by acknowledging the need for a disruption of it through a process initiated by Clare in the novels: she struggles against the latency of resistance history through her witnessing, wording, and analysis of Jamaica's traumatic heritage and the social practices of trauma. To use Cathy Caruth's argument, Clare's encounters with her traumatic past leads to the realization that "history is no longer referential (that is, no longer based on simple models of experience and reference)" (*UE* 11). Clare the young adult in *No Telephone to Heaven*, sequel to *Abeng*, will eventually consciously participate in the progressive deconstruction of patriarchal/colonial systems of reference in order for the not-known and not-said to irrupt out of the disquieted volcano of the past. However, the first step is for Clare-the-child in *Abeng* to witness the trauma of her 'dark' history and perform unconsciously (though the process is made conscious for the reader by the heterodiegetic narrator) "a rethinking of reference . . . aimed at . . . permitting *history* to arise where *immediate understanding* may not" (*UE* 11). This rising of history through Clare's witnessing in *Abeng* is signified by the narrator's interventions in the consciousness-searching story of Clare. These interventions are in fact pieces of Jamaican resistance history which come to disrupt the narrative of Clare's life whenever she performs an important act of witnessing. In *Abeng*, Clare-the-child visits with her father an old Jamaican plantation turned into a tourist

attraction where foreigners can come and experience the atmosphere of a long gone past. There she witnesses the commodification of colonial history, a history which shows itself so tangible on the plantation since if the ‘white masters are represented by “white plaster dummies from a factory in New York City” (A 37), “Black Jamaicans, also in period costume--but alive, not replicas--were paid to stand around with machetes and hoes, and give directions to the parties” (A 37). This present witnessing of the performance of pre-abolition racial structures alludes to the colonial system still in place at the time of the narrative (1958) but is disrupted by the narrator’s intervention. As Clare witnesses and assimilates, the narrator intervenes and “permits history to arise” by taking the reader back in history through a narrative of past resistant movements to slavery.

Paradise Plantation is the place where the Savage family, ancestors of her father, used to live as producers of cane and slave owners. The ‘great house’ where the Savage family used to live has remained untouched on the plantation while the rest of it has been turned into a tourist trap. There, foreigners can buy vacation homes the look of which takes them, rather romantically, back in history. Clare’s father wants her to visit the old house since it represents for him the remains of the glorious past of the Savage family. Upon entering, Clare’s eyes focus on the walls of the house and detect, “a pattern made of the same picture of people in a park in a city somewhere in Europe. The women wore long dresses . . . The dresses and parasols were red, the woman white. White children played across the paper, and red dogs jumped at sticks. The scenes were repeated again and again across the wall” (A 24). As they both prepare to leave the house, and after a long observation of its insides, Clare “licked her finger and touched it to the wall, then tasted it, it was salt” (A 25). The wallpaper which symbolizes the repetitive structure of

the colonial system tastes of salt, is in fact completely covered with salt, which was used as compensation to sweating by slaves working in the plantation. Moreover, as John Gilmore mentions in *Faces of the Caribbean*, ““salt-water slaves” (162) was the name given to slaves brought from Africa. This making visible of the slaves’ haunting presence in the master house, of the human sacrifice made in the process of preserving colonial structures and economy, takes place through Clare who becomes a medium between past and present in this newly imagined place, Paradise Plantation, which seeks to erase the violence of history. Her tasting the salt on the wall makes real the trauma of slavery and her involvement in it, and it feeds her growing desire to redefine herself beyond the boundaries imposed by her father. In “Three Words toward Creolization,” Antonio Benitez-Rojo writes that the instability of Caribbean identities “is the product of the plantation (the big bang of the Caribbean universe), whose slow explosion throughout modern history threw out billions and billions of cultural fragments in all directions” (*Caribbean Creolization* 55), fragments the “coming together and pulling apart” (CC 55) of which create the creole subject. Clare, as the novel moves forward, learns to desire the *creolité*, this unstable cultural interstice to use Bhabha’s term⁴, her father refuses her.

Though Clare-the-child does not know all the intricacies and details of that erased creole history at the time of witnessing, her seeing and tasting of the past, and her walking around the plantation are acts of memory, acts of return to the not-known, the not-said. They are also acts of departure from the colonial structures, a departure that will become more and more conscious with age. Clare the young adult in *No Telephone to*

⁴ In “Signs Taken for Wonders,” text found in *The Location of Culture*. London; New York: Routledge. 1994.

Heaven will retrospectively re-interpret, replay (thus repeat), these unconscious acts of memory and continue to construct her dispersed identity and her political struggle against colonial structures of power.

New Evaluations of Traumatic Return, Departure, and Repetition

Clare's return/departure, though unconscious at the time of witnessing, is necessary ground for the narrator's interventions upon the structures, the references of colonial history and its representations. It is necessary ground for Clare-the-young-adult's subsequent "'striking' of the insight" (*UE* 22), as Caruth would argue, offered to her through the act of witnessing. However, contrary to Caruth's argument based on her analysis of Freud's *Moses and Monotheism*, between Clare's unconscious acts of witnessing/living trauma and her realization that the Jamaican colonial trauma is hers, there is no fall because the act of departure (from the myth of an ideal white colonial past promoted mainly by her 'light' father) is immediately counterbalanced by the act of return (of a history of resistance to the myth). This return is not, as explained above, performed by Clare herself but by the narrator who incorporates resistance history into the narrative of Clare's witnessing. Through her interventions, the narrator (this other voice of history) refuses the fall and offers Clare a different fate than the one predicted to the traumatized, the victim of history. Clare never falls victim to the unconscious traumatic loss of her colonial historical connections because as this traumatic loss grows, as the acts of witnessing trauma succeed each other, the holes are mended by the constant interventions of the narrator who continues, repeats, her new historical tale. In *Abeng*, this repetitious telling of Jamaican resistance history, the repetition of the names of resistance (Nanny the sorceress and warrior who fought against slave-owners during the Maroon revolt, Kishee her army commander, Mma Alli the obeah woman who taught the

young to remember their history, etc.), is not an index of trauma. On the contrary, this narrative acting out of trauma through the repetition of ignored resistance stories is part of the slow process of identification Clare will continue to go through in the sequel to *Abeng*. In *Abeng*, repetition denotes Jamaican author's Michelle Cliff's desire for a non-resolution, a no-end to the act of witnessing trauma since this witnessing is the very road to freedom for Clare, the very stuff that will make it possible for her to redefine her identity along new historical lines. Clare-the-child's unconscious loss of markings (markings imposed by the father) in the process of witnessing the traumatic effects of the island's colonial past, though already disruptive to Clare's identity, turns out to be covered and healed by the narrator's counter-traumatic process of recuperating what was forgotten by her father Boy in his telling of the island's history to Clare in *Abeng*. This pattern of recuperation is repeated in *No Telephone to Heaven* as Clare remembers and interprets her acts of witnessing with the knowledge of an adult who understands the implications of what she did witness. What is cathartic for Clare is thus not the transformation of forgetting into memory and self-representation as Freud would have it, it is the conversion of the unknown—the unsaid never forgotten, though undecipherable at the time of witnessing—into knowable, utterable, acts of resistance to colonial mythologies about Jamaican self-representation and recollection.

Contrary to Caruth's positive conclusions about Freud's departure from the trauma of nazism, Clare's departure from the traumatic history she was born into according to her father would be catastrophic, not at all the gift of freedom, which is how Caruth reads departure in the context of Freud's story. Such a departure for Clare would forbid the proper weighing of returned memories instigated by the narrator of *Abeng* against

patriarchal/colonial history. If the recuperation of Maroon history is crucial to Clare's identity formation, her remaining attached to her father's mythology of pure white origin is also crucial. Clare has to retain the memory of paternal/colonial desire--the desire to see Clare fall into monolithic categories of subjecthood^B, and combat this desire by keeping it within hands' reach. The linear movement of departure, the product of trauma for Caruth and prospect of freedom, becomes for Cliff the agent of Clare's trauma in the same way as it has been an agent of Jamaica's historical trauma (Caribbean exiles living in the motherland embody that trauma for V.S. Naipaul), hence the intervention of Cliff's historical returns in *Abeng* and *No Telephone to Heaven*.

According to Lacanian psychoanalysis, the ego is constituted through the very process of alienation. Hence Lacan's conclusion that the ego is in fact an alter ego since identification with the Other takes place in the process of ego formation. The term used by Lacan to refer to that process by which alterity becomes central to subject formation is extimacy⁵. In *Abeng*, Boy the father both symbolic and real, is responsible in part for Clare's disappearance (a disappearance against which she fights), departure from herself. He is the symbolic Father/Other through whom Clare is expected to constitute her subjectivity. His traumatic ever-present shadow in the life of Clare forces her into a process of adaptation to a reality regimented by a patriarchal/colonial symbolic order. This conforming process implies, for Clare, a betrayal of the mother/owner of counter-colonial knowledge, and of herself who is biologically (essentialism comes in but for a good cause) and culturally the heiress of that very knowledge. The omnipresence of the

⁵For further development on the concept of extimacy (*extimité*), see Jacques Alain Miller in *Lacanian Theory of Discourse: Subject, Structure, and Society*. March Bracher et al., eds. New York: New York University Press, 1994, 75.

symbolic law of the father forces maternal knowledge and power into absence, but this binary opposition against which Clare struggles as she lives under its aegis is indeed disrupted through Clare's acts of witnessing. Clare's departure from the colonial matrix through her acts of witnessing in *Abeng* is later materialized in *No Telephone to Heaven* by her actual departure from colonial Jamaica to New York in 1960 when Clare was 14, and later London where she lives and studies until she makes her come back to Jamaica in the 1980s. She will then take the decision to fight on the side of resistance to governmental powers which, though officially independent from the British rule, are still the faithful heirs to colonial governments in the 1980s (and today). This return is, on the one hand, a physical return to and recovery of the native/real mother/land though land and mother were never forgotten, and on the other hand, the beginning of Clare's material involvement in the armed struggles against the remains of the Empire. This physical departure/ return is again not marked by the curse of trauma since Clare continues, even abroad, as she lives and grows in America and then England, the process of filling in the gaps and holes created by her father's myths. Though Clare will always be bonded genealogically to a violent colonial structure, Clare-the-young-adult rediscovers her mother's erased history and her citizenship in a new nation that strives to preserve its practical bonds to the past and limit the influence of more unpractical ones. Through this process of departure/return, this constant movement of migration, Clare is definitely undone, but this undoing is performative as Clare becomes the meeting place between different pasts, as well as between these pasts and the present of Jamaica in the 1980s. She also becomes a figure of hope for the future, a positive vision of recovery from colonial lies, against cultural disavowal. According to Anne Cvetkovic, "Migration can

traumatize national identity, producing dislocation from or loss of an original home or nation. But if one adopts a depathologizing approach to trauma, the trauma of immigration need not be healed by a return to the ‘natural’ nation of origin or assimilation into a new one” (*Archives of Feelings* 121). In the context of Clare’s story, thanks to her acts of witnessing and her actual physical departure from and return to the island, migration is not traumatic because it implies this double movement of intellectual and physical departure and return, a movement that prevents the traumatic fall. This movement never implies an eventual return to the nation of origin, nor does it involve assimilation into a new one. Clare does return to Jamaica, but a Jamaica quite different from the place defined and described for her by her father. The Jamaica she returns to is the place she has managed to reconstruct through this constant migration process, these theoretical and physical departures/ returns that have helped her come to terms with the absolutism of her father’s stories of origin. Clare embodies the successful contestation of cultural hegemony and comes to replace the negative image of the exile in V.S. Naipaul’s *The Mimic Men*, for whom both departure and return are unrecoverable traumatic events that forever prevent any kind of identity recovery and negate the possibility for finding a place one could call home.

New Figures of Trauma, New Figures of Knowledge

In *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction*, Laurie Vickroy recognizes “the mother/daughter relations as an important locus of identity formation” (10). She also describes this relation as a locus where the “perpetuation of traumatic legacies” (10) takes place. In this part of the chapter, I want to look at the ways in which Michelle Cliff redefines the mother-daughter relation as a locus of knowledge and resistance, and not simply as a tie that enables the continuation of trauma, though trauma there is. Clare’s

mother does not only ‘offer’ her daughter a traumatic legacy, on the contrary. Clare is made aware of Jamaica’s traumatic past and thus steps into history through the voice of her mother and other women around her. These voices are counter-traumatic since they participate in the events of return in the departure/return process I described earlier. In Lacanian psychoanalytical theory, the concept of the devouring mother⁶ in the pre-oedipal child-mother relationship, and his focus on the child’s duty to detach herself/himself from her in order to enter the social realm in the oedipal phase, puts the mother in a lesser position than the father in her role as parent since she is the one from whom one needs to get away, the one from whom one needs to be ‘saved,’ when seeking social acceptance. For Lacan, the father, not the mother, owns the keys to the social realm. In Cliff’s *Abeng* and *No Telephone To Heaven*, Clare’s mother Kitty is the one who saves her daughter from rejection by the social realm as she erases her own self. Clare’s mother keeps her Maroon legacy, her non-Western, non-White origins silent so that her light-skinned daughter can find her place in the racist Jamaican social system. Though this ‘other’ origin is obvious from the color of her skin (Clare’s mother is ‘red’; she is of European and Maroon descent), Kitty never clearly acknowledges her Maroon heritage in front of her daughter: “Better to have this daughter accept her destiny and not give her any false hope of alliance which she would not be able to honor. Let her passage into that otherworld be as painless as possible” (A 129). Kitty remains quiet, subdued to her husband’s desire to pass Clare as a young white girl and erase Clare’s other heritage. The father, Boy Savage, takes over, rejects her wife’s and daughter’s difference, and

⁶ See Lacan’s 1956-57 seminar on object relations for further information on the “devouring mother” in *Le Seminaire, Livre IV: La Relation d’Objet et les Structures Freudiennes*. Paris: Seuil, 1994.

imposes upon them the racist myths produced by colonial powers through Jamaican cultural amputation. He embodies a patriarchal/colonial social system of control in which women are objectified and rejected if they are too 'dark,' and pedestalized if their skin is light. This system is regimented by its Eurocentrism, its racism, its dogmatism, and its lack of ethics. Through his teaching of a dubious version of history, his history, Boy tries to pass onto her daughter the meta-narratives (to use Lyotard's term) constructed by and through colonial institutions. Boy's own indoctrination (as a kid) into a realm built and controlled by "a force outside himself which was responsible for all" (A 44), a force promoting separation between races through scientific proof and religious dogma, led him to believe in the concept of the elect, "those whose names were recorded before time. Those who no matter what they did or did not were the only saved souls on earth" (A 45). This belief, Boy strives to inculcate it to his daughter Clare whom he wants to see continue the White Savage line through the promotion of colonial mythology/ideology. By doing so, Boy serves to secure the repetition of Jamaican history qua trauma. He is the cannibal, the one who devours the child and the mother both so as to perform their personal and historical erasure. As Clare observes both father and mother she becomes conscious of her father's desire to mold her so as to fit colonial structures of oppression. Clare does take in her father's teachings and takes advantage, though in a very conscious and often guilty manner, of her 'lightness and her mastery of "proper English." In an episode where she and her 'dark' friend Zoe sunbathe naked near the river on Clare's grandmother's property, Clare steps back in the position of privilege she had left aside while playing with Zoe in order to scare away a cane-cutter observing them from a distance: " 'Get away, this is my grandmother's land.' She had dropped her patois, was

speaking buckra, and relying on the privilege she said she did not have” (A 122). This episode follows an earlier conversation between her and Zoe during which Zoe, whose only language is *patois*, points out Clare’s privileged social position and weighs Clare’s past and future against hers. Zoe does not see Clare as one of her people: “Fe wanna people have been here long, long time. Dem own land. Dem have meeting in dem parlor. But fe me people been here long, long time too. We even been slaves” (A 118). This originary difference will separate them when they enter womanhood, Zoe foresees. Even if Clare does not want to accept Zoe’s predictions, the cane-cutter episode makes her reflect upon her friends’ words, and Zoe’s intervention becomes for Clare another illuminating moment after which she feels the split between “white and not white, town and country . . . Boy and Kitty” (119) grow wider and deeper.

Despite her occasional safe returns to a position of privilege, Clare does manage to interrupt and counteract her father’s narratives and teachings. Despite the father’s marked influence upon her daughter, Clare, through her acts of witnessing, reads and analyzes her mother’s silences in order to disrupt the world order imposed by the father. Kitty’s silencing, though quasi total in the presence of the father, gets perturbed through the intervention of characters and events that force Kitty’s Maroon heritage to come out. Clare is a witness to these ‘coming outs’ and works to weigh them against her father’s imposed knowledge. The mother’s interventions lead to very conscious moments of questioning for Clare who feels split as she witnesses the subtle struggle between mother’s past and father’s version of the past. One of these interventions take place as the Savage family passes a mourning march on their way to Kingston. As the mourning party marched on, they were singing in a language “strange, unrecognizable” (A 50) to Clare.

When Clare asked her parents, “what are they saying,” only Kitty was able to answer, “They are singing in the old language; it is an ancient song, which the slaves carried with them from Africa” (A 50), to which the father says, “some sort of pocomania song” (A 50). Boy’s disrespect for the cultural heritage brought by Jamaican slaves is contrasted by his wife’s knowledge of that heritage and the language associated with it. This father/mother division reoccurs throughout the novel and infuses in Clare this feeling of a split: she is torn between mother and father, old language and colonial language, plural history and Western colonial knowledge. Another instance of disruption of patriarchal/colonial knowledge erupts when the mother-daughter relation is undisturbed by, separated from, the lucubrations of the father. During these very short moments, Kitty partially unveils the extent of her knowledge about Maroon culture. Such one moment of unrestrained sharing informs Clare on the medicinal power of the plants that grow in the small town of St. Elizabeth, her home town: “Kitty knew the uses of Madame Fate, a weed that could kill and that could cure. She knew about Sleep-and Wake. Marjo Bitter. Dumb Cane . . . She knew that if the bark of the [Goodwood] tree came in contact with sweating pores, a human being would die quickly. She taught her daughter about Tung-Tung, Fallback, Lemongrass . . .” (A 53). Kitty is to some extent the embodiment of the late Maroon female healer Mma Alli, a slave on the Savage plantation, who used to “[teach] her children the old ways--the knowledge she brought from Africa--and told them never to forget them and to carry them on” (A 34). Though Kitty does not tell her daughter to carry on the knowledge of her ancestors, she is a site of memory for such knowledge, a knowledge Clare welcomes and takes in, in the same manner as she takes in her father’s teachings. Such revelations would have been dismissed by Boy who, contrary

to Kitty, believes in the benefits of city life, the city Kingston being the locus of production and reproduction of colonial power structures Boy defends and perpetuates. Kitty, though silenced by her husband, will throw fits of anger during which the voice of the past, which she strives to subdue in order to make life easier for her 'light daughter, will come out. Kitty shares these hysterical bursts with other female characters in the novel, characters who talk back to and resist the very structures that keep their knowledge and life confined to a set of roles and codes to be respected. They take patriarchal/colonial institutions through the process of re-mystification as they replace patriarchal/colonial mythology with the myth-making traditions inherited from female Jamaican slaves. They represent a distance from origins, a renouncement of what de Man called "the desire to coincide"⁷ with certain given understandings or meanings of social structures. They open the way towards new kinds of reading (and writing) of history, and permit a critique of and flight from the doctrines or set of practices that sustain colonial myths. Their knowledge comes through as mnemonic traces of the past that constantly return and reconstitute whatever has been concealed by colonial history. They consume this imposed history, these imposed structures, and loudly counter the very institutions that define their female Maroon knowledge as ignorance. Kitty feels the weight of this erasure in Jamaica and reacts to it punctually. In *No Telephone to Heaven*, the Savage family is forced into a move from Jamaica to America by Boy who seeks economic achievement out of the move. In 1960 racist America, Kitty, forced to work for a laundry business, feels even more heavily her silenced position than on the island. Boy, giving into the

⁷See De Man's "The Rhetoric of Temporality" in *Interpretation: Theory and Practice*. Ed. Charles S. Singleton. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1969. 173-210.

capitalistic desire promoted in Jamaica by the influence of Western Europeans and Americans, displaces Kitty from home to a foreign place where nothing at all is familiar. She loses her “place of reference, the place which explained the world to her” (NT 66) that is the island, and is forced to become a ‘faithful servant’ in a cleaning business. This state of servitude to her husband’s dreams places her in an abusive economic system which employs people like her, people who speak with a ‘strange accent’. Her job is to rid garments of their ‘dark stains’ for a cleaning store called White’s Sanitary Laundry, “White” referring to the name “Mrs. White,” the supposed owner of the place, a constructed character who came out of the imagination of the very real Mr. B. The owner uses the association between white middle-class women and the traditional occupation of cleaning the home to attract business men into his store. Paradoxically enough, only colored and ‘exotic’ working class women perform the cleaning tasks in the store.

Thus, to her husband’s silencing, Kitty can add a whole country’s unwillingness to listen to the unfamiliar: “people are used to certain sounds . . . it confuses them when there are new ones . . . especially from exotic places” (NT 74). Kitty resents this forced silence and will disrupt it punctually through a rewriting of the messages put in the pockets of clients to promote the cleaning store and encourage their return. Instead of simple advertising messages meant to help the store prosper, Kitty writes inflammatory notes about the racial and social inequalities she is able to witness around her: “Ever try to cleansing your mind of hatred? Think of it” (NT 78), “We can clean your clothes but not your heart . . . White people can be black-hearted” (NT 81). These little acts of subversion are reinforced by Kitty’s betrayal of the cleansing project embodied by the imaginary Ms. White through her adoption of a new female figure as point of reference in

her life. After a visit to a New York Cuban store and her encounter with the statue of La Morenita, the black virgin, Kitty decides to return to Jamaica with her second daughter, her 'dark' daughter, and leaves Boy and Clare behind. She does not leave, however, before going back to the cleaning store to write one of her last illuminating messages: "Hello. Mrs. White is dead. My name is Mrs. Black. I killed her" (*NT* 83). This 'hysterical' note of assassination and Kitty's departure mark her recuperation of voice and self. She can redefine herself through her black/Maroon heritage, a process which does not have any impact upon the social and cultural structures that promote separation through difference. She can only recuperate her sense of self by departing, escaping from Boy and an oppressive economic system. This self-marginalization, her return to Jamaica, and then soon-to-come death imply a failure which thankfully Clare will know to avoid. However, it is a failure that does not erase Kitty's mad desire to change, with the means at hand, the fate of her clan. This desire is clearly expressed for the first time to Clare in the last of her letters to her daughter: "I hope someday you make something of yourself, and someday help your people" (*NT* 103).

In *Abeng*, different historical figures, cultural ancestors of Kitty and Clare, come into the narrative as "hysterical" interruptions that seek to disrupt the structures of colonial power. Nanny, a Jamaican revolutionary figure, "the sorceress, the obeah-woman" (*A* 14), was the leader of the "Windward Maroons" who held out against the forces of the white men longer than any rebel troops. They waged war from 1655-1740. Nanny was the magician of this revolution; "she used her skill to untie her people and to consecrate their battles" (*A* 14). This historical and hysterical (if we define hysterical knowledge and practices as counter-colonial practices, as going against the dissociation

of colonized bodies from her or his history and performing a new dissociation from colonial structures) female warrior and leader of her people is a focal point of the novel. Her ghost seems to haunt Kitty and other female characters of Cliff's fiction as Nanny reappears throughout the novel when her intervention as counter-traumatic remembering of the past is needed. She is a haunting presence made visible and audible through punctual hysterical calls for rebellion against colonial practices and discourses. One of these calls takes place through Mma Alli who, by lying with a woman, teaches her how to "make her womb move within her" (A 35). Mma Alli was a slave on the Savage plantation, and through her relationship with Inez--Clare's great-grandmother on the side of her father who was raped by Judge Savage--and other women on the Savage plantation, she passed on necessary knowledge and strength so that the slave women could "keep their bodies as their own, even when they were made subject to the whimsical violence of the justice" (A 35). The link between Mma Alli's teachings on the "wondering womb" are intriguing considering very early medical explanations to the "disease" called hysteria as the erratic movement of the womb in the body of the sick woman. The cure to that disease was replacement of the womb in its appropriate place. Here, Mma Alli teaches hysteria in order to counter the traumatic dissociation performed through violent colonial practices. Slave women regain strength through this recalling of obeah practices, the recovery and repetition of slave knowledge which opposes itself to the bodily, cultural, and social paralysis imposed by colonial structures upon colonized womenB whether enslaved like Mma Alli or freed like Kitty and Clare. Mma Alli's cultural counter-practice serves as a point of departure for Inez and her descendants to fight against the colonial myths, the colonial "hallucinations" that promote personal and

cultural dissociation from one's history. Hence, if hysteria produces paralysis, it is on the side of the colonizer that this paralysis is witnessed, and it signifies the recovery of counter-narratives to patriarchal discourses and the uncovering of their hallucinatory nature and their innate violence. Towards the end of the novel, Clare, questioning the worthiness of her father's teachings, will begin the active process of "paralyzing" his discourse as she refuses to go live with Mrs. Phillips, and old friend of the Savage family who will teach her how to become a "lady." Then Kitty describes Mrs. Phillips to Clare as a nice person, but someone who "is narrow-minded about colored people. You know a little like your father" (A 151). Clare responds, "Then what do you want me to learn from her?" (A 151). Clare's reaction is proof of her transformation from "daddy's girl" into "mommy's defender" as she dismisses her father's point of view and asserts her desire to stay with her mother whom she wants to learn from. Unfortunately, and despite Kitty's hysterical tantrums against patriarchal institutions, Clare will be forced by her re-silenced mother to obey her father's decision. Despite Kitty's disavowal of her daughter's racial consciousness, Clare has reached an epiphany towards the end of the novel and can recognize Jamaica as the locus of unfair racial and social (the two being intricately linked) hierarchization. She will continue that metamorphosis in *No Telephone to Heaven*, a metamorphosis which eventually takes Clare back to Jamaica where she will participate in the armed struggle against a corrupted Jamaican government post-colonial only in name.

The women's hysterical resistance in *Abeng* demonstrates that the colonial construction of aboriginal women's knowledge as ignorance, as a backward reliance on a past dismissed by colonial history, is in fact an index of the empire's refusal to memorize,

to acknowledge history. Thus, hysterical resistance involves a post-colonial reading of negation. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick discusses the relationship between knowledge and ignorance in *Tendencies*. She posits ignorance as being inveterately intertwined with knowledges which, in fact, give birth to ignorance: “. . . there exists. . . a plethora of ignorances, and we may begin to ask questions about the labor, erotics, and economics of their human production and distribution. Insofar as ignorance is ignorance of a knowledge. . . these ignorances, far from being pieces of the originary dark, are produced by and correspond to particular knowledges and circulate as part of particular regimes of truth. . .”(T 25). The production of ignorance by the colonial matrix is counterbalanced by women whom in *Abeng* impose a re-reading, a re-vision of history through madness.

Madness is one of the ‘pathologies’ that have been widely described and studied by psychoanalysts. In a book entitled *La Folie et la Chose Littéraire* (madness and the literary thing), Shoshana Felman asserts that today, madness is a common place and cannot be imprisoned within the realm of the pathological anymore. Madness is part of the everyday. The question of the place of madness in the everyday is often combined with that of the status of knowledge. Felman states that what interests us today is not an answer to the question “who knows?” (the master does not matter), but an answer to the question “What is knowledge?” (*La Folie* 12). In *Abeng*, Mad Hannah, gone mad after the death of her son Clinton, becomes a site of knowledge through her very madness. Mad Hannah is the product of the inhuman behavior of St. Elizabeth’s community which refuses to help Hannah and “assist her in the rite of laying the duppy at peace” (A 63):

No one came to sing the duppy to rest and put bluing on the eyelids of Clinton, nail his shirt cuffs and the heels of his socks to the board of the casket. No one to create the pillow filled with dried gunga peas, Indian corn, coffee beans, or to sprinkle salt into the coffin and make a trail of salt from the house to the grave . . .So Mad

Hannah buried her son alone the next morning when it should have been done at midnight. On the third night after her burial she saw his duppy rise from the grave. (A 63-64)

The reason behind the community members' shunning of Mad Hannah lies in their belief in the rumors about her son's sexual difference. Clinton's gayness, his 'sinful' destabilization of the patriarchal/colonial, strictly gendered structures regimenting St. Elizabeth's community structures internalized by its members--requires punishment even after death. Mad Hannah's wandering around the city looking for her son's duppy is a reminder of the community's failure in assisting one of its members, a reminder of their guilt in choosing the values of a system that alienates them from their beliefs and cultural roots. The guilt, however, disappears with Mad Hannah after the Baptist preacher of St. Elizabeth representative of the very discourse that condemned her son and his like for their 'sin' in the eyes of the community--has her arrested and sent to an asylum.

Despite Mad Hannah's forced disappearance, and according to Shoshana Felman, cultural history has to open to the presence inside and outside itself, as well as the meaning of, madness. Felman argues that madness should become a tool in the process of reading and re-reading cultures, nations, or simply texts. Madness involves certain linguistic procedures which transform what appears as logic into a counter-rhetoric that is coherent. Madness and its rhetoric lead towards demystification and thus, calls for different readings, mad readings that unveil the arbitrary nature of the sign, the colonial sign in the case of Michelle Cliff's novel *Abeng*. This madness, Clare inherits it from her ancestors and Mad Hannah herself when she decides to go hunt for Massa Cudjoe the wild pig in order to show her opposition to the gendered binaries to which Clinton and her mother fell prey. She fails in this endeavor, and though this desire for resistance to the place assigned to her is eventually restrained by her forced departure for Mrs. Phillips'

house, it does not dissolve in thin air. Clare's trajectory throughout *Abeng* leads to the death of another sort of 'pig,' the symbolic father, and to the birth of a maternal metaphor (as opposed to Lacan's 1957 concept of the paternal metaphor) as Clare progressively replaces the word of the father by that of the mother. In *Abeng* Clare's desire for maternal knowledge induces a re-identification outside the framework of patriarchal/colonial structures, though Clare never negates the role played by these structures. Though politically outside of them, she will perform her role as a 'white lady' until adulthood and her involvement in the turmoils of the Jamaican struggle for racial equality.

No Telephone to Heaven: Resistance against Nationalistic, Traumatic Use and Abuse of Creole/Hybrid Rhetoric

In *Abeng*, Clare strives to reconstruct herself beyond the racial and social boundaries imposed by the colonial system. What she desires to promote is a creolized/hybridized identity which could become a place from which to speak and fight against the oppressive structures of colonial power. *No Telephone to Heaven* begins with a scene that shows post-independence Jamaica at the heart of racial and social tensions. Clare has joined forces with an armed group that seeks to defend Jamaican population across racial differences, a group which works to fight the remnants of a colonial system the structures of which have been adopted by successive post-independence Jamaican governments. In *Postnationalism Prefigured, Caribbean Borderlands*, Charles V. Carnegie explains that in post-independence Caribbean nations, "tensions have sometimes arisen between the ideology of the state and that of the majority of the population" (36). Jamaica has been and still is the preferred site for such a tension. As a matter of fact, post-independence Jamaica is, in *No Telephone to Heaven*, a site of racial and social tensions. Carnegie points out the problematic behavior of a "brown middle

class (who also hold political office), who are afraid that their historically privileged position will be eroded by the aspirations of the nation's black majority" (*PP* 37). He also points out a contradiction that arose while the Caribbean was still fighting for its independence: "While being cautious not to openly advocate nationalisms based on race, the anticolonial, preindependence movement in the English-speaking Caribbean did appeal to precisely this shared popular understanding in its rhetoric" (*PP* 37). Jamaica, for example, elevated Marcus Garvey as well as other unmistakably black historical figures to the status of heroes. The independence movement and postindependence political campaigns were definitely founded upon the positive redefinition of blackness and its potential for becoming a powerful political tool in fighting colonial structures. As Carnegie argues, "Successive postcolonial governments in Jamaica have vied with each other to gain popular support through their manipulations of symbols of blackness" (*PP* 35). However, economic power in this country is still in the hands of local white and brown elite and the nationalist promise of "black political and economic sovereignty" (*PP* 38) remains theoretical. Here the Jamaican government's promise of racial and social equality is in fact a political lie that seeks to protect the economic interests of the nation no matter how detrimental this preservation can be to the Jamaican black population. This false promise of equality and protection, and thus the Jamaican government itself—the very institution that is there to protect the population, becomes a site of trauma that Cliff seeks to critique in her sequel to *Abeng*.

In *No Telephone to Heaven*, in an independent Jamaica, social separation based on economic status and lightness of skin are as pervasive as they were in *Abeng* under colonial rule. Paul H., a boy whom Clare meets during one of her returns to the

motherland as a young adult, embodies, along with the rest of his family the post-colonial social and racial differences reinforced by the brown middle class. Here, brownness/hybridity, becomes, through the racist discourse of the brown privileged, a discourse nourished by the underlying racism of governmental political and economic choices and practices. *No Telephone to Heaven* speaks of class conflicts and racial division through the character of Christopher who, at the start of the book, appears to be the good, quiet, and obedient gardener of the H. Family. This defined position comes to change after Christopher asks his “buckra master,” Paul’s father, for a favor. Christopher, longing for his grand-mother who has been dead for 13 years and haunted by her image, decides to look for her body and give her the funeral she never had thinking that it would put her soul to rest. With that purpose in mind and feeling even more the urgency of such an endeavor after having had a few drinks, he goes to his master in the middle of the night and asks him for “one parcel’ ‘pon you propity. Dat all. Fe bury she” (NT 46). Mr. H responds to Christopher’s demand angrily and with the intent of ridiculing a man who believes that a body can be recovered after 13 years spent in the ground: “Bwai, you is one true jackass. Me nuh know when me ever hear such nonsense. Firs’, she jus’ dus’ by now. Secon’, no way in hell dem can fine she” (NT 47). The answer to Christopher’s begging for a burial place is thus negative and climaxes into Mr. H’s infantilization and ridicule portrayal of Christopher. Mr. H.’s lack of understanding and respect for Christopher’s odd beliefs and desire, his cruel treatment of Christopher whom he deems stupid and intrusive, trap Christopher into the web of racist and elitist buckra discourse about black men like him who are the reason why “dis dan country don’t amount to nothing” (NT 47). This traumatic moment for Christopher forces an apology out of him

only to then put him in a state of hysteria as he raises his machete and kills his master before assassinating the rest of the H. family. Mr. H's refusal to help Christopher in putting his grandmother's duppy at rest can be compared to Mad Hannah's loneliness in confronting her son's death in *Abeng*. Hannah's roaming around town in search of her son's duppy and Christopher's violent elimination of his master are both mad disruptions of the oppressive conditions that regiment their respective lives. They are punished for their disruptive beliefs and mere presence by the colonial system and its spiritual constraints, its definition of 'civilized' knowledge, in the case of Hannah; and by the oppressive remains of that system in the case of Christopher.

For them, economically privileged brown Jamaicans are not at all the actors of resistance to colonial structures. They are its puppets, its representatives as they keep reproducing the very structures against which they swore to fight before independence. They reject their own complex liminal position and its political implications. They are not agents of change and adopt a homogeneous persona afforded to them by their lightness of skin and the social privileges that come with it. For the characters clearly defined as black Jamaicans such as Christopher, hybridity becomes a site of trauma since the term, which appears in nationalistic discourses that promote equality, only comes to mean as the defining trait, the very site, of privilege. This envisioning of the hybrid as both site and perpetrator of the colonial trauma is of course veiled by positive discourses of national unification through racial difference. In order to give hybridity back its political potential for resistance and productively counter, though in very punctual ways, the image of the hybrid as traitor to the cause of racial equality, Clare joins the armed forces that seek to

protect restless Jamaican underprivileged racial/social groups against the wrath of a government that in fact promotes social separation through racial difference.

This process of recuperation of a positive hybridity reaches a climax when Clare learns of her mother's death. This loss makes her more aware of the need to speak up her hybrid origin in her mother's stead. She then brings forth her mother's heritage by reminding her father of the fact that "my mother was a nigger" (*NT* 104) when he accuses Clare of having "more feelings for niggers than for your own mother" after he realizes Clare is not crying over her mother's death. Rather than cry, which is what Boy does when he learns of his wife's death, Clare takes on the responsibility to continue her mother's hysterical fight against history. Her joining the armed forces against the enemies of independent Jamaica symbolizes her participation in "this new sort of history" (*NT* 194) that she has taken on, a history at the center of which she stands:

I am in it. It involves me . . .the practice of rubbing lime and salt in the backs of whipped slaves . . . the promised flight of Alexander Bedward in rapture back to Africa . . . cruelty . . . resistance. . . grace. I'm not outside this history. It's a matter of recognition . . . memory . . . emotion. (*NT* 194)

Clare recognizes her hybrid position as both victimizer and victim in the history of her nation. She proposes to stop denying the presence of that contradiction in the process of her becoming Jamaican, and turns this contradiction into a place from which to denounce the aforementioned political contradiction upon which Jamaica has constructed itself after independence (blackness as both nationalistic rhetorical tool for equality and material site of social and economic distress). Clare's redefine *créolité* as the positive, personal and historical counter-traumatic process of unveiling contradictions and restoring agency through a re-imagining of the potential cultural heterogeneity. This re-imagining counters the imaginative qua oppressive creation of the character of Mrs.

White by Mr. B the laundry store owner, a creation which seeks to hide traumatic colonial and neo-colonial structures of racial, social, and gendered oppression. Clare's re-imagining involves the unveiling of the traumatic patriarchal/colonial project of forced forgetting of Jamaica's plural, 'hysterical' history. It also re-invents creole identity as a complex meta-metropolitan, meta-colonial position. These two adjectives point to a place both inside and outside colonial and post-colonial discourses about otherness, a place that deconstructs the colonial/post-colonial dichotomy and stresses the entanglement of these discursive structures. These two adjectives point to a place of resistance which integrates trauma as this implicit and complicit element of resistance; as this transgressive, complex feature in the process of identity reformation away from the binary opposition of trauma/fragmentation versus healing/unity.

CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSION

In the November 3, 2005, issue of the French newspaper *Le Monde* appeared an article written by French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy and titled, “Freud, Heidegger, Notre Histoire” (Freud, Heidegger, Our History). This article, which created much havoc in the newspaper’s readership, brings Heidegger and Freud side by side in order to critique the ways in which today’s conservative “angry thinkers” tend to denounce and disavow the need to engage with, and counter the impact of, hegemonic conservative discourses and values that promote the possibility for and define the trajectory towards stability, healing, the recovery of meaning, a return to wholeness, happiness, etc., despite the social and political turmoil spreading worldwide today. Nancy does not name these “angry thinkers,” nor does he make any allusion to particular theoretical schools or fields of study or interest that could help locate precisely the departure points for his critique. His critique is global and deals with the ways in which sections of history can be conveniently erased in the process of promoting xenophobia and racisms of all types. According to Nancy, these “angry thinkers” too often denounce, denigrate, and dismiss the work of two theorists who have, with the means available to them in a very specific social, cultural, and historical context, worked against conservative systemic values and participated in the productive derailment of European Enlightenment ideologies. In this article, Nancy critiques the recurrent dismissal of two individuals and their life’s work, a dismissal that takes place through the synecdochal reduction of their life and historical input to what has become their main defining characteristic.

Heidegger supported Nazi ideology, and this problematic, not to say monstrous, political attachment damaged his academic credibility and forced many to not just question the validity and scope of his metaphysical queries and arguments concerning the meaning of being (a questioning which is always productive and necessary), but to reject them. Freud was “extraterritorial,” that is neither doctor, nor philosopher, nor psychologist, to repeat Nancy’s definition. His lack of adherence to any one particular frame of thinking, his status as theoretical outsider, was and still is one of the reasons behind the rejection by some of psychoanalysis qua theory of transplants, and the reason behind its rectification and cannibalization by others, i.e. the French medical body (we can refer back to the controversy around the Amendment Accoyer discussed at length in Chapter 1). Freud’s development and promotion of controversial methodologies to study the self and his bringing together of traditionally separate areas of knowledge to perform that study (i.e. literature and psychology) do not suit those who look to dispel the aura of this thinker of difference and his hybrid work and reaffirm the potential for salvation of conservative, monolithic discourses about the self.

So, on the one hand, Heidegger and his work are rejected because he was and remains a Nazi sympathizer. On the other hand, Freud and his work are rejected by the protectors of sameness and the theoretical status quo because he was and remains a theorist-outsider, a figure of disruption, a thorn in the thigh of conservative theoretical thinkers about the self, or in other words, a Jew in a system that rejects difference. Some of the readers of *Le Monde* who responded to Nancy’s article argued that it was a shame (some called its decision “abject” and accused Nancy of intellectual trickery) for Nancy to bring these two thinkers into the same essay because of their “obvious” enemy status.

The underlining question in the readers' responses was the following: one was a Nazi, the other a Jew, how can they or their work share any common feature? The reduction of these two men to a misguided political choice for one and a victimized cultural heritage for the other was a leitmotiv in the readers' angry responses to Nancy—problematic responses because of their rather clear intention to keep locked into a past disconnected from the present two historical characters whose work offers many of the tools and methods of survival still necessary today to make sense of the international political turmoil that is poisoning the post-colonial project of transcultural understanding.

Unlike most reader responses to this article seem to point out, Nancy is not in any way pedestalizing the work of Heidegger. He is not at all de-historicizing Heidegger's position vis-à-vis Nazi Germany. He is not forgetting that Heidegger did indeed, as one reader points out, joined the Nazi party in 1933 and paid his fees until 1945. He is not forgetting that Heidegger was a Nazi, nor is he arguing that the importance of his work can override his involvement with a fascist ideology. Nor is Nancy guilty of nihilism by constructing his analysis of the work of Freud and Heidegger upon the assessment that both authors helped question and counter unproblematized and unproductive, though very "stable" and comprehensible, discourses about being and selfhood.

What Nancy strives to do in this essay is critique the damage conservative discourses about the self can provoke—a critique which, for example, serves to warn against the explosion of nationalist desires, in the midst of social unrest in the Parisian suburbs, to recover the "true" French self buried under layers of cultural difference. What Nancy points out in this article is the complacency of conservative contemporary thinkers who believe that it is suitable to dismiss certain stories which have participated in the

process of making history, in this case the history of ideas in contemporary Europe, by de-historicizing these very stories. The dangers and deficiencies in this attitude are what Nancy wants to point out. What I can read in Nancy's commentary is the desire to convey the idea that such dismissal is deadly, that it is in more ways than one a fascist move, and that in order to counter the irresponsibility and violence of certain theoretical positions (fascism among others), it is necessary to recognize the multiple dimensions of Heidegger and Freud's work and its indelible influence upon contemporary thinking. This recognition has to involve a complex analysis of the productive aspects of their life and work and unveil the errors, the "insufficiencies," and the "risks" their work and their life stories also present. It counters any kind of reductionist envisioning of our Heideggerian and Freudian inheritances and points to the danger of falling into a critical trap that would once more foreclose the possibility for reconciliation between "enemy" cultures.

Heideggerian metaphysics and Freudian psychoanalysis, despite their limitations, have given us necessary keys to understand the ways in which we dwell in the world, the ways in which we love, hate, hurt, and heal. Therefore, both the productive complexity of their gift and the set of theoretical and practical problems that came with it have to be recollected. The historical and political significance of their work should neither be rejected nor uncritically glorified. Their work should be remembered as the product of a particular social and historical context. Their work should be put through the process of continuous critique and amelioration as this context changes. One should not hesitate to unveil the work's inaccuracies and incongruities, to re-read and reevaluate its characteristics and impacts (productive in terms of its revolutionary potential in fighting against Enlightenment ideals and regulations and their conservative theoretical heirs, and

disastrous in terms of its imperialist attachments and participation in the colonial project) through the lens of post-colonial social and political mutations in Europe and its ex-colonies.

In a text entitled “Postcolonial Culture, Postimperial Criticism,” W.J.T. Mitchell writes, “If the balance of literary trade has shifted from the First to the Second and Third Worlds, the production of criticism has become a central activity of the culture industries of the imperial centers, especially those in institutions of higher education” (Mitchell 476). He continues by arguing that for a long time criticism born into imperial centers was supporting the values and structures of this very political space, but “contemporary criticism, by contrast, tends to subvert the imperial authority” (Mitchell 476) and bring “a rhetoric of decolonization from the imperial center” (Mitchell 477). My argument in this dissertation is that psychoanalysis and trauma studies are both colonial and postcolonial practices. In the four chapters that compose this dissertation, I re-politicize psychoanalysis and point out the potential of revised, recontextualized psychoanalytical concepts to combat a series of imperial practices in Europe’s ex-colonies, and at the same time I denounce the ways in which the use and manipulation of psychoanalytical concepts have participated in the imperial project of promoting the deployment of Eurocentric values made universal and reproduced so as to erase the colonized and her cultural paradigm. I participate in what Ranjana Khanna in her book *Dark Continents: Psychoanalysis and Colonialism* calls “worlding” (a word and concept borrowed from Heidegger, interestingly enough, and reformulated through a post-colonial framework), that is “a projection into existence of certain elements in the world which now become unconcealed” (Khanna 4). According to Khanna, “The project of worlding is one of strife

between the unconcealed (worlded) and the concealed (earthed)” (Khanna 4). My work in these four dissertation chapters is the work of unconcealment. I unveil the ways in which global psychoanalytical conclusions on the characteristics and effects of trauma participate in the colonial project of erasing difference and foreclosing possible productive connections between “enemy” cultures (the ex-empire and its ex-colonies, but also the new empires and their colonial targets) in the post-colonial era. “Psychoanalysis is a colonial discipline” (Khanna 6), Khanna argues. She adds, “As a discipline, it formalized strategies to normalize a form of civilized being constituted through colonial political dynamics” (Khanna 6). In my work, these norms are pitted against non-Eurocentered, post-colonial social and cultural contexts. They are scrutinized and challenged by authors who, to use a term coined by Dipesh Chakrabarty in “Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History,” participate in the *provincialization* of this European colonial strategy, that is the unveiling of “the ambivalences, contradictions, the use of force, and the tragedies and ironies that attend it” (Chakrabarty 383). In order to transform trauma studies into a productive post-colonial field of study, writers in/about the field have to put it through the work/process of provincialization. The field of trauma studies has to open itself up to the consideration and analysis of forgotten traumas, and it has to recognize its own delinquencies, its own colonial tradition. Moreover, it should stop pretending to draw universal conclusions as to the “nature” and effects of trauma, and begin dealing with local traumatic events and their specific characteristics and repercussions. In his afore-mentioned essay, W. J. T. Mitchell writes,

One should not minimize the dissonance between post-imperial criticism and post-colonial cultures. Criticism may find itself preaching a rhetorical de-centering and de-essentializing to cultures that are struggling to find a center and an essence for

the first time. Conversely it may find itself bringing an imperial theory of culture into a situation that resists any conceptual totality. (Mitchell 477)

Western criticism, which includes the field of trauma studies, should put itself at the service of understanding difference—the different historical and political trajectories of cultures, their specific traumas, their particular evolutions according to locale. Trauma theories should let themselves be transformed and transformed again by the testimonies of those who have lived through trauma. Trauma theories should recognize the importance of analyzing localized traumas, the shapes they have taken, and the possibilities for new forms of resolution which depend on the traumatized individual or community's specific needs; and should let themselves be revised, revisited by the very witnesses of trauma. Only through a dialogical relationship between (Western) trauma studies and non-Western cultural histories can trauma studies shed its colonial skin and become a universally meaningful post-colonial field—universally meaningful because concerned with an analysis of localized traumas and their specificity.

The unearthing of the concealed counter-traumatic and counter-colonial potentiality of trauma studies, and more specifically psychoanalysis, takes place in the work of the writers of difference I name and quote in this dissertation. These authors manage to give back trauma studies, and thus psychoanalysis, its revolutionary potential by deterritorializing it, detaching it from its colonial heritage (though always recognizing and foregrounding that heritage), and transforming it into a productive post-colonial practice critical of its origins, its evolution, its violence. My dissertation makes the hopeful statement that the study of local traumas will participate in the re-politicization of a presently, and problematically, apolitical body of knowledge. I am hopeful that this re-

politicization will foster the post-colonial project of transcultural sharing and understanding—my project in this dissertation.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

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