A Comparative Analysis of Works of Maryse Condé and Gisèle Pineau: Literary Representations of Trauma and its Transgenerational Effect on the Postcolonial Caribbean Family

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Declaration

This thesis is my own work and no part of it has been submitted for a degree at this, or any other university.

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R M N D K Rathnayake
Abstract

This thesis provides an insight into the representations of trauma generated by slavery in selected novels of two contemporary French Caribbean writers: Maryse Condé and Gisèle Pineau. My research question is: how do representations of experiences of personal trauma in selected works of Condé and Pineau affect a cycle of dysfunctionality within the family unit? I borrow the term ‘transgenerational trauma,’ coined by Nicolas Abraham, to describe this type of experience. Past studies have undertaken an in-depth analysis of trauma in Condé’s and Pineau’s work. However, this study proposes to address the theme of trauma by focusing on depictions of the recurrence of family dysfunctionality in postcolonial Caribbean society. Contemporary scholars such as Bonnie Thomas and Nayana P. Abeysinghe have examined the representation of trauma in Caribbean literature. Thomas examines trauma and its transgenerational nature in Gisèle Pineau’s Chair Piment (2002) and Mes Quatre Femmes (2007) and suggests that Pineau’s work reflects the effects of slavery and colonisation which continue to define Caribbean identity. Abeysinghe examines the transmission of traumatic memory in the works of Condé and Pineau. Neither has looked at Condé’s and Pineau’s work in comparative perspective which allows to uncover how the Caribbean family unit, and in particular the Caribbean woman, has been affected by trauma across generations. Like Abeysinghe I also examine the transmission of traumatic memory. However, I examine transgenerational trauma as the catalyst for family dysfunctionality through the lens of Nicola King’s rememory and Marianne Hirsch’s postmemory. Each chapter studies two novels from each author and five novels in total for each author. I argue that Condé’s and Pineau’s protagonists perform a revisit to the primary site of trauma and exhume memories of elders, in particular their grandmothers, to acquire knowledge of their past. This knowledge is critical in the reconstruction of a coherent narrative of their traumatic past, which facilitates both the protagonists’ longing for an authentic self identity and sense of belonging. Understanding of the events which have shaped their life enables a resolution which in turn interrupts the chain of family dysfunctionality. The comparative study therefore shows how Condé and Pineau empower their protagonists to reconcile with their past which has been the source of their personal pain. My research integrates the study of Caribbean Francophone literature into the larger academic arena of postcolonial studies and is interdisciplinary in that I draw on history, literary theory and psychoanalysis. This analysis in effect aims at inviting other scholars to
expand readings of trauma and memory in postcolonial Caribbean society to other cultures and traditions in order to understand the multifaceted nature of readings of trauma.
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Special Note

_The University of Toledo Libraries: MLA Style Footnotes and Bibliography_ have been used for referencing of both English and French sources (with some minor modifications). Australian English spelling conventions have been followed throughout the thesis (except for quotations, where the conventions of the source text have been retained).
Introduction

With its colonial history dominated by violence and wrought by the practice of slavery, Caribbean society has been left to reconcile with its resulting trauma and traumatic memories. The theme of trauma, so prevalent in French Caribbean literature, is intimately linked to the region’s political and cultural history. On the one hand, colonialism and the colonial practice of slavery in particular, have fractured Caribbean identity. On the other, the French colonisers erased the historical and cultural experiences of the Caribbean people by imposing French values on the colonised, whilst simultaneously justifying their separation from, and dominance over, imported labour and indigenous people through a virulent form of racialism. The post-colonial situation is characterized by Caribbean society being left to struggle to retain a semblance of both personal and collective identity.

Maya Angelou says ‘[i]t takes more than a horrifying transatlantic voyage chained in the filthy hold of a slave ship to erase someone’s culture’. ¹ Similarly, one could argue that slavery is not the only source of trauma of the Caribbean people. In fact, personal traumas such as loss of loved ones and experience of sexual violence are common to any society. However, slavery was the documented point of departure of trauma of Caribbean people. As Beverley Ormerod writes ‘[s]lavery was the starting-point of alienation, loss of pride in one’s race and of confidence in oneself’. ² Memoirs and letters written by slaves, for example, memoirs of Mary Prince and the autobiographies of Esteban Montejo and Olaudah Equiano attest to the trauma experienced by slaves during colonisation. ³ Furthermore, commenting on the ideology

¹ Joanne Braxton, Interview with Maya Angelou, 9 Aug. 2012.
of racism, Hilary McD Beckles writes that the superiority of whiteness and the inferiority of blackness are notions that find their roots in the period of slavery. The ideologies that demean blackness were culturally instituted only after slavery. Furthermore, historians and anthropologists who were inspired by decolonisation turned to the legacy of slavery in search of explanations for problems identified in the postcolonial society. These include the instability of black families, female oppression within the family and the role of the family in shaping their community. For these reasons, many Caribbean authors tend to dwell heavily on the age of slavery. As a matter of fact, slavery has been identified as the prominent cause of Caribbean people’s trauma.

The aim of my research is to explore the representations of expressions and transmission of individual and collective trauma in the works of Maryse Condé and Gisèle Pineau. In an analysis of selected novels by these two French Caribbean female writers, the study will first directly address the transmission of traumatic memory through generations. In this study I am interested in determining how trauma is presented as a transgenerational phenomenon in the literary works of Condé and Pineau, and how this is conveyed through recurrent thematic and formal effects. In light of this, my research question is; how do experiences of personal trauma in selected works of Condé and Pineau affect a cycle of dysfunctionality within the family unit? I argue that Condé’s and Pineau’s protagonists revisit the sites of trauma, both physically and through the memory of others, in order to understand the circumstances of their life. With this knowledge they are able to construct a coherent narrative surrounding the trauma which allows for a resolution of this trauma, and which is so often played out in dysfunctional family relationships. This also aids in resolving the protagonists’ search for self-identity and belonging.

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By reading the novels of Condé and Pineau through the lens of dysfunctional relationships within the family, this thesis highlights the attempts of the two authors to explore the long-term effects of slavery on successive generations. It is the second and subsequent generations who have lived in close proximity to the pain, depression, and disassociation of those who have witnessed and experienced firsthand the trauma of slavery. In Condé’s and Pineau’s writing the violence committed against African slaves during the imperial past is transmitted across generations, sometimes explicitly through transgenerational narratives such as *Récit des Femmes* in Condé’s *Célanire cou-coupé* (2000), the story-telling of Julia in Pineau’s *L’Exil selon Julia* (1996), and sometimes as complex family secrets surrounding rape, incest and estrangement or as real acts of (often sexual) violence as in Pineau’s *L’Espérance-macadam* (1995) and Condé’s *Desirada* (1997). The consequences of traumatic experience being transmitted through generations have resulted in complex dysfunctional relationships between parents and children; mother and daughter, mother and son, father and son, father and daughter or between husband and wife. I argue that the characters in Condé’s and Pineau’s novels struggle to reconcile with the *causes* of this dysfunctionality in order to understand their life situation and to construct a coherent sense of self. Many of the characters in Condé’s and Pineau’s novels enact a return to the site of the conceptive act of violence in search of answers. These answers are often to be found in the stories of the mothers, grandmothers, aunts and sisters of the protagonists. Thus, I propose that a resolution can only be achieved by the discovery of the truth surrounding the circumstances of these violent experiences. This thesis further argues that transgenerational trauma narratives, such as those told by grandmothers to their granddaughters, facilitate this resolution. In order to construct an authentic sense of self, and at the same time interrupt the cycle of dysfunctionality, the protagonists in the novels seek to unlock the mysteries of their family’s past. Thus, this thesis examines the link that transgenerational trauma narratives offer to the unacknowledged experience of the Caribbean people, and the possibility of restoring the identity of the Caribbean self.
Colonial History of the Caribbean

In 1492, the explorer Christopher Columbus became the first European to set foot on the Caribbean islands. Because he believed that he had reached Asia and the East Indies, Columbus named these islands Indies. When Columbus’ mistake was later discovered, the Spanish renamed the islands West Indies to distinguish them from the Spice Islands in the Pacific Ocean. The indigenous population of the West Indies then comprised three major ethnic groups; the Taíno or Arawak, the Bahamas and the Caraib. The islands were also called ‘Caribbean,’ as they are today, after the ethnic group Caraib who lived in the Lesser Antilles.

The French first arrived in the Caribbean islands around 1635 as explorers seeking a route to the Pacific Ocean. By this time, almost all the indigenous population had been exterminated as a result of the Spanish conquest, particularly by enslavement, social dislocation and disease. The French settlers exterminated the remaining indigenous people by imposing conditions which led to starvation and disease. They also expelled them to neighbouring Dominica as they were not amenable to hard labour. For three years a system of indentured labour of ‘engagés blancs’ from France was then introduced to work the plantations of the Caribbean. A few years later, when this system of indentured labour had been deemed a failure, the French began to ship African slaves predominantly from the Gulf of Guinea to Martinique, Guadeloupe and Guiana to work on the sugarcane plantations.

After the abolition of slavery in 1848, the African slaves were replaced by indentured labourers from India. All the slaves and indentured labourers were placed under a

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7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
10 Indians were not the sole source of labour introduced into the Caribbean after the Abolition of slavery. Free Africans, a variety of Europeans, notably Portuguese Madeirans, also came to the
French bureaucratic and administrative framework. Needless to say, however, racially and culturally they were juxtaposed as the quintessential ‘Other’ to the European: ‘[the Caribbean people] have had their entire existence defined for them by the Other, the culturally dominant France, [they] have long suffered from a lack of “authentic” history and tangible roots’. A rigid racial hierarchy positioned Whites at the top, the Indian indentured labourers at the very bottom, with mulattos and Africans in between. The mulattos distanced themselves from the black slaves and attempted assimilation with Europeans. The békés held a racist attitude towards both mulattos and black slaves. The legacies of class and colour, evident even in contemporary Caribbean society, were firmly established with each group identifying themselves superior to the group below.

Since 1946, Martinique and Guadeloupe have both been overseas departments (DOM-département d’outre-mer) of France. The same laws and rights were applied to those living in overseas departments as to all French citizens. However, as a result of their political, economic and cultural domination by France, Guadeloupeans and Martinicans have been alienated from their own cultural identities. On the one hand, in the mid 20th century, France administered Martinique and Guadeloupe as the ‘same’

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12 Béké is a Creole term which is used to describe descendants of early Europeans, usually French settlers in the French Caribbean.

13 Haigh 4-5.


15 Haigh 5.
because the islands were proclaimed as overseas departments of France and, most importantly, were in the spirit of Republicanism allowed to integrate the ‘values’ of France. These ‘equal rights’ included the implementation of the French school system and the French language itself. On the other hand, because of the internalization of French values, those who lived on the islands had also internalised an acute sense of ‘otherness’ in relation to their African derived self-identity. They were torn between two different identities or more if they had mixed ancestry, and different languages; French and African languages. This has led to a scattered sense of self, for it is a situation which does not let them have their own history and culture. In short, the people of Martinique and Guadeloupe struggle to construct their own cultural identity, which is clearly distinct from that of France.

Being both geographically and psychologically displaced, the identity of Martinicans and Guadeloupeans was complicated by the fact that their homelands could be imagined only through memory. For example, the experiences of trauma suffered by the characters in the novels are often constructed around an initial separation from home and exile, much the same as the colonised experienced during colonisation. Their loss of homeland and culture leads to a condition that Edouard Glissant terms a ‘void’ in the historical memory of the Caribbean region, and consequently in its people. In the face of this void, narratives of trauma act both as a link to the unacknowledged experiences of the Caribbean people, and as a promise to the possibility of restoring a distinctly Caribbean sense of self.


17 Thomas 2-4.

Introduction

Literary Representations of Trauma

Mary Gallagher writes ‘[i]n the Caribbean in general, the past is commonly perceived as problematic and traumatic’. Caribbean literature communicates the traumatic legacies of this colonial past and the lost memory of the Caribbean self. Often this literature includes characters who attempt to find an explanation for the violence committed, either directly or indirectly, against them. For instance, physical violence includes the enslavement, mutilation and execution of slaves and the dispossession of homeland. Cultural violence, or what Gayatri Spivak calls ‘epistemic violence,’ refers to the dehumanization of slaves through the imposition of the colonisers’ language, religion and customs. Such instances, presented in Condé’s and Pineau’s novels, all allude to the trauma that is associated with slavery. As suggested by Maeve McCusker in ‘Carnal knowledge: trauma, memory and the body in Patrick Chamoiseau’s *Biblique des derniers gestes,*’ it is the narratives which allow trauma to surface from the ‘pays enterré’. These stories communicate traumas experienced ‘out of time,’ in that they emerge from the Caribbean colonial past.

Psychoanalytic theories offer useful insights into the way trauma manifests in individuals. More specifically, those psychoanalytic theories which focus on the relationship between trauma and literature have been helpful in understanding literary representations of traumatic experience. Cathy Caruth, for instance, has demonstrated the value of drawing together the theories of literature and psychoanalysis. She argues that literature and psychoanalysis can be unified to explore ‘the complex relation between knowing and not knowing’. The paradoxical concepts of ‘knowing’ and ‘not knowing’ suggest that the narrator ‘now’ in the present moment


21 Ibid.

of the narration, has the knowledge and the awareness that he or she did not possess ‘then’ at the time of the real experience. Memory is the link between the ‘knowing’ and the ‘not knowing’.

Cathy Caruth, for example, begins her work Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History by referring to the intersection between Freud’s Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1961) and Torquato Tasso’s Gerusalemme liberate (1581). She does this in order to highlight, with respect to trauma and its effects, the relationship between theory and literature. Caruth quotes Freud, in her analysis of Tasso’s epic:

Its hero, Tancred, unwittingly kills his beloved Clorinda in a duel while she is disguised in the armour of an enemy knight. After burial he makes his way into a strange magic forest which strikes the Crusaders’ army with terror. He slashes with his sword at a tall tree; but blood streams from the cut and the voice of Clorinda, whose soul is imprisoned in the tree, is heard complaining that he has wounded his beloved once again.

Caruth comments on this incident:

The actions of Tancred, wounding his beloved in a battle and then, unknowingly, seemingly by chance, wounding her again, evocatively represent in Freud’s text the way that the experience of trauma repeats itself, exactly and unremittingly, through the unknowing acts of the survivor and against his very will.

What strikes Caruth is not the unconscious act of inflicting a wound but the voice that cries out, the voice released ‘through the wound’. It is the voice that bears witness to the past, to the act of causing wound and repeating it.

Caruth continues:

If Freud turns to literature to describe traumatic experience, it is because literature, like psychoanalysis, is interested in the complex relation between knowing and not knowing. And it is, indeed at the specific point at which knowing and not knowing intersect that the language of literature and the psychoanalytic theory of traumatic experience precisely meet.

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24 Caruth 2.
25 Ibid.
26 Ibid 2-3.
The narratives of life stories, a critical element in the process of identity construction in Condé’s and Pineau’s novels, are made possible by memory which gives access to this ‘not knowing’. The protagonists of Condé and Pineau probe the veiled memories of others to access the unknown or forgotten history of their families. These protagonists, and sometimes the authors themselves, attempt to retrieve the lives and experiences of their parents and grandparents as a means to understand their own lives and construct a sense of self. Thus, the events of the past, as much as the experience of the present, are integral to a sense of personal identity.

Dominick LaCapra claims that trauma victims hesitate between knowing and not knowing, precisely because they do not want to work through their trauma.27 This happens in extreme events of trauma when the victim feels that he or she must be faithful to it by not talking about it. For instance, in working through the traumatic event the survivor may feel they are betraying those who were also consumed by the same past. If the trauma was caused by the death of a loved one, the survivor feels that the trauma is invested with value, thereby creating an unconscious desire to linger with the trauma.

LaCapra also suggests that the ‘confusion of self’ felt by the survivor may bring forth an incorporation of the traumatic experience, and the voice of the victim, in order to make possible the recovery of the (un)damaged self.

[...] a confusion of self and other which may bring an incorporation of the experience and voice of the victim and its re-enactment or acting out. As in acting out in general, one possessed, however vicariously, by the past and reliving its traumatic scenes may be tragically incapable of acting responsibly or behaving in an ethical manner involving consideration for others as others.28

LaCapra further suggests that this incorporation emerges at the point of writing of trauma (or post-traumatic writing). The act of writing paves the way for exploring this

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28 LaCapra 28.
confusion and investigating the complex relationship between ‘acting out’ and ‘working through’ trauma. Literature can get at trauma because it writes about, acts out and works through trauma by confronting and giving voice to the past. It ultimately provides the only means of coming to terms with traumatic experiences.

In *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, Dominick LaCapra also discusses the function of language as a mechanism to discipline the traumas of the past and their scars. LaCapra suggests that through writing, traumatic memories can be appeased and their ghosts laid to rest.

When the past becomes accessible to recall in memory, and when language functions to provide some measure of conscious control, critical distance and perspective, one has begun the arduous process of working over and through the trauma in a fashion that may never bring the full transcendence of acting out (or being haunted by revenants and reliving the past in its shattered intensity), but which may enable processes of judgement and at least limited liability and ethically responsible agency. These processes are crucial for laying ghosts to rest, distancing oneself from haunting revenants, renewing an interest in life, and being able to engage memory in more critically tested senses.

Condé and Pineau have incorporated the narratives of slavery at a textual level. These narratives remain absorbed into the collective psyche of the community and integrated into the society. Condé and Pineau, through writing, have given voice to their characters who share their experience of trauma through narration. In other words, the horrors of the past are recounted and reconstructed through language. These characters eventually achieve a sense of what LaCapra calls a ‘critical distance’. Language provides the means to interpret the trauma through awareness. Language facilitates the positioning of the (fractured) segments of the event that have been dispersed or manifested in different forms. In other words, language assists in the reconstruction of the traumatic event.

Caruth also argues that the story of trauma is not only

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29 Ibid 23.
30 Ibid 186.
31 Ibid 90.
the story of the individual in relation to the events of his own past but also the story of
the way in which one’s own trauma is tied up with the trauma of another, the way in
which trauma may lead, therefore, to the encounter with another, through the very
possibility and surprise of listening to another’s wound.\footnote{32}

Although trauma is usually examined as an individual experience, it also has a
collective dimension. According to Caruth, the traumatised person wants to be heard.
He or she has a story to tell. Through the telling of the story, one’s individual trauma
becomes a part of a collective trauma. In other words, individual trauma is inextricably
linked with the collective trauma of a community. For instance, when a victim of
trauma narrates his or her story, there is a community involved in listening, feeling and
responding.\footnote{33} Collective trauma, as opposed to individual trauma, may not have a
direct relationship to events that have negative impacts on an individual’s life.
However, a community represents a collection of individual traumas. Therefore,
psychoanalytical theories of trauma are equally applicable to examine collective
traumas. Indeed, Condé’s and Pineau’s writings reflect a strong correlation between
individual and collective trauma.

The word ‘trauma’ derives from the Greek verb ‘titrooskoo’ which means ‘to pierce or
to penetrate’.\footnote{34} In Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Sigmund Freud defines as traumatic
‘any excitation from outside which are powerful enough to break through the
protective shield [...]’.\footnote{35} He also adds that ‘[t]he concept of trauma necessarily implies
a connection of this kind with a breach in an otherwise efficacious barrier against
stimuli’.\footnote{36} Thus, trauma is an excitation, or a troubled condition of the mind, ensuing
from stimulation of an individual which starts on the outside and which is strong
enough to flow inwards. Both Sigmund Freud and Cathy Caruth recognise trauma as a

\footnote{32}{Caruth 8.}

\footnote{33}{J. Achilles Shay, Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character (London: Touchstone Books, 1994) 188.}

\footnote{34}{McCusker 173.}

\footnote{35}{Sigmund Freud, Beyond the Pleasure Principle (New York: Norton, 1961) 23.}

\footnote{36}{Ibid.}
psychological condition, despite the fact that trauma had previously been conceptualised as a wound inflicted on the body. Kalí Tal also defines trauma as an injury to the mind which emanates from ‘a life threatening event that displaces his or her preconceived notions about the world’.\footnote{Kalí Tal, World of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 15.} Thus, unlike a wound inflicted on the body, the wound of the mind is often more difficult and takes longer to heal. Trauma of mind may be triggered by a powerful, life-changing act such as rape. Like death itself,\footnote{In Une mort très douce, Simone de Beauvoir states that although all humans are subject to death, for each individual, death is an accident which is always unexpected: ‘Il n’y a pas de mort naturelle: rien de ce qui arrive à l’homme n’est jamais naturel puisque sa présence met le monde en question. Tous les hommes sont mortels: mais pour chaque homme sa mort est un accident et, même s’il la connaît et y consent, une violence indue,’ Simone de Beauvoir, Une mort très douce (Paris: Gallimard, 1964) 164.} violations such as rape subvert the individual’s rational understanding of possibilities and are defined by their inaccessibility to the conscious mind. As a result, the experience remains suspended in a perpetually unassimilated state. This state reflects the concept of ‘knowing and not-knowing’ posed by Caruth. Caught between knowing and not knowing, the traumatic experience can present itself repeatedly within the subject through haunting, flashbacks or nightmares; these are the domain of the traumatic event.\footnote{Jean Laplanche, Vie et mort en psychanalyse (Paris: Flammarion, 1970) 216-29.} Trauma is, therefore, not simply locatable in the original event in an individual’s past, but also in his present and future. Furthermore, Caruth develops this notion by arguing that the recurrence of the experience of trauma - which Freud calls ‘traumatic neurosis’\footnote{Freud, Beyond the Pleasure Principle (London: The International Psycho-analytical Press, 1922) 8.} – is the mind’s attempt to convey a message, a truth which at present we do not have access to; ‘the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available’.\footnote{Caruth 4.} And further ‘[t]his truth, in its delayed appearance and its belated address, cannot be linked only to what is known, but also to what remains unknown in our very
actions and language'. Thus, trauma makes itself essentially evident only in ‘another place, in another time; because of the latency inherent in its structure and its essential quality is the unexpectedness’. Indeed, Condé’s and Pineau’s novels trace an extended interaction with the principal preoccupations of trauma studies through the presentation of their characters.

In accordance with the tension surrounding ‘knowing and not knowing’ argued by Cathy Caruth, this thesis will examine the process of reconstruction and reconciliation with the past (through memory). Nicola King, for instance, asserts that it is memory which negotiates the relationship between the repressed event and its reconstruction:

... 1) the event; 2) the memory of the event; and 3) the writing of (the memory of) the event. It is the third stage of this process that constructs the only version of the first to which we have access, and memory is the means by which the relationship between the event and its reconstruction is negotiated.

Narratives are the discursive manifestation of memory and provide access to the, as yet, unrevealed past. This study will explore the function and reconstruction of memory in the trauma narratives surrounding the lives of the characters in Condé’s and Pineau’s work, and how they are implicated in the construction of self identity. In the novels of Condé and Pineau the narratives of trauma thus become tools to repair and heal, to reveal the ‘not knowing’.

Being able to relate one’s story is an act of remembering. Nicola King uses the term ‘rememory’ to emphasise the ‘afterwardsness of memory...the fact that memory is always a representation. It suggests “re-remembering,” a remembering after a forgetting, the psychic insistence of the traumatic event and the cyclical structure of the narrative’. The ‘re’ in rememory points to the belatedness of the traumatic

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42 Ibid.
43 McCusker 173.
44 King 6.
45 King 158.
memory. Rememory also suggests a link between individual memory of personal experience and collective memory of a community or society. Rememory is often associated with the term ‘reconstruction’. The ability to reconstruct one’s stories helps the victims of trauma regain control of their life. The process of reconstructing occurs through rememory. Indeed, Condé’s and Pineau’s writings reflect this association between rememory and reconstruction of the protagonist’s past.

Reflections on Maryse Condé and Gisèle Pineau

Among contemporary Francophone Caribbean female writers, Maryse Condé is one of the most prolific. Born in Guadeloupe in 1937, she left the island for Paris at the age of sixteen to further her studies. Condé’s family were members of the relatively privileged black bourgeoisie in racially divided Guadeloupean society. As Condé explains in her 1999 autobiography *Le cœur à rire et à pleurer*, the black bourgeoisie, including her own family, were ready to sacrifice their Caribbeanness to acquire the presumed ‘superiority’ of Frenchness. Her writing reflects her views of Caribbean identity which emerges from the experiences of colonialism, slavery and métissage.

Whilst Condé began her writing career in the 1970s, Gisèle Pineau is a more recent female writer who published her first short story *Paroles de terre en larmes* in 1987. Unlike Condé, Pineau was not born in the Caribbean. Rather, she was born in 1956 in France to parents of Guadeloupean origin and spent her childhood in ‘a very racist

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46 King 150.

47 What distinguishes rememory from reminiscence is that the latter is associated with an individual’s willingness to recall past events.

48 However, Condé neither identifies herself as a French writer or a francophone writer. In *Entretiens avec Maryse Condé* by François Pfaff Condé states “Je me considère comme un écrivain. Les gens qui ont envie d’ajouter des étiquettes, c’est à eux de le faire. Moi, je ne me vis ni comme écrivain guadeloupéen, ni comme écrivain francophone. J’écris et puis c’est tout” (51).

49 François Pfaff, *Entretiens avec Maryse Condé* (Paris: Karthala, 1993) 14. Condé states that her parents used to visit only the other black families because they considered the mulatto to be ‘bastards’ and whites as ‘enemies’: “Mes parents ne voulaient fréquenter pratiquement personne que des Noirs. Ils étaient racistes à leur façon. Je l’ai dit, les mulâtres, pour eux, c’étaient des bâtards; les Blancs, c’étaient des ennemis...”.
suburb of Paris. She and her family, however, relocated to Martinique when Pineau was thirteen years old. Pineau then spent the next twenty years in both Martinique and Guadeloupe working as a psychiatric nurse, not returning to Paris until she was thirty three years old. Pineau prefers to be recognised as a Caribbean, rather than a French writer. In her 1995 essay ‘Ecrire en tant que Noire,’ she expresses her identity as Caribbean rather than French: ‘Ecrire en tant que femme noire créole, c’est apporter ma voix aux autres voix des femmes d’ici [...], c’est donner à entendre une parole différente dans la langue française’.

It is evident that Condé and Pineau are descendants of a nation that shares a history of foreign domination and colonialism, as well as a legacy of resistance and struggle to assert their freedom, a struggle that still continues at the economic and cultural levels. Thus, they situate their work within the Caribbean life-experience, in particular, in how slavery and patriarchy have affected Caribbean women. Both Condé and Pineau appear to be callous in their attempt to pile transgressions and disasters onto their characters. However, Condé personally believes that some of her novels, such as Célanire cou-coupé (2000) and Histoire de la femme cannibale (2003) are humorous although they have been at times interpreted by recent academics as tragic stories. In the case of Pineau, it is her experience as a psychiatric nurse that reflects in her characters along with her historical background. Thus, her intention in writing is ‘to commomemorate, to say how proud [she] was of [her ancestors].’

However, neither Condé nor Pineau favours radical theories of feminism. For instance, in an interview with Taleb Khyar, Condé states that ‘[t]he kind of world that the radical


53 Veldwachter 183.
feminists are dreaming of frightens me. Petrifies me’. Pineau believes that feminism does play a role in French Caribbean literature, but ‘c’est un féminisme qui s’exprime pour les femmes et pas contre les hommes’. Representing a younger generation of female writers, Pineau not only continues her literary predecessors but also evolves towards ‘a more self-consciously committed act of writing literature’. More in line with postcolonial feminist writers such as Gayatri Spivak and Chandra Mohanty, both Pineau and Condé consider writing as a path toward female liberation for it provides a way of articulating women’s oppression. Furthermore, while dissociating herself from any political ideology, Condé believes that, as a writer, she is not only able to express the suffering of women per se, but also help Caribbean society, both women and men, work toward a unique Caribbean identity through a resolution with the colonial past. In an interview with Alexyna Mekel, Condé states that writing is ‘the only form of combat for a writer…’. She also adds that ‘I do not write political pamphlets. What seems important to me is Marcus Garvey’s statement: “I shall teach the black man to see into himself”. That, in my opinion, is a writer’s function’. Pineau also suggests that “[s]eule la parole peut libérer les êtres humiliés. Il faut parler si on veut s’en sortir”. Elizabeth Wilson remarks that through the protagonist’s story women writers often attempt to convey the narrative of their country in such a way that ‘the country’s political and cultural situation is “mediated symbolically through the healing of the woman, with which it coincides and is synonymous”’. The female protagonists in


56 Thomas 31.


58 Ibid.


Condé’s and Pineau’s works symbolise the history of Caribbean society. For both Condé and Pineau literature offers a medium through which they can (re)claim a sense of identity. Writing allows them to ‘speak of their struggle (and by extension their communities’ struggle), to name themselves and express from multiple perspectives and positions their personal and collective experiences’.  

My interest in Condé’s and Pineau’s writing derives from the striking similarities I observe in their approach to transgenerational trauma. Unlike other Guadeloupean or Martinican male and female writers, Condé and Pineau do not dwell heavily on négritude or créolité. Instead, these two female writers provide an important voice for the historically marginalised black women to overcome their past traumas whilst also demonstrating the way in which this trauma has filtered down to subsequent generations of French Caribbean people. Furthermore, Condé’s and Pineau’s depiction of characters, engaged in a process of piecing together their past, facilitates my examination of transgenerational trauma through the lens of rememory. Despite the fact Condé and Pineau belong to two different generations of writers; their perspective on writing trauma in the novels chosen for this study is compatible in that they refer to the experience of slavery as the source of this trauma. Therefore, I believe Condé’s and Pineau’s work provides fertile grounds for my study that frequently captures the similarities rather than differences in their writing.

In so doing several common themes emerge from both Condé’s and Pineau’s works. These include racial and cultural issues, gender relations in different historical eras, (interracial) marriage, the inability of mothers to relate emotionally to their daughters and the search for a personal and a cultural sense of self. Most importantly they highlight women’s experience of violence; including the violence of separation from home, the violence of exile in an unknown foreign land, and the sexual violence of rape and incest. Another characteristic of their writing is the narration of stories of the

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female experience which includes women of all colours; white, black, *mulâtre* or *mulâtresse* (mulatto), *chabin(e)* and *câpre* or *câpresse*.

Some of the themes that Condé and Pineau explore are related to their personal experiences. For instance, Pineau experienced racism on the streets of Paris and also in the classroom. In the early 1960s only a few black students attended French schools. From the age of five, Pineau was a victim of racial taunts. At school, she was humiliated because of her blackness and told to return to her country which, by then, she had no knowledge of. In ‘Ecrire en tant que Noire,’ Pineau not only speaks of her feelings of exclusion as a black child in Paris, but also her inability to conform to the life of other Caribbean immigrant families in Paris, including her own. As such she cultivated an acute sense of otherness and feelings of emotional displacement. This prompted her to express the conditions of her ‘exile’ through writing. As Pineau says ‘[…] I console myself with writing. With *L’Exil selon Julia*, I consoled myself for my childhood.’

However, perhaps because of her unfamiliarity with Creole culture and her inability to speak Creole, the sense of unease Pineau experienced toward Caribbean emigrant life in Paris also played out upon her move to Guadeloupe. It was Pineau’s grandmother, an illiterate woman from a rural village in Guadeloupe called Routhier, who nurtured in her a sense of ‘Caribbeanness’ with Caribbean folklores, stories related to Caribbean life and culture which eventually provided the young Pineau with the confidence to find a place for herself in both French and Caribbean society. Drawing on her own life experience, Pineau’s uprooted and culturally alienated protagonists travel across the world in an attempt to resolve the inner tension which arises from not having a ‘place

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62 The complex skin colours of Caribbean society define *mulâtre* or *mulâtresse* (mulatto) as a person born to one white parent and one black parent while the term *câpre* or *câpresse* describes someone with one black, and one mulatto parent. *Chabin(e)*, in contrast, describes someone of mixed parentage and ancestry who has both light skin and light hair. See for example, Clarisse Zimra, “Patterns of Liberation in Contemporary Women Writers,” *L’Esprit créateur*, XVII (1977): 109.


64 Veldwachter 182.
in the world’. This is exemplified in Pineau’s récit *L’Exil selon Julia* (1996) which she wrote as a tribute to her grandmother.

This theme of nomadism also appears in Condé’s novels. In *Célanire cou-coupé* (2000), *La Belle Créole* (2001), *Histoire de la femme cannibale* (2003), and *Les belles ténébreuses* (2008) Condé depicts protagonists who travel across continents; between the Caribbean, United States, France, Asia and Africa, in an attempt to claim a ‘homeland’ and piece together the jigsaw of their personal histories. In so doing they travel a path traced through time and previous generations (the doubling of ‘routes/roots’) to arrive at ‘origins’.65 Condé has herself taken those same numerous journeys and lived in many countries. In an interview with Noëlle Carruggi, Condé admits that her journeys were ‘voyages de découverte’.66 They have helped her to realise that she ‘n’est pas une Africaine, n’est pas une Américaine, n’est peut-être même pas Antillaise, [mais] Maryse Condé est simplement elle-même, un certain mélange, résultat d’une série d’expériences purement individuelles’.67

Another recurrent theme in the works of both Condé and Pineau is sex; both consensual sex and non-consensual sex. For instance, in Condé’s *Moi, Tituba, sorcière… noire de Salem* (1986) the rape of Abena in the slave ship by an English sailor draws the reader’s attention to the inhumanity of the Middle Passage. The theme of rape recurs in subsequent novels, including *La migration des cœurs* (1995), *Desirada* (1997) and *Célanire cou-coupé* (2000). Pineau similarly explores themes of rape and incest in her work. For instance, Pineau’s *L’Espérance-macadam* (1995) depicts the horror of incest experienced by Eliette and Angela. Apart from forced violent sex, Condé and Pineau present women who freely engage in consensual sex.68 This form of sex can be

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67 Ibid.

68 Abeysinghe 10.
ecstatic, as in Pineau’s *La Grande Drive des Esprits* (1993) or an enactment of power (or simply an easy way of achieving something) as in Condé’s *Célanire cou-coupé*. 69

In brief, the themes of rape and incest, of physical and emotional displacement, of a search for belonging in Condé’s and Pineau’s writing all arise from slavery. Their work reflects the traumatic effects of the violence experienced by Caribbean women and the way it recurs through generations. In other words, most of Condé’s and Pineau’s literary creations portray violence, trauma and their transgenerational nature. For this reason, my research draws particularly on the psychoanalytic concept of ‘transgenerational trauma’ and investigates its impact on the Caribbean family.

An Analysis of Transgenerational Trauma Through the Lens of Postmemory

The notion of transgenerational trauma has been expanded in reaction to the horrors of the Holocaust, and has since been identified as a useful psychological concept to understand better the experience of trauma in other contexts. In 1975, psychoanalyst Nicolas Abraham employed the term ‘transgenerational trauma’ in his article ‘Notes on the Phantom’. 70 Abraham uses the term ‘Phantom’ in an attempt to suggest the impact of an individual’s troubled life experiences on the lives of his or her descendants. Thus, the ‘phantom’ is not confined to the individual; it penetrates the lives of subsequent generations because it claims the idea that some people unconsciously transmit the secrets of the lives of their ancestors to their descendants. As such, the symptoms of trauma, experienced as uncontrollable, invasive and imposed rather than chosen, 71 of the successive generation do not manifest from the life experience of an individual but from the traumas, inner conflicts or secrets of their ancestors. Therefore, their trauma ‘eventually leads to the psychoanalysis in absentia of several generations (parents,

69 Ibid.


grandparents, uncles, et al) through the symptoms of a descendant’. 72 Thus, the concept of the phantom allocates greater importance to family histories, particularly to the secret histories of families. 73

Marianne Hirsch has extended Abraham’s work, developing the concept of ‘postmemory,’ which I believe is a valuable conceptual tool to study representations of transgenerational trauma in Condé’s and Pineau’s writings. Hirsch describes ‘postmemory’ as a ‘structure of inter- and trans-generational transmission of traumatic knowledge and experience. It is a consequence of traumatic recall but - unlike posttraumatic disorder - at a generational remove’. 74 In other words, Hirsch contends that the descendants of victims (or indeed perpetrators) of traumatic acts connect deeply to the memory of the previous generation(s). However, it is a received memory, distinct from the first-hand experience. Thus, the ‘post’ in ‘postmemory’ does not simply imply the memory of aftermath, but ‘reflects an uneasy oscillation between continuity and rupture’. 75 It is the continuity of memory which is distinguished from individual memory by history and generational distance. Postmemory, according to Hirsch, is a special and powerful form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection, but through an imaginative investment and creation. 76 In addition, Hirsch argues that received memory is powerful enough to impede subsequent generations from constructing stories and experiences of their own. They live in a past in which they neglect their own being and their present. Hirsch believes that this phenomenon is ‘the experience of postmemory’. 77

72 Ibid.


75 Ibid.


77 Ibid 107.
Furthermore, the concept of postmemory is useful in that it examines the role of the family as a space of transmission. I believe that Pineau and Condé reflect in their novels the notion of postmemory, not only in its physical manifestations (of violence) but also in its impact on familial relationships. Thus, this thesis will discuss the dysfunctionality within the family through the lens of postmemory.

Clearly there are differences in the experiences of the Holocaust and that of slavery in the Caribbean; however, parallels can still be drawn. These include ‘expulsion from home,’ ‘transportation to a site of exile’ and incarceration within indescribably cruel conditions. It is possible to apply readings initially concerning the Holocaust to other sites of trauma, such as the Caribbean experience of slavery, which, because of the violence from which it emerged, is distinct from other postcolonial cultures. Violence is central to the Caribbean which was formed through genocide, transportation and slavery.

The Dysfunctional Family in the French Caribbean and its Representations in the Works of Condé and Pineau

Both Condé and Pineau believe that contemporary dysfunctional gender relationships in the French Caribbean have their antecedents in slavery. Their work brings to life the colonial practices which emasculated black men and tore apart the family unit. For instance Condé, in *La Parole des femmes*, asserts that under slavery black men were not only denied the right to autonomy over their lives, but also any rights they had in relation to their families. In *Femmes des Antilles: Traces et Voix*, a book Pineau coauthored with Marie Abraham in 1998 on the 150th anniversary of the abolition of slavery, Pineau speaks of the disempowerment of black men during slavery while their wives and children were possessed by the colonial master. For instance, the black

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man could not claim rights over his biological children. Instead, the colonial master
owned his wife and children, and had the authority to sell him without his family. Phaf
has made the observation that:

[b]lack men and women were the “damned” of colonial society, and for all practical
purposes they had no family ties. They could be bought and sold at will, and their living
conditions did nothing to stimulate a desire for children of their own.81

Valérie Loichot further strengthens this in Orphan Narratives by asserting that the
family under slavery endured two ‘murder attempts’.82 The first is the slave owners
attempt to separate husbands from wives, and parents from their children. The slave
master refused the biological fathers’ and mothers’ rights to their children. The
realities of slavery disrupted the forming of a normal relationship between family
members, particularly the loving bond between mother and child.83 The second
‘murder attempt’ was the slave master’s effort to promote the image of the African
man as an ‘irresponsible absentee father’ and women as ‘natural breeders’.84 The
labelling of black women as sexual objects allowed white slave owners to transfer
the blame for their own immorality. Essentially, white masters were able to rape slave
women and deny their parental rights, all the while blaming the black woman.

With the Introduction of the Code Noir in 1685, the slave owner’s power was extended
to allow him to forbid marriage between slaves if the relationship did not meet his
approval. Within this legal framework the integrity of the family unit deteriorated. In
regard to the master’s power to tear apart slave couples and disperse their families,
Condé affirms that ‘[c]’est la structure d’un pays dominé, l’exploitation dont les Nègres

81 Ineke Phaf, “Women and Literature in the Caribbean,” Unheard Words: Women and Literature in
Africa, the Arab World, Asia, the Caribbean and Latin America, ed. Mineke Schipper (London: Allison &
Busby, 1985) 170.

82 Valérie Loichot, Orphan Narratives: The Postplantation Literature of Faulkner, Glissant, Morrison, and

83 Ibid.

84 Ibid 4.
sont victimes qui ne permettent pas le bonheur des êtres, et détruisent les couples’.\textsuperscript{85} These circumstances led to the emergence of a matrifocal family in which the woman, in the absence of and without the financial and emotional support of a father-husband, was left with the sole responsibility for her family.

The plantation-system doubly oppressed the black female slave because of her sex. While the value of the black male ‘chattel’ slave derived from his compulsory labour and its direct contribution to the economy of the plantation, the black female slave was valued for her economic, sexual and reproductive capacities. As Barbara Bush writes ‘[t]he common image of the woman slave, culled from planter and abolitionist sources alike, is a compound of the scarlet woman, the domineering matriarch and the passive workhorse’.\textsuperscript{86} In other words, besides her labour she was expected to perform sexual favours for her white master, and perhaps more importantly bear mulatto children to provide future slave labour. In so doing, black women were able to acquire some rights and even social position vis à vis black men. For example, they were assigned lighter workloads and special provisions were made for their mulatto children. As Smith asserts ‘non-legal unions between higher status men and lower status women are not negative; they result in a positive status increment for the offspring’.\textsuperscript{87} These provisions allowed black women to maintain a degree of autonomy over their children and their own lives, a privilege denied the black man in his inability to exercise authority within his family. A situation in which the mother became the central figure of the family further stripped the black man of his masculinity and power.

The female-headed family thus contributed to the emasculation of the Caribbean man. In \textit{La Parole des femmes}, Condé states that male infidelity, a common feature of Black Caribbean society, is one way that men react to the frustration of their subordination

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\textsuperscript{85} Condé, \textit{La Parole} 35.


and diminished role as head of the family. The black man becomes involved in adulterous relationships, or even rape and incest, to demonstrate his virility. Valérie Loichot’s ‘Negations and Subversions of Paternal Authority in Glissant’s Fictional Works’ studies the role of the father within the French Caribbean family. Loichot believes that the weak role or complete absence of the ‘Caribbean father’ emerges from the colonial slave-system. It produced men who have no place in parenting. In the French Caribbean, black men are left with only the potential to ‘prove’ their virility and power through the act of procreation: ‘fathering a child - as opposed to parenting - [is]...the true sign of manhood’. As such, raising children is seen as the responsibility of women rather than men: ‘L’enfant, c’est l’affaire de la femme antillaise’.

Successive generations of Caribbean men have been socialised into matrifocal or mother-headed households and raised ‘in situations where female gender identity is strong, and, where a father or other older male is absent [...].’ In this way Caribbean men do not have the opportunity to ‘absorb notions of male status and identity through role modelling in the home’. This situation perpetuates a cycle of male unreliability. As Valérie Loichot suggests:

> There is ... no possible identification with the father ... rather a constant subordination, a constant immaturity. In Martinique, the name father, père, is reserved for God, the captain of a soccer team, or other authorities; the father is papa. The Caribbean man cannot be father, and cannot have a father.

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91 Senior 38.

92 Ibid.

My theorization of the dysfunctional family is based on Guadeloupean literature, particularly Condé’s and Pineau’s stories that reflect many of the negative aspects of Caribbean society which has been shaped by its colonial history. The depiction of family can only be understood when it is linked to the common experience of slavery and the plantation system. I understand dysfunctionality as disruption of family relations between its immediate members through sexual violence, forced or deliberate family separations, and issues concerning gender and race. The nature of these families is that the familial space is devoid of parental love, particularly maternal love, a site of rape and incest and fractured by racial hierarchies. For instance, Marie-Noëlle in Condé’s *Desirada* (1997) and Josette in Pineau’s *Fleur de Barbarie* (1995) reside with their mothers but receive no maternal intimacy. Both are consumed in missions of piecing together (and therefore reclaiming) their biological fathers’ identities. Their stories encapsulate the loss of stable marriage alliance and kinship patterns within the extended family. Pineau’s *L’Espérance-macadam* (1995) reflects the violence committed against women and how the home-space, which is ideally a place of security and protection, can be transformed into a site of rape and incest. In Pineau’s *L’Âme prêtée aux oiseaux* (1998) the abandonment of a mulatto son by his French biological mother reflects the ingrained racialism which justified and maintained relations of exploitation in plantation life. All these characters are defined by their emotional disturbance, cut off or abandoned from family, which affects their emotional and psychological growth as adults.

The dysfunctional family, as portrayed in Condé’s and Pineau’s novels, does not have a central authority of father or mother. This leaves the child deprived of parental guidance. Valérie Loichot uses the trope of *orphan* to describe such children. However, these children recognise the essential lack of parental presence and it inspires them to investigate their origins. Loichot writes that, where the family is torn apart, kinship ties play an important role in transmitting family histories. This assertion resonates with

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95 Loichot, *Orphan Narratives* 2.
the histories of those slaves who ‘adapted to or resisted such forces to ensure that, in
the words of the old Ashanti proverb, the “family tree” was not cut’. 96 Despite the
violence inflicted on the slave family, it is the children, perhaps the most vulnerable,
who play an active role in family reconstruction. 97 In Condé’s and Pineau’s novels,
orphan characters such as Mina in Chair Piment, Claude in La Vie Scélératé and Josette
in Fleur de Barbarie manage to recover their family stories and make sense of their life.

Some of Condé’s and Pineau’s characters also show that their dysfunctional life has been handed over to them by their parents. In other words, these characters are taking over the dysfunctional life of their parents. For instance, Condé’s Desirada provides examples of women of three generations; grandmother, mother and daughter with similar emotional distance and disturbance. Mina in Pineau’s Chair Piment regenerates the dysfunctionality of her father, Melchior, which was handed over to him by his father Gabriel. While Marie-Noëlle demonstrates how the children who grew up in a cold and distant environment tend to become cold in their adult life, Mina confirms how children who did not receive nurturance and care find it difficult to establish and maintain intimate relationships in adult life. It is this reproduction or regeneration of dysfunctionality in successive generations that I theorize as dysfunctional patterns.

Originality: My Contribution to the Field

Research on trauma and its impact on gender relationships is a growing field of interest in the context of Caribbean Francophone literature. 98 Although the works of Maryse Condé and Gisèle Pineau have received a great deal of attention from contemporary scholars, the representation of trauma, particularly transgenerational

96 Ibid 3.
97 Ibid.
trauma, is an area of research which to date has received very little attention. Bonnie Thomas compares and contrasts the presentation of trauma in Gisèle Pineau’s Chair Piment (2002) and Mes Quatre Femmes (2007) and its transgenerational nature in ‘Transgenerational trauma in Gisèle Pineau’s Chair Piment and Mes Quatre Femmes’.\textsuperscript{99} By examining how the characters in both novels respond to powerful traumatic events and the relationship these events have with memory, Thomas suggests that Pineau reveals how, long after its abolition, the powerful effects of slavery and colonisation continue to shape the Caribbean people’s sense of personal identity. Whilst it is true that numerous scholars have independently studied the works of Condé and Pineau, none have taken a comparative approach focused on these two authors. Nayana P. Abeysinghe in ‘Intergenerational Memory in the Work of Francophone Caribbean Women Writers’\textsuperscript{100} does examine selected works of Maryse Condé and Gisèle Pineau and suggests that individual and cultural memory in their work is intergenerational. She does not however undertake a comparative analysis. In her thesis she considers four different paradigms of intergenerational memory - the transmission of traumatic memory in Maryse Condé’s Desirada and Célanire cou-coupé; the lingering of the “spirit” of communal pasts in Gisèle Pineau’s La Grande Drive des Esprits; the transmission and transformation of literary history in the context of intertextuality in Condé’s writing of Emily Brontë’s Wuthering Heights in La migration des cœurs; and finally, the bequest of memory within the context of diasporic and transnational inheritances in Pineau’s L’Exil selon Julia and Chair Piment. The first paradigm is closer to my study in that I also examine the transmission of traumatic memory. However, my research focuses on transgenerational trauma as the catalyst for the dysfunctional family. Although the term dysfunctionality has been used by many postcolonial Caribbean critics, none of them have defined or elaborated what they mean by it.\textsuperscript{101}


\textsuperscript{101} See, for example, Nayana P. Abeysinghe, Intergenerational Memory in the Work of Francophone Caribbean Women Writers, diss., Columbia University, 2010, (Ann Arbor: UMI, 2010, 3420841); Robert
believe that my definition of dysfunctional family and dysfunctional patterns will provide a new lens to look at the distinctiveness of Caribbean literature. The understanding of the dysfunctionality within the context of Caribbean space will eventually be an intellectual tool to dismantle the negative impacts of colonialism and its postcolonial successors.

Each chapter in my thesis addresses two novels; one of these being the work of Pineau, the other Condé. My intention in this study is to draw together the different presentations of transgenerational trauma by Condé and Pineau and apply these to my chosen theme, the nature of the dysfunctional family. In so doing I hope to integrate the study of Caribbean Francophone literature into the larger academic understanding of postcolonial societies. I believe that this comparative approach allows me to situate the complex interplay of history, literature and psychology in an attempt to restore the identity of the Caribbean people.

Overview of Chapters

This thesis is composed of five chapters. Each chapter addresses two novels; one of each by Condé and Pineau. The works discussed in the thesis highlight the contrasting ways in which transgenerational trauma has been depicted by these authors. In this analysis of transgenerational trauma and its effects on the family, I will draw on theories particularly from scholars including Sigmund Freud, Pierre Janet, Cathy Caruth, Marianne Hirsch, Nicolas Abraham, Maria Torok, Susan J. Brison, Judith Herman Lewis and Nicola King.

It is acknowledged that an interdisciplinary approach to critical writing in Francophone literature is more prominent in English than in French. In other words, substantial body of writing on Francophone literature is available in English. For instance, prominent critics of Francophone literature such as Celia Britton, Dawn Fulton, Sam Haigh and Mary Gallagher represent Anglophone academia whilst only a few academic texts can be found in French. Although there are Caribbean authors such as Jean Bernabé,
Patrick Chamoiseau, Raphaël Confiant et al, only a few like Mireille Rosello, Beverley Ormerod Noakes and Lydie Moudelino focus on Guadeloupean literature. For this reason, the reference I provide in my analysis is mostly in English.

Chapter One, entitled ‘What Lies Behind the Dysfunctional Family?’ broadly discusses the causes of the dysfunctional family. Drawing on Condé’s *La Vie Scélérate* (1987) and Pineau’s *Chair Piment* (2002) this chapter introduces some of the most prevalent themes that are woven through my analysis in subsequent chapters. These themes include the irresponsibility and infidelity of men, the experiences of exile, rape and incest, the emotional absence of the parent, resolution through revisiting sites of trauma, and the grandmother’s role in the protagonist’s attempted resolution. *La Vie Scélérate* introduces the protagonist, Albert, whose life has been conditioned by the dominant ideologies surrounding colour, class and sexuality in the Caribbean. His children are so preoccupied with their father’s past they have forgotten their present. In *Chair Piment*, the trauma of the death of Rosalia in a fire in 1975 haunts successive generations of the Montério family. Mina Montério, unable to recover from her sister Rosalia’s death, displays the symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Her trauma manifests in a manner which is ‘fixed or frozen in time, refuses to be presented as past, but is perpetually re-experienced in a painful, dissociated, traumatic present’.102 While living in France in her later life, Mina returns to Piment, her birthplace and the site of Rosalia’s death, to unravel the mystery of her family’s past. Mina discovers that the unexpected deaths of her family members are due to a spell cast by Suzon, Mina’s father’s lover, because she could not fulfil her dream of marriage. Both *La Vie Scélérate* and *Chair Piment* depict successive generations obsessed with reclaiming the past to the point where it denies them the possibility of constituting their own memories in the present; this points to the experience of both rememory and postmemory.

Chapter Two is entitled ‘Reclaiming Memory from the Trauma of Physical and Sexual Abuse’. This chapter examines the themes of non-consensual sex, as in Pineau’s

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Introduction

*L’Espérance-macadam* (1995) and consensual sex as in Condé’s *Célanire cou-coupé* (2000) which both paradoxically generate instability in the lives of the protagonists. Violent sex, including rape and incest, is a recurrent theme in *L’Espérance-macadam*. The novel highlights the repetitive pattern of sexual abuse perpetrated by fathers against their daughters. Célanire, the protagonist in *Célanire cou-coupé*, is separated from her mother at birth and subjected to an attempt at ritual sacrifice. The scar of the ritual practice, the slashed throat, is a constant reminder of the trauma she has experienced. Because of these events the characters in both novels are incapable of maintaining stable emotional relationships. Furthermore, these protagonists who were either victims of rape or were separated from their parents at birth, struggle to claim their identity. Thus, the victims and their perpetrators have a symbolic role in underlining the origins of Caribbean history and complicating the lineages of black families. This chapter shows how the trauma ruptures or splits the self into a ‘before’ and ‘after’ and argues that the unformed memory of trauma lies in the mind in a repressed state and affects the everyday life of the victim. This will also show how an understanding of the traumatic event helps the protagonists arrive at some form of resolution. I suggest that the play of memory - of women who have been raped, of children born out of rape, of children who were victims of incest and other forms of abuse - is a literary device which links the here-and-now to the past.

Chapter Three is entitled ‘The Intricate Mother-Daughter Relationship and its Impact on the Identity of Postcolonial Women’. This chapter focuses on the dysfunctional mother-daughter relationship; a familiar theme in Caribbean writing. The novels chosen for the analysis are Condé’s *Desirada* (1997) and Pineau’s *Fleur de Barbarie* (1995). Scarred by the traumatic experience of rape, the mothers in both novels become estranged from their daughters who were born out of rape, and who resemble their rapist. In their turn, the daughters are doubly affected by both maternal neglect and the absence of a father. Consequently, the protagonists, who themselves are unable to nourish stable relationships in adulthood, attempt to unravel the truth behind their mother’s past, the circumstances of their birth and ultimately the identity of their biological fathers. The emotional absence of the mother in the life of the protagonists, and their quest for paternal identification, are integral to the
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trauma narrative framework that has been used to reveal the large-scale psychological effects of the slave trade, the Middle Passage, and the Caribbean plantation system. This chapter interrogates how the memory of the first and second generations serves as hope for the third. It also evaluates the applicability of the term translation in examining the transmission of memory between generations.

Chapter Four is entitled ‘The Grandmother: An Icon of Optimism, Resistance and Resolution’. The aim of the chapter is to examine Victoire, les saveurs et les mots (2006) and L’Exil selon Julia (1996), the autobiographical narratives of Condé and Pineau in order to understand why the protagonists turn to their grandmothers for answers to the mysteries of their past. Caribbean literature often depicts mother-daughter relationships which are cold and distant, framed by experiences of rape, abandonment and illegitimacy. The young women raised in a dysfunctional mother-daughter relationship often find solace in their grandmothers. Through an exploration of her grandmother’s life Condé attempts to understand better her own life circumstances. Pineau’s grandmother Julia nurtures in Pineau a robust sense of Caribbean cultural identity. Hence, Julia’s role is that of the conteuse créole, or the Caribbean storyteller who, in the (re)telling of history, embodies a resistance to the practices of colonisation. In light of this, chapter four highlights how the grandmother serves as ‘another way of knowing things’ and the ways the past determine the interconnectedness of female lives, and how an ‘archéologie du savoir’ (archaeology of the knowledge) of the past is critical to understanding the nature of these interconnections.

Chapter Five is entitled ‘Interracial Marriage: The Impact of Race on One’s Relationship with Partners and Children’. It draws on Condé’s Histoire de la femme cannibale (2003) and Pineau’s L’Âme prêtée aux oiseaux (1998) to examine issues arising from

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interracial marriage. This chapter analyses the story of Rosélie, the black protagonist in *Histoire de la femme cannibale*, and her relationship to her white academic partner Stephen. Rosélie experiences a loss of her identity as a black woman in this intercultural relationship. Central to the story is Rosélie’s struggle to reclaim her self-identity. Pineau’s *L’Âme prêtée aux oiseaux* not only presents the intricate relationships between black and white partners, but also the relationship between white parents and their mulatto children. The examination focuses on the lives of three women from three different generations, all of which have mulatto children as a result of their interracial relationships. This chapter focuses on the divisions caused by racism within the family, and compares the severe psychological damage which originates from dysfunctional husband-wife and parent-child relationships.

Conclusion

Overall, this study argues that Condé and Pineau portray the legacies of slavery that have deeply scarred the French Caribbean psyche. They show in their novels how the damaging effects of slavery continue to impact on Caribbean society. Drawing together Caribbean colonial history and Caribbean lives, this study examines the contrasting portrayals of trauma, its transgenerational nature, and the resulting dysfunctional relationships in the works of Condé and Pineau. I argue that the cycle of dysfunctionality can only be broken through an acknowledgement of traumatic event(s). The characters in Condé’s and Pineau’s novels attempt to unearth the circumstances of their family’s past through narrative in order to come to terms with their own trauma. As such, transgenerational memory links the past that had been lost in the traumatic events of their life, with the actuality of the present. The submerged cultural identity of the Caribbean people arises as a result of this process of recovering memory. By recuperating suppressed histories, transgenerational memory bridges the rift in self caused by the interruption of history on both the individual and collective level. I will argue that this has been Condé’s and Pineau’s objective in crafting the stories in their novels.
Chapter One
What Lies Behind the Dysfunctional Family?

1.1 Introduction

The novels under discussion in this chapter provide fertile sources for an exploration of contrasting images of dysfunctional families. These novels are Chair Piment by Gisèle Pineau, and La Vie Scélérate by Maryse Condé. Both novels depict fictionalised experience(s) of colonisation and include many of the themes that I address in subsequent chapters. These themes include the irresponsibility and infidelity of men, the emotional gulf between parents and their children, and experiences of exile and alienation. All of these have created dysfunctional relationships within the family, and have impacted on the critical role of the Caribbean grandmother in helping to disrupt the cycle of dysfunctionality. My contention is that all of these issues have emerged from the experience of slavery.

The chapter will also examine how trauma impacts on successive generations. In other words, the chapter is concerned with the transgenerational nature of trauma. In light of this, the chapter will identify and explore the nature of the various types of trauma experienced by the protagonists in the novels. I also argue that the traumatic experience can only be resolved once it is confronted and understood, which indeed is the goal of the protagonists in both novels. Many of Condé’s and Pineau’s protagonists seek strategies of resolution including enacting a return to the site of trauma in search of the ‘buried mysteries of their lives’. Because the recovery of family history emerges through narratives of memory, this chapter includes an examination of the role of memory in assisting the protagonists to piece together their family’s past.

1.2 A typology of family dysfunctionality in postcolonial Caribbean

Drawing on both Chair Piment and La Vie Scélérate, the following section will examine the sources of family dysfunctionality. Most importantly, male irresponsibility in relation to family and infidelity are a significant source of family dysfunction. In the
face of frequent male negligence towards the family, the role of the Caribbean mother takes on a greater importance because she becomes the primary provider for the family. She fulfils not only traditional maternal and domestic roles, but also becomes the breadwinner and moral guardian. Male irresponsibility can empower the Caribbean mother with an extraordinary ability to survive and sustain the family.

1.2.1 Straying Caribbean man

In *Femmes des Antilles: Traces et Voix*, Pineau describes the Caribbean woman as *femme matador*, the ‘strong Caribbean woman’ who faces life’s trials with enormous courage. The Caribbean man, however, is depicted as unreliable and irresponsible, as one who moves from one relationship to another. This is the case with the families described in *Chair Piment* and *La Vie Scélérate* as they are typically characterised by the physical or emotional absence of a father who is often unconstrained by a sense of family responsibility. Both novels include narratives that reflect these portrayals of Caribbean men and women. *Chair Piment*, for instance, features the ancestor Séléna who, in the 1870s, engaged in a battle with a mulatto man to secure her right to own land through hard work and a crafty attitude. On the other hand, the priest with whom Séléna bears an illegitimate child demonstrates his untrustworthiness when he abandons Séléna and flees to France after the birth of their child Gabriel. In her courageous attitude towards life without the support of a man, Séléna embodies the strength of Caribbean woman. Indeed, the priest appears as the irresponsible father who represents Caribbean man.

The transgenerational cycle of male unreliability is perpetuated when, two days before his marriage to Nana Salibour from Grand-Fonds, Gabriel has sex with the village girl Lucinda Mignard, who then falls pregnant with Gabriel’s child. The Jamaican scholar Olive Senior has shown that many young boys in the Caribbean grow up in the absence

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of a father figure. They are instead raised in female headed households; unconsciously absorbing the normality of an ‘invisible father’. In Chair Piment Gabriel is similarly raised without a father or male role model at home. For several years Gabriel remains unaware he has an illegitimate daughter named Suzon, (the illegitimate child born from his encounter with the village girl Lucinda Mignard) and of the fact that she had been born at the same time as his legitimate son Melchior. When he eventually discovers the existence of Suzon, Gabriel hides it from Nana whilst she bears him two more sons, Ferdy and Gregoire. However, when an anonymous letter arrives revealing to Nana the existence of Gabriel’s illegitimate daughter Nana confronts Gabriel over his infidelity and decides to leave him and their eldest son Melchior and returns to Grand-Fonds with Ferdy and Gregoire.

Gabriel’s infidelity eventually impacts on the Montério family when Melchior discovers he has inadvertently been engaged in an incestuous relationship with his half-sister Suzon. The pain of separation, the shame and guilt of not being able to keep the promise of marriage means that Melchior is unable to reveal the reasons why he is abandoning Suzon. From that point, Melchior becomes emotionally disengaged and indifferent towards his family.

The entire Montério family then fall victim of the twenty year curse placed on them by Suzon who was, without explanation, abandoned by Melchior. The curse eventually leads to the death of Melchior and his two subsequent wives Marie-Perle and Médée; the infertility of Olga (Melchior’s daughter from his first marriage); the mental disability of Rosalia (Melchior’s daughter from his second marriage); and Mina’s insatiable desire for random sex with anonymous men.

In comparison, Condé’s La Vie Scélérée draws heavily on representations of colonisation, especially in terms of its portrayal of Albert Louis, the narrator Claude’s great grandfather. Albert’s hardships as a worker on the Boyer-de-l’Etang plantation in

107 Senior 38.
108 Senior 36.
Guadeloupe and in Panama illustrate the kind of exploitation that was endured by slaves. Albert’s transportation from Guadeloupe to Panama portrays the kind of exile that was experienced during slavery. Panama was a segregated, US administered, Canal Zone where non-white workers like Albert were treated cruelly by white American overseers. Whilst the black workers were subjected to the most dehumanising forms of exploitation, their overseers were rewarded with ‘gold bars,’ as well as exclusive access to comfortable modern bungalows in sanitary neighbourhoods, expressly designated as «Réserve aux Blancs», «Blancs seulement» (22).

Albert is subjected to work conditions which are similar to those experienced during the time of slavery. The ideologies of class and race remain crucial in determining how black workers are treated. However, the fact that Albert is rampantly promiscuous also has an impact on his life. Whilst Pineau in Chair Piment highlights the irresponsibility and infidelity of men, Condé, in La Vie Scélérate, portrays Albert in the stereotypical image of the ‘straying’ Caribbean man. Christine Barrow suggests that:

> Caribbean man perceives women as existing for his sexual pleasure. The tendency to be simultaneously involved with more than one partner is perceived as natural to a man—“to keep you knowing you is a man”—but not to a woman. For their sexual performances men are complimented as “hard-seeds”, while women become “whores” and are “dragged in the gutter”.

Condé depicts Albert with an uncontrollable desire for women and as a regular visitor to brothels. Albert ‘s’était vautré à se noyer dans le lit des femmes. Jeunes, vieilles, toutes y passaient. Un temps, il avait fait l’amour en même temps à une mère et à sa fille. Un temps, à deux sœurs jumelles’ (15).

As discussed in the ‘Introduction’ to this study, during colonisation black women slaves gained a certain degree of autonomy over their lives through their association with white masters. Their male counterparts, on the other hand, experienced complete emasculation under the plantation system. Black men’s masculinity, characterised in

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the Caribbean by their promiscuity and sometimes violence against women, emerged as a response to this oppression. Furthermore, this form of masculinity has been reproduced in subsequent generations. In *La Vie Scélérate* Albert’s son Bert from his first marriage, and his four sons from his second marriage - Jacob, Serge, René and Jean - are all portrayed as being either unfaithful, unreliable or promiscuous.

Whilst Jacob is not initially unfaithful to his wife Tima, and in fact is presented as a devoted father to their only child Thécla, he still makes love to Tima solely for his own gratification and without any consideration for her pleasure. In this way he fits the mould of the Caribbean man who primarily perceives women as sexual objects. Tima lies beside Jacob with ‘le dos tourné, hostile de tout ce plaisir qu’il avait pris sans lui [en] donner, …’ (161). However, his business trip to New York, where he has sex with a prostitute, heralds the beginning of his infidelity. Jacob finds himself ‘adultérin en un rien de temps’ (127). He subsequently has an affair with a woman named Flora Lacour and has two sons with her. Jacob’s justification for taking a mistress is ‘pour suppléer [aux] refus [de Tima], à ses rebuffades, à ses abandons rétifs…’ (128). This resonates with Barrow’s assertion that Caribbean men attempt to justify their infidelity when ‘a woman’s behaviour does not conform to her partner’s requirements’. 110

Condé’s portrayal of Albert’s other three sons from his second marriage (Jean, Serge and René) is similar. Jean, for instance, is unfaithful to his pregnant partner Anaïse. He not only marries a *chabine* named Marietta, but also ends up living with her under the same roof as Anaïse. When Anaïse commits suicide, he betrays Marietta by having extra marital relationships. Although Condé does not develop the characters of Serge and René, it is evident they are also renowned for their promiscuity. For instance they are described as young men ‘qui se frayaient un chemin au lycée et dans le lit des femmes’ (116). Serge is also described as ‘un jeunot de vingt-deux ans, assez vagabond et porté sur les femmes’ (118).

110 Barrow 59.
Raymond Smith argues that the ‘theme of male “irresponsibility” in marriage and fatherhood is insistent and recurrent in modern West Indian Social life’. Both Condé and Pineau highlight this assertion through portrayals of men who indulge in adulterous relationships as a means to prove their virility. The characters of the priest Gabriel, and Melchior in Chair Piment; and Albert and his sons in La Vie Scélérat, substantiate this assertion and the transgenerational nature of a dysfunctional masculinity among Caribbean men. These two novels clearly portray the figure of the Caribbean man who is incapable of maintaining a stable family relationship.

Francesca Velayoudom Faithful observes that in the face of male irresponsibility, women gain a more dominant position in the family. This situation is reflected in Chair Piment, however, Condé’s novel La Vie Scélérat rarely depicts overtly strong women. Nevertheless, Condé does portray unfaithful and promiscuous women, such as Jacob’s daughter Thécla. The theme of unfaithful and promiscuous women will be further analysed in a following section of this chapter.

1.2.2 Emotional distance between parents and children

A theme which will be addressed and further expanded upon in subsequent chapters is the parents’ emotional disengagement from their children. The ‘nuclear family’ in the Caribbean has been described as consisting of father, mother and their children who live together in the same dwelling. The parents may or may not be legally married, and the children can be either their biological children or adopted. Olive Senior suggests, however, that in the Caribbean children are not considered to be a mutual responsibility of both parents but are solely the responsibility of their mother. This occurs when the father fails to fulfil his paternal obligations within the family and, as a

111 Smith 117.


113 Senior 8.


115 Senior 116.
result, the mother is forced to assume both roles. This is further supported by Rodman who asserts that the father is only expected to acknowledge paternity, whilst the mother ‘feeds, clothes, and generally takes care of the child, almost to the exclusion of the father’. 116

In *Chair Piment*, however, Melchior’s role as a father is diminished by circumstances not of his own making. The trauma of Melchior’s incestuous relationship with Suzon prevents him from forming close and intimate relationships with his family. After the drowning of his first wife Marie-Perle, Melchior’s relationship with his daughter Olga gradually deteriorates. Against her father’s wishes, Olga gets married to Douglas and decides to live in Paris. Melchior enters into a loveless marriage with his second wife Médée, whom he married ‘par pure nécessité’ (29). He rejects their eldest daughter Rosalia because of her physical and mental deformities. The metaphor of a snake describes the physical and psychological damage done to Rosalia by the green cord when she emerged from her mother’s womb blue with a bright green cord wrapped around the length of her body: ‘Un serpent entré dans le ventre de Médée pour étouffer la Rose, lui serrer les membres, l’étrangler, empêcher son sang de circuler et son esprit de se former’ (277).

In contrast with the character of Melchior in *Chair Piment*, Albert in *La Vie Scélérate* is one who appears deeply affected by the violence of slavery. The plantation system produced a complex social hierarchy. Slaves were divided into two groups called *ateliers*, one large and one small. The hardiest slaves, consisting of those who could handle the most arduous physical work, made up the large *atelier*. The small *atelier* consisted of slaves who could not bear heavy work; who had recently arrived and needed training; or female slaves, especially those who were pregnant or had young children. 117 Because of his enormous strength and ‘son grand tronc de bois de mahogany’ (18), Albert was assigned to heavy labour, including setting explosives and

116 Cited in Senior 36.

felling giant trees, just like those African men of his stature who were assigned to the large atelier at the time of slavery. The physical exploitation and racial discrimination Albert endured in the Guadeloupean plantation intensified in his subsequent work in the Panama Canal. Albert’s experience illustrates the harsh reality of Martinican and Guadeloupean workers who endured similar exploitation to that of slaves at the time of colonisation.

Albert’s personal experiences of racism centre on three salient events. The first occurred when his first wife Liza died at childbirth after being denied treatment in an American-run hospital. The second event was the race-motivated murder of his best friend Jacob. The third was a beating that Albert suffered at the hands of white supremacists in Panama. Albert was severely affected by these incidents and as a result alienated himself from the affection from his family. The factors behind his withdrawal from his family are clearly explained in his revelation to Bert:

"Comme tu me vois là devant toi, tu crois que j’ai une roche au cœur? C’est que tu ne sais pas par où je suis passé! Ils ont tué ma femme, ta mère. Ils ont tué mon ami, mon frère. Qui eux? Mais les Blancs! Ce sont des démons, ne t’approche jamais d’eux. Ne souille jamais ton sang avec le leur! (86)

In Remembering Violence, anthropologist Rosalind Shaw argues that trauma victims are often unable to narrate the event itself and ‘undergo a dissociative splitting, simultaneously inhabiting the past and the present as two incommensurable realities, and pass on their psychosocial wounds to their children’. 118 Albert is torn between his past and present and dwells in both at the same time. Albert’s ‘traumatic silence’ 119 severely affects his relationships with his sons. Albert ‘avait toujours manifesté de l’aversion pour Jacob et une parfaite indifférence pour Serge et René’ (108). Albert’s contempt for whites permeates the Louis family, most of whom come to acquire a sense of pride in being pure ‘nègres’.


119 Shaw 254.
Another reason that estranges children from their parents is the rigid nature of parents and particularly fathers. On the one hand is the stereotypical image of the apathetic Caribbean father. On the other, when the father is present within the family he is typically portrayed as being authoritative. In his role as a father he is expected to be strict and execute corporal punishment which is another means of establishing his masculinity at home. For instance, Albert is a stern and uncompromising father who is self-righteous in delivering physical punishment to his sons. Jacob relives ‘sur sa conscience, la terreur du père, le souvenir de ses volées à coups de canne et plus cuisant encore, de ses regards de mépris!’ (158). Because of this, at Albert’s death Jacob feels ‘un profond soulagement’ (160). Albert’s physical abuse and his inability to relate to his children left a psychological scar which meant they were themselves incapable of forming stable families. Albert’s cruelty towards his sons thus triggered a vicious cycle of dysfunctionality.

Albert’s inability to love his son Bert stems from the resentment he felt because his beloved wife Liza died giving birth to him. Their relationship breaks down to the point where Albert banishes his son to France under the pretence of allowing him to further his studies. Bert’s exclusion from the family and Guadeloupe is sealed when Albert ostracises him from the family following Bert’s marriage to a white, working-class French woman. Bert, then experiences intense feelings of exile due to being cast out by his family and forbidden to return to his home in Guadeloupe. Ensnared in an unhappy marriage Bert finally comes to a point where he commits suicide.

Bert’s death is triggered by the traumatic separation from family and island. This echoes the historical displacement of slaves from their native Africa. Slavery initiated a process of physical and emotional displacement. Bert is representative of the deracinated Africans who experienced traumatic separation from their family and homeland through slavery. Edouard Glissant writes:

120 Senior 39.
You deport me to a new country, you steal from my mind - indeed, from the inmost depths of my being - the knowledge of my former country, you further insist that the new country belongs only to you, and so I must go down the ages, countryless.\textsuperscript{121}

Glissant suggests that exile leads to a loss of identity, alienation and feelings of dispossession. As a result of this alienation and the cruelty experienced at the hands of the colonisers, the occurrence of suicide was common during the period of slavery. Some slaves starved themselves to death, jumped ship or killed themselves through a number of other means during middle passage. Others who were unable to cope with the displacement experienced in the Caribbean also committed suicide. Suicide was considered as a refusal of, and resistance to, the barbarity of slavery. This is the reality that Condé depicts in \textit{La Vie Scélérâte} in the character of Bert.

While Albert and Bert provide examples of dysfunctional father-son relationships, Tima and Thécla, and Thécla and her daughter Claude, provide examples of dysfunctional mother-daughter relationships. In an interview with Robert H. McCormick Jr, Condé affirms that ‘mother-daughter relationships are very complicated’.\textsuperscript{122} The complicated mother-daughter relationship is a common theme in Condé’s works. In \textit{La Vie Scélérâte}, Condé depicts problematic mother-daughter relationships between Tima and Thécla, and Thécla and her daughter Claude. These relationships are characterised by situations in which the mother does not fulfil the role of a nurturing and caring figure in the daughter’s life. The following section will focus solely on the relationship between Tima and Thécla.

The notion of the ‘othermother’ in Caribbean literature points to a substitute or surrogate mother - one who replaces the biological or birth mother - in times of need.\textsuperscript{123} However, Simone A. James Alexander uses the term ‘othermother’ to


\textsuperscript{122} Robert H. McCormick Jr, ‘’Desirada- A New Conception of Identity; An Interview with Maryse Condé,’’ \textit{World Literature Today}, 74.3 (2000): 520.

\textsuperscript{123} The theory of ‘othermother’ has been discussed by Gloria Wade-Gayles and Rosalie Riegle Troester as substitute of the biological mother. See for example, Gloria Wade-Gayles, “The Truths of Our Mothers’ Lives: Mother-Daughter Relationships in Black Women’s Fiction,” \textit{Sage}, 1.2 (1984): 8-12
attribute ‘otherness’ to the biological mother, because she represents the other of her daughter.\(^\text{124}\) According to Alexander, the biological mother (as the ‘othermother’) contradicts the image of a nurturing and caring mother. In fact, she adopts an adversarial position in relation to her daughter. Tima becomes an othermother to her biological daughter in that her ideas and beliefs about life contradict those of her daughter. As Tima attempts to impose her will on her daughter, Thécla feels that she is being manipulated by her mother. For instance, Tima’s relentless effort to impose an unwanted education on Thécla encompasses the image of nurturing and supporting mother. However, Thécla resents her mother’s wilful and obsessive management of her life.

Jamaica Kincaid suggests that the mother as ‘other’ can be associated with the image of the coloniser.\(^\text{125}\) She writes that:

[i]n my first two books, I used to think I was writing about my mother and myself. Later I began to see that I was writing about the relationship between the powerful and the powerless. That’s become an obsessive theme, and I think that it will be a theme for as long as I write. And then it came clear to me when I was writing an essay that became “On Seeing England for the First Time” that I was writing about the mother—that mother I was writing about was really Mother Country. It’s like an egg; it’s a perfect whole. It’s all fused some way or other.\(^\text{126}\)

The above quote draws our attention to the mother-daughter relationship as that of the coloniser and the colonised. The powerful mother who attempts to impose colonial values represents the coloniser; whilst the powerless daughter who attempts to resist this imposition represents the colonised.\(^\text{127}\) Thus, the daughter sees a coloniser instead of a nurturing and caring mother. Furthermore, through this otherness of the mother, the daughter sees the betrayal and untrustworthyness of the

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\(^{124}\) Alexander 7.

\(^{125}\) Alexander 19.


\(^{127}\) Alexander 19.
mother. With the realisation that she is barred from her mother’s life, the daughter seeks to create an identity for herself, an individual identity. This again suggests the need of restoration or rediscovery of African roots of the Caribbean self. Daughters’ search for identity is a theme which will be broadly discussed all through this thesis.

As Kincaid argues, if the mother-daughter relationship is defined by the coloniser-colonised relationship through the difference of power, any dual relationship with power difference could also be associated with the coloniser-colonised relationship. However, Kincaid also draws our attention to the triangular relationship that exists in the Caribbean between mother, daughter and mother country. She suggests that daughters, apart from the complex relationships they may have with their mothers, also have complex relationships with their mother countries. Alexander further suggests that in the Caribbean, the link between the daughter and the island of origin is inextricably linked through the mother. According to Kincaid and Alexander, mother is the main component of this triangular relationship and the daughter’s relationship with her mother conditions her relationship with mother country. The mother’s acceptance of the daughter in turn allows the daughter to accept her mother country: ‘[o]ften, acceptance of the daughter by the mother leads to the daughter’s acceptance and adoption of the motherland’. Hence, the daughter’s relationship with her mother predetermines her relationships with the motherland...

This relationship between the mother, the daughter and the mother country can also be located in the relationship between Timia and her daughter Thécla. When Thécla feels disconnected from her mother, she feels that she is no longer attached to the island. The dysfunctional mother-daughter relationship results in her movement between Guadeloupe, France, America, Haiti and Jamaica.

\[128\] Ibid 7, 19-20.

\[129\] Ibid 19.

\[130\] Ibid 18.

\[131\] Alexander uses the terms motherland and mother country synonymously and often interchangeably.

\[132\] Alexander 18.
In Caribbean literature, particularly in women’s writing, the theme of motherland is just as significant as the dysfunctional mother-daughter relationship. Susheila Nasta confirms this when she writes that ‘clearly mothers and motherlands have provided a potent symbolic force in the writings of [Caribbean] women’.\textsuperscript{133} Condé and Pineau are themselves migrants and their preoccupation with ‘home’ and ‘motherland’ is a crucial factor in their construction of self. Even though Condé’s novels are not strictly autobiographical, it is clear that her personal experience has guided the development of her protagonists.\textsuperscript{134} For instance, Alexander suggests that Condé’s writings on the link between mother, daughter and mother country reflect her personal relationship with her mother and mother country.\textsuperscript{135} Like many other Caribbean women writers, Condé’s relationship with her mother, Guadeloupe and Africa ‘is fraught with alienation and ambivalence’.\textsuperscript{136} When Condé felt alienated in Guadeloupe, she migrated to Africa; living there for several years she was met with an even greater sense of alienation.\textsuperscript{137} It is this reality that Condé depicts through Marie Hélène in \textit{Une Saison à Rihata}; Veronica in \textit{Heremakhonon}; and Thécla in \textit{La Vie Scélérée}. Condé’s real-life nomadism is also mirrored in Thécla’s wanderings between Guadeloupe, France, America, Haiti and Jamaica.

Thécla’s dysfunctional life, which stems from her relationship with her mother, translates into a profusely promiscuous adult life. Thécla bears an illegitimate daughter to one of her lovers; engages in a sexual relationship with two brothers and has numerous random sexual encounters. She continues in this way even after her marriage to Pierre Levasseur. Her lack of faithfulness to one man also leads her to deprive her daughter Claude of a reliable father figure.

\textsuperscript{133} Susheila Nasta, ed., \textit{Motherlands: Black Women’s Writing from Africa, the Caribbean, and South Asia} (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992) xix.

\textsuperscript{134} Alexander 10.

\textsuperscript{135} Ibid 8.

\textsuperscript{136} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{137} Taleb-Khyar 355-356.
Thécla’s inability to form a stable relationship with a man symbolically represents the black female slave who cannot be faithful to her partner. The conceptualisation of the black slave as promiscuous emerges as a continuation of their African origins. Walvin, for instance, asserts that ‘African men took a number of “wives,”’ while African women were free with their sexual favours’. Female slaves were also forced to have sex with their white masters. As attested in the Code Noir, the slave was the master’s property which was ‘sujet à vente, saisie, partagé entre héritiers, à l’instar d’autres choses mobilières’. Slaves were denied the ability to form loving and long term relationships; as the conditions of slavery made it impossible for them to form faithful ties to a partner.

The family is a major focal point in a child’s life and the novels are strongly steeped in that view by depicting a range of family contexts. Whilst Pineau portrays the dysfunctional relationships between fathers and daughters, Condé goes one step further in La Vie Scélérate by writing of the emotional gulf between both fathers and sons, and mothers and daughters. Parents bring unresolved issues from their past to their nuclear families; shown in the incestuous past of Melchior in Chair Piment, and in La Vie Scélérate in the experiences of racial discrimination and the deaths of Albert’s family. In such instances, parents are unable to relate to their children, nor provide them with love and affection. These childhood experiences impact on their functioning in adulthood, as we’ve seen in the characters of Mina in Chair Piment, and Bert and Thécla in La Vie Scélérate. The lack of parental love affects the child’s ability to create intimate relationships in their adult life. Bert’s suicide and Thécla’s promiscuity are examples of this. This pattern of gender relationships continues to form the backdrop to presentations of relationships between men and women in contemporary Caribbean literature.

1.3 The trangenerational pattern of dysfunctionality


Chair Piment provides examples of a vicious circle of dysfunctionality in successive generations. Mina’s dysfunction is created by her trauma which has been transmitted through generations of the Montério family. She appears to be the most affected by her family dysfunction, particularly by her father’s traumatic past. The memories of traumatic events pass down the family line and the protagonist Mina is deeply engaged in clarifying her vague memories in an attempt to uncover the family secret. In La Vie Scélérate, the acrimonious relationship that Claude has with her mother compels her to question the family ancestry. Although Claude does not overtly demonstrate the symptoms of trauma, she nevertheless searches for maternal love and a place to belong. The absence of motherly love becomes a critical cause of her dysfunctional life. Therefore, the following section will unearth the sources of the protagonists’ trauma and its nature.

Mina’s life experiences have been shaped by the unexpected deaths of her parents. Her mother Médée was run down by a truck on the 18th of April, 1975, and her father Melchior was struck by lightning exactly three months later on the 18th of July, 1975. The emotional distress caused by these tragic events is such that Mina attempts to deflect her memory of them by reducing each to numbers in her mind: ‘18419751871975’ (130). Yet the most traumatic of all memories is the death of Rosalia, Mina’s mentally retarded sister, in a fire in their house in Piment, Guadeloupe on the 11th of September, 1978. Mina recalls this tragic episode as the ‘jour où Rosalia entra dans la case en flammes. 1191978...’ (130). The then fourteen year old Mina remains traumatised for twenty one years after she witnessed her sister’s death in the fire with a ‘[v]isage brûlé étonné. Peau grillée. Chemise de nuit en Nylon fondu dans ses chairs’ (13).

Trauma begins when an event or series of events become intolerable to an individual’s conscious mind. As Judith Herman suggests, a traumatic experience may not be remembered but relived and its nature is to intrude and recur. A traumatised individual attempts to cut off from the original experience. However, he is unable to escape the trauma of the original event until its memory is claimed. Herman writes:
The ordinary response to atrocities is to banish them from consciousness. Certain violations of the social contract are too terrible to utter aloud: this is the meaning of the word ‘unspeakable’.... The conflict between the will to deny horrible events and the will to proclaim them aloud is the central dialectic of psychological trauma...traumatised people alternate between feeling numb and reliving the event.  

The nature of traumatic experience that Herman describes, the trauma that tries to arise in the rupture of reality and memory draws our attention to the post-traumatic stress disorder.

The American Psychiatric Association recognizes post-traumatic stress disorder as ‘fundamentally a disorder of memory’. The mind is dissociated or ‘split’ by the emotions forged by a traumatic experience. The mind in this way is unable to register the wound to the psyche because the ordinary mechanisms of awareness are destroyed. Consequently, the victim is unable to recall the traumatic experience in normal consciousness. Instead, they are possessed by intrusive traumatic memories. Mina displays the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder as she experiences ‘repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviours stemming from the event, along with numbing that may have begun during or after the experience’. The verbs used by Pineau to describe Mina’s actions such as ‘se précipiter’ (quicken), ‘serrer’ (clench), ‘soupirer’ (gasp), ‘se laisser soulever’ (to be borne away), ‘porter’ (sweep up), ‘posséder’ (possess) (13) explain the agitated state of mind and her shackled body. Although Mina reacts physically to the trauma, her mind is incapable of clearly recalling the event. Thus, Mina represents the essential paradox of a trauma victim; that is the survivor has a vague understanding of, and a response to, the event, but he or she

140 Judith Lewis Herman, Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence-From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror (New York: Basic Books, 1997) 1.

141 Leys 2.

is unable to fully recall it. Therefore, the experience of trauma cannot be embodied in one’s past but is constantly reexperienced in one’s present.\textsuperscript{143}

The return of Rosalia in the form of a ghost on the day of her funeral becomes a constant reminder of Mina’s traumatic experience. Furthermore, with these supernatural appearances, the traumatic experience of Rosalia’s death reoccurs in Mina’s mind in a similar manner to the real experience even after Mina has left Guadeloupe for France to live with her half sister Olga. Therefore, Mina’s trauma remains constantly in the present, rather than as an event in her past. Rosalia’s regular appearances chains Mina to the past, even though she attempts to repress the memory, Rosalia’s ghost pushes her to confront it. Rosalia’s ghost brings to Mina ‘a forgotten history [which] has the power to shake the social and metaphysical forms against which it breaks…the idea of history as a violent intrusion from somewhere else’.\textsuperscript{144} The ghosts play a significant role in persuading a person to reach to the past and discover the truth. The role that ghosts play in relation to memory will be further discussed in a following section.

In accordance with Caruth’s argument, Mina’s trauma ‘is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual’s past, but rather 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’.\textsuperscript{145} The trauma of Rosalia’s death manifests for Mina in ongoing, intrusive images of her burning sister, and supernatural visitations and her mechanism for dealing with this trauma becomes casual sex with unknown men on the streets of Paris: ‘La Chasse…Elle partirait de nouveau en chasse,…Elle monterait dans les bus aux heures de pointe, rien que pour se frotter à des hommes’ (92-93). She wakes up in the middle of the night longing for a man’s body. Her desire for sex is such that her first sexual encounter is with Douglas, her half-sister’s husband. Following\textsuperscript{143} Leys 2.

\textsuperscript{144} King 150.

\textsuperscript{145} Caruth, \textit{Unclaimed Experience} 4.

Whilst Caribbean literature often draws on the figure of the absent father, maternal absence is also a prominent theme in Caribbean writing. Olive Senior supports this contention by asserting that ‘while it is the “absent” father who is most frequently remarked upon, the “absent mother” has become sufficiently institutionalized to be also a theme in West Indian literature’. 146 However, Senior also argues that since there are plenty of foster-mothers in Caribbean cultures maternal absence cannot be compared to paternal absence. 147 Whilst Chair Piment provides examples for the paternal absence in children’s lives, La Vie Scélérate is redolent with instances of both maternal and paternal absence. The following section will therefore look at the mother-daughter relationship between Thécla and her daughter Claude in particular, the void that maternal absence creates in a daughter’s life and the daughter’s strategy to come to peace with the emotional distance between her and her mother.

Wendy Goolcharan-Kumeta argues that the:

failure to bond with the mother or any other surrogate mother figure often results in extreme difficulty and generally failure to connect to the network of associations with the mother which can nurture and sustain the female self. 148

The main source of the problem between Thécla and Claude is Claude’s father, who abandoned Thécla when she was pregnant with Claude. Thécla’s hope for a happy future was shattered by a man who she felt betrayed her. Claude remains as a

146 Senior 11.

147 Ibid.

constant reminder of his abandonment and as such Thécla is unable to love her daughter. It is evident when she declares to Claude that:

c’est vrai, tu es l’enfant de ma honte et de mon chagrin. Cela je ne peux pas l’oublier. Quand tu es devant moi, ce n’est pas toi, Coco, que je vois. C’est ton père avec son sourire belles dents blanches de garçon bien élevé alors que le dernier coupeur de cannes avait plus d’honnêteté que lui. Et c’est sa mère que je vois aussi, montant sur ses grands chevaux pour demander de quelle famille je sortais et renifler d’un air dégoûté l’odeur de morue salée de notre nom. Car personne n’a jamais parlé de ma couleur qui au fond faisait le vrai problème. (274-275)

Although Claude knows her father by name, she identifies him as ‘père inconnu, absent. Fugueur. En cavale, indifférent, indigne’ (334).

In contrast with Mina, Claude does not overtly display any form of physical or psychological trauma. However, Claude’s feelings of identity loss are reflected in Ron Eyerman’s notion of cultural trauma. He distinguishes cultural trauma from psychological or physical trauma by stating that:

Cultural trauma refers to a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in the social fabric, affecting a group of people that has achieved some degree of cohesion. In this sense, the trauma need not necessarily be felt by everyone in a community or experienced directly by any or all. While it may be necessary to establish some event as the significant “cause”, its traumatic meaning must be established and accepted, a process which requires time, as well as mediation and representation.149

Being an illegitimate child, abandoned by her mother soon after birth, Claude was placed under the care of a nanny. The pain of uprooting her from a stable environment after ten years was intensified by her mother’s inability to love her. In being reclaimed by her mother, Claude also must become involved in her mother’s wanderings. The lack of emotional bonding, her mother’s inability to love her, and most importantly her desire to trace her identity, leave her experiencing a cultural trauma.

In her novels Condé often tells of a mother’s absence in the early years of a child’s life. In Desirada, for instance, Reynalda leaves her daughter Marie-Noëlle with Ranélise while in Fleur de Barbarie Pâquerette leaves Josette with a foster family. In much the

same way, in *La Vie Scélérate*, Thécla leaves Claude with a nanny in Brittany. It is also important to note that these mothers eventually return to reclaim their daughters, despite the fact that they are incapable of loving them. Olive Senior suggests two reasons for this. The first is that many women enter into stable relationships only after they have had several illegitimate children. Thus, the responsibility for the younger children is often given to female kin, especially grandmothers. Secondly, their migration to other islands or countries in search of work may necessitate that they leave their children behind.

Many of Condé’s and Pineau’s protagonists enact a revisit to their site of trauma in order to be rid of their trauma. Mina, in *Chair Piment*, also comes to the realisation that she could never be free of her trauma by repressing its memory. She also realises hunting for men on the streets of Paris only brings her temporary relief. Thus, she decides to return to Guadeloupe to confront her trauma and explore it as a form of potential release. Claude also determines to embark on a journey to trace her family lineage. Toni Morrison describes this enactment as a process of ‘literary archaeology’ which ‘on the basis of some information and a little bit of guess work [one] journey[s] to a site to see what remains were left behind and to reconstruct the world that these remains imply’. Mina decides, after twenty one years of suffering in Paris, to visit the site of her trauma in Piment in the hope of recovering her memory of the night of the fire which she believes will help her ‘ordonner [s]a vie’ (197). While Mina takes a literal return to Guadeloupe, Claude takes the same journey through writing of her family history. Her archaeology is based on family photos, the discussions that she had with her mother’s lovers, her grandfather Jacob and as Morrison suggests ‘a little bit of guess work’.

1.4 Reconciliation through reconstruction of memory

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150 Senior 10.

151 Senior 10-11.

Chapter One

The two works selected in this chapter investigate the relationship between a traumatic past and its reconciliation through memory. In a similar manner to many of the protagonists in Pineau and Condé’s works, the protagonists of Chair Piment and La Vie Scélérate also revisit the site of their trauma in an attempt to discover and reconcile with their past. While Mina considers a physical return to the site of her trauma, Claude decides to take the same journey through memory writing. Lambek and Antze also argue that memory-making is an activity which employs a person’s physical strength as they engage in the ‘ceaseless activity of remembering and forgetting, assimilating and discarding’. According to them, the process of forgetting is as important as the remembering which both require ‘effort and energy’. Thus, the following section will examine how these complex notions of remembering and forgetting manifest in the protagonists in these two works. This will also investigate the function of (re)(post)memory in reconstructing and reconciling with the past. An analysis of the protagonists will show that the traumatic event ceases to be traumatic once its memory is recovered and reconstructed.

As argued by Caruth, Mina’s unresolved memory or the ‘not knowing,’ allows the past to affect and often overwhelm her present and future. Her pain of ‘not knowing’ is presented through a metaphor of a decayed tooth which has continued to be painful for twenty years:

... j’ai ramené de cette dent qui me fait mal depuis vingt ans. Devine ce que c’est? Tous les jours y a quelque chose qui reste coincé, un bout de viande, un grain de riz, une arête... Ça fait vingt ans qu’elle me fait souffrir l’enfer, cette dent. (16)

Her inability to recapture the event which led her to traumatic state prevents resolution or integration. Her memory resurfaces at her every attempt to repress it, until she gives her memory an acknowledged place in her present. The psychoanalyst Renee Fredrickson in Repressed Memories confirms that one’s past is made of repressed memories and if one can uncover them, they will help to understand the

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154 Ibid.
circumstances of one’s life and one’s experience of pain.\textsuperscript{155} Thus Fredrickson suggests her readers embark on a ‘journey of discovery and healing’ in which ‘you must piece together mind and body clues to find out what you have forgotten. You will struggle at first to believe what you are remembering, but your healing will take place as you recover your memories’.\textsuperscript{156} Thus, recovery from trauma can only be achieved through the recovery and acceptance of its memory.

What Mina wants to consider as history resurfaces, because of its unresolved nature, as memory. Pierre Nora, in his essay ‘Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire,’ shows how history constantly seeks to replace memory:

\begin{quote}
History is perpetually suspicious of memory, and its true mission is to suppress and destroy it. At the horizon of historical societies, at the limits of the completely historicized world, there would occur a permanent secularization. History’s goal and ambition is not to exalt but to annihilate what has in reality taken place.\textsuperscript{157}
\end{quote}

According to Nora, memory is the process of remembering and forgetting which is subject to latent experience and intermittently invigorated whilst history is the restoration of what is no longer. Whilst memory ties us to the present, history represents the past. As time goes by, memory fades and becomes part of history. Thus, history illuminates a discontinuity of memory. History has suppressed memory to a point where there remains only ‘lieux de mémoire’ (sites of memory) and not ‘milieux de mémoire’ (real environments of memory).\textsuperscript{158}

Nora also suggests the possibility of resuscitating this past if one takes the responsibility of recalling it through individual means.\textsuperscript{159} With the supernatural


\textsuperscript{156} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{158} Nora 284.

\textsuperscript{159} Ibid 289-293.
appearances of Rosalia, Mina is unable to avoid the past. Thus, Mina does not allow history to replace her memory. Instead, she initiates the process of digging up her memory by going to Piment, her ‘lieu de mémoire’ and piecing together her story. Piment is the ‘lieu’ in three meanings of the word; ‘material, functional and symbolic’.\(^{160}\) It is material because of its demographic content. It is functional since Mina is left with second-hand memories that were transmitted across generations. It is symbolic as it is defined by ‘events and experiences shared by a small minority that may not have participated in them’.\(^{161}\)

Mina is burdened with a past which she has not directly experienced, but she has inherited its consequences. Recovering the memory or piecing together the past is a complicated task. Thus, she seeks to fill in the gaps through the narratives of others around her. Nicola King asserts that the remembering of self is not a restoration of an original identity, but a constant course of ‘re-membering,’ ‘of putting together moment by moment, of provisional and partial reconstruction’.\(^{162}\) This remembering is actioned with the support of the Piment community. Rosalia’s ghost persuades her to come home to Piment and then she is initiated into her family history by the villagers. Her first encounter is with Suzon Mignard; and then the school mistress Eleanor Rutice; another village woman Silène Couba; Pépette, the fish monger and most importantly Nana, Mina’s grandmother. As Silène states ‘[l]e passé est à portée de ta main. Les vivants te guideront et les morts t’escorteront sur le chemin de la vérité’ (278). Silène’s use of future tense in the quotation guarantees the certainty of retrieving the past. As Nora suggests, although the ‘milieu de mémoire’ is no longer available, Mina is at the ‘lieu de [sa] mémoire’ and its inhabitants will provide her the means to uncover the past.

\(^{160}\) Nora 295.
\(^{161}\) Ibid.
\(^{162}\) King 175.
In this journey of recovery, Rosalia’s ghost plays a significant role. She is Mina’s first guide in bringing her to Piment. In *Spectres de Marx* Jacques Derrida describes ghosts as the return of a repressed history. In line with Derrida, Avery F. Gordon affirms that:

> the ghost is the sign, or the empirical evidence that that haunting is taking place. The ghost is not simply a dead or a missing person, but a social figure, a key to that dense site where history and subjectivity intertwine .... The way of the ghost is haunting, and haunting is a very particular way of knowing what has happened or is happening.  

When Rosalia’s ghost returns to Piment in 1998 and appears to many villagers, they start to believe that ‘[elle était] remontée des temps de l’esclavage, à cause du passé réveillé par les démons intellectuels commémorateurs de l’année 1998 qui fêtaient en grandes pompes et petits flonflons les cent cinquante ans de l’Abolition’ (212). It also embodies recognition of the fact that the legacy of slavery might be the tendency to inflict trauma on the self and of the need to acknowledge it in order to leave it behind. By extension this suggests that the past legacies of slavery with its buried traumas still haunt the island in the same manner that Rosalia haunts the village.

‘Rememory’ is a concept central to the reconstruction of Mina’s memory. The term ‘rememory’ suggests that part of the remembering process is left unacknowledged. Thus, it suggests the importance of ‘remembering’ the ‘memory’. Mae G. Henderson suggests that ‘rememory’ is something which possesses or haunts one, rather than something which one possesses. The fact that a person is haunted or possessed by the memory of the past means that it is the memory which takes control of the person. Mina’s memory is certainly an embodiment of this kind of memory.

She possesses a vague memory of the night after Rosalia’s funeral. She recollects that by the time she lost consciousness, she was taken care of by Suzon. Thus, she remains

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164 King 161.

possessed by this memory for twenty one years. However, Mina believes that the recollection of her memory of what happened that night will help her liberate herself from her sister’s ghost and reconcile with her past. For Mina, the process of reconstructing memory takes place through rememory or ‘remembering again after a period of forgetting’. It is in Suzon’s house, after her return to Guadeloupe, that she retrieves her memory. Her first breakthrough is the image of Suzon ‘conversing with invisibles’ just as she was losing consciousness after Rosalia’s funeral. The words uttered by Suzon come to Mina’s memory, ‘les paroles amères de Suzon Mignard, que Mina croyait effacées de sa mémoire, ensévelies dans l’oubli, se présentaient dans l’ordre d’autrefois’ (199). This is the moment where Mina discovers Suzon is responsible for the curse on her family. In accordance with Abraham and Torok, Mina’s memory was ‘entombed in a fast and secure place, awaiting resurrection’.

Mina’s rememory suggests the belatedness of her traumatic experience. She has not forgotten the trauma of her past, but has not fully witnessed the experience of her trauma. Thus her revisit enacts the process of her ‘remembering something she had forgotten she knew’. Abraham and Torok’s notion of ‘preservative repression’ is valuable here. They suggest that preservative repression ‘seals off access to part of one’s own life in order to shelter from view the traumatic monument of an obliterated event’. Such events are preserved in what they call an ‘intrapsychic tomb’:

the tomb’s content is unique in that it cannot appear in the light of day as speech. And yet, it is precisely a matter of words. Without question, in the depths of the crypt unspeakable words buried alive are held fast, like owls in ceaseless vigil.

166 Ibid.

167 Ibid.


169 Ibid.
Mina’s rememory represents the return of the repressed memory, in which the ‘repressed’ does not mean the completely forgotten, but implies an unassimilated event.

Apart from Rosalia’s ghost, the other important figure who helps Mina in discovering the truth is her grandmother Nana. In Condé’s and Pineau’s novels, the protagonist often seeks help from an elderly person in her family to fill in the gaps of their family’s past. They usually choose the figure of the grandmother who possesses the memory of lived experience. In *Chair Piment*, Melchior has ‘transmitted only the wound to [his] children, to whom the memory had been refused and who grew up in the compact void of the unspeakable.’\(^{170}\) Within this void, Mina relies heavily on others to reconstruct the past which ‘eludes and excludes them’.\(^{171}\) Mina constructs her past with the narratives of the villagers and most importantly with the help of her paternal grandmother Nana who passes the memory of the lived experience of the trauma to Mina.

Caribbean society attaches great importance to the grandmother as the other mother who looks after the children within the context of the absent mother. Ormerod, for instance, states that:

> ... a traditional prestige attaches to the grandmother as substitute mother, offering care, protectiveness and a stability that the birth mother may not be able to provide. She symbolises the strength of the matrifocal household that was born of the shattering of African family pattern during slavery.\(^{172}\)

In addition to this, and most importantly, the grandmothers also become the custodians of (family) history, for they are the ones responsible for the transmission of family stories and folk traditions regarding the Caribbean to future generations by carrying on the oral story telling tradition. This phenomenon is further supported by


\(^{172}\) Ormerod, *An Introduction* 102.
Micheline Rice-Maximine who notes that ‘[c]’est la grand-mère, et donc les femmes en
général, qui de façon anonyme bien souvent a [sic] effectué ce travail de passation du
savoir et de la culture’.\textsuperscript{173} Mina’s grandmother Nana also fulfils this duty of handing
over the family history to her granddaughter. This significant grandmother role is also
a central technique in the Caribbean literature which will also be the theme of the
fourth chapter of this dissertation. The alienation and the exile experienced by the
daughters due to their inability to bond with the mother is atoned for by the entrance
of an older woman who is usually the grandmother into their life. The grandmothers
serve as a focal point for the granddaughter to find the answers to the unanswered
questions in her life, thereby creating her own identity. The grandmother facilitates
the role of educating the daughter, filling the gaps in the family history, previously
unknown to the granddaughter, and subsequently hands over the ability to help in
establishing one’s identity to her granddaughter.\textsuperscript{174} They preserve the oral tradition
and pass it on to their granddaughters. This is, in fact, the subject of discussion of the
fourth chapter.

Although Nana is the only member who can bear witness to the family’s past, she
shuts herself off from everyone around her. Nana’s repression of the past again evokes
Abraham and Torok’s notion of a metaphysical tomb in which a traumatised person
seals his or her secrets in an effort to erase the memory. As Abraham and Torok
suggest, she is unable to integrate the past into her life because she is consumed by
loss - the loss of a happy family with Gabriel:

… there was the metapsychological traumatism of a loss or, more precisely, the “loss”
that resulted from a traumatism. This segment of an ever so painfully lived Reality-
untellable and therefore inaccessible to the gradual, assimilative work of mourning-
causes a genuinely covert shift in the entire psyche. The shift itself is covert, since both
the fact that the idyll was real and that it was later lost must be disguised and denied.
This leads to the establishment of a sealed off psychic place, a crypt in the ego.\textsuperscript{175}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[173] Micheline Rice-Maximine, \textit{Karukéra: présence littéraire de la Guadeloupe} (New York: Peter Lang,

\item[174] Rosalie Riegle Troester “Turbulence and Tenderness: Mothers, Daughters, and ‘Othermothers’ in

\item[175] Abraham and Torok 141.
\end{footnotes}
For decades, Nana has barred access to the truth. She who discusses all matters comfortably, slips into silence whenever her son Ferdy ‘empruntait les chemins de l’histoire familiale à Piment’ (335). Confronted by her granddaughter Mina, Nina begins to reveal the family secret with ‘des mots pris aux rets de son âme depuis et cetera d’années’ (349). In effect, Mina’s presence helps another victim of trauma, her grandmother Nana, to liberate herself from her trauma while she helps Mina to piece together her family’s past. Most importantly, this demonstrates ‘the dependency of the self on others’ and the way in which healing is intimately linked with reconnecting relationships.

It is also interesting to note the role of the grandmother as it is presented in La Vie Scélérate. Bert’s wife plays the role of the grandmother, educating her granddaughter Aurélia (Bébert’s daughter), in the family’s history and inculcating a sense of belonging to the island. It is with the help of her grandmother that Aurélia overcomes the deaths of both her father and her grandfather. After her grandmother sent her some photos of Guadeloupe, ‘[c]’est de ce temps-là que l’île a commencé de m’envahir’ (300). It is her grandmother’s love and the knowledge she transmits to her that allows Aurélia to dream about the island, and by extension a family. Furthermore, Aurélia’s interest in a homeland draws interesting parallels with the protagonist in Pineau’s L’Exil selon Julia. Although it is the same situation discussed in both novels, Pineau’s novel is true to social realities in that it is the grandmother from the Caribbean who educates her granddaughter about her homeland whilst in La Vie Scélérate it is the French working class grandmother who has never been to the Caribbean who, out of love for her deceased husband, introduces the island heritage to her granddaughter.177

Using Caruth’s formulation of trauma, the re-remembering of Mina finally resituates the event ‘in [her] immediate understanding,’ permitting ‘history to arise where

176 Brison 46.

immediate understanding may not’. Rosalia, who was physically and mentally disabled in life, acquires great powers in death and pursues Mina to find peace. The narratives of lived memory of her grandmother and others around Mina prove that recovering from trauma relies on reconnection with the world and not separating from it. As has been suggested by Abraham and Torok:

... with our own strength, with the help of loved ones, or with an analyst if need be, we must be able to remember the past, recall what was taken from us, and understand and grieve over what we have lost to trauma, and so find and renew ourselves.179

Eventually she pieces together her past and reconciles with her trauma. With this, the symptoms of her trauma disappear. Along with Mina’s reconciliation with her trauma, Rosalia disappears from Mina’s vision and rests in Morne Calvaire at the foot of the traveller’s tree where Melchior had buried the pieces of her umbilical cord. Thus, Mina experiences a transformation in life. She feels free of Rosalia’s ghost that had tied her to her past for twenty one years and forms a stable love relationship with a French man named Victor who was one of her stream of lovers.

In La Vie Scélérate, Claude attempts to write her family history in order to establish her own identity. The fulfilment of this project rests on a narrative which is based on memory. The first sentence of La Vie Scélérate: ‘Mon aïeul Albert Louis qui n’était encore aïeul de personne’ (13) implies a narrative as ‘journey through history’ as recounted by Claude, a fourth generation descendent of Louis.180 In accordance with the postcolonial critic Stuart Hall, Condé recognises that Caribbean identities are not only structured by a ‘vector of difference and rupture,’ but also by a ‘vector of similarity and continuity’.181 In the interplay of ‘time and space, rupture and continuity’


179 Abraham and Torok 13.


are evident in the first lines of *La Vie Scélérate*.182 Claude’s recreation of the life of her forebears necessitates a journey back through time past; (re)constituting both biological and historical links between the narrator protagonist and her ancestors.

Elizabeth A. Zahnd affirms that in this journey Claude plays various roles as ‘narrator, writer, researcher, historian, descendent and child protagonist’.183 This, by extension, points to the multifaceted and collective nature of Caribbean identity.184 She fulfils her role of both writer and historian by investigating her family history through photos, documents, and interviews. She is engrossed in her ‘travail de fourmi ramassant, recueillant des miettes d’information pour les engranger dans le lieu sûr de [sa] tête’ (268). She is at once the protagonist in *La Vie Scélérate* and the subject of her own research. As narrator and writer, she examines and analyses the thoughts and conversations of her ancestor. Through these multiple roles and the process of her personal inquiry, Claude juxtaposes her personal story against the collective history of her family.185 By extension, she symbolises the individual identity of the Caribbean against their collective history.

Claude’s attempt to (re)write her family history through her own memory and the memories of others, challenges Albert’s established definition of family when she includes formerly excluded members in her account. Albert’s exclusive and selective construction of family membership includes black relatives, yet excludes white relatives. Claude’s narrative eradicates the distinction of race in family and identity, describing the family as ‘corps homogène, irrigué par le même sang et réuni sous la même membrane de peau’ (341). In fact, in writing her family history, Claude gives priority to excluded members of her family.

182 Zahnd 92.
183 Ibid 93.
184 Ibid.
185 Ibid.
Although the narrator-protagonist retells the history from a subjective point of view, she of course has not witnessed many events that happened long before her birth. Particularly the life circumstances of her great grandfather Albert. Elizabeth A. Zahnd suggests that this process of reconstructing the past might best be conceptualised as rememorizing.\(^{186}\) She identifies rememory as an ‘oral process which allows an individual to recall events that affected a community outside of his or her own life’.\(^{187}\) However, my interest in using Marianne Hirsch’s concept of postmemory is to show how Claude’s narrative expresses a generational response to the memories and traumatic experiences of previous generations of her family. Claude attempts to establish a relationship to her mother and to her maternal family in order to trace her own identity. As Hirsch states, ‘postmemory [is] the response of the second generation to the trauma of the first.’\(^{188}\) In *Family Frames* and several other articles, Hirsch discusses the notion of postmemory and the impact of the traumatic experiences of previous generations on the identity of successive generations. This indeed is the focus of *La Vie Scélérate*.

Hirsch defines postmemory as:

\[\text{distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection. Postmemory is a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation ... Postmemory characterizes the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can be neither understood nor recreated.}\(^{189}\)

The ‘imaginative investment’ is central in the theory of postmemory in that successive members of one family attempt to retrieve the memories of previous generations. When memories are transmitted from one generation to the next, gaps are left in

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\(^{186}\) Ibid 94.

\(^{187}\) Ibid.


\(^{189}\) Hirsch, *Family Frames* 22.
between. In an attempt to fill in the gaps, successive generations are left to imagine the lived memories of their ancestors. Claude, for instance, imagines what the life of her great-grandfather would have been like as a labourer on the Panama Canal. She also imagines her grandfather Jacob’s journey to New York. Her narratives oscillate between lived and inherited memories. Claude is burdened with a past not directly experienced but nevertheless lived as psychologically real, as a reality which actually happened rather than being imagined, and is integrated into the story of the self. Claude has integrated her mother’s, grandfather’s and great-grandfather’s past into the ‘fabric of [her] self-history’ and made it a ‘part of [her] core sense of self’.\footnote{190}

One of the sources Claude uses in her recreation of history is family photos. In their article “What’s wrong with this picture? Archival photographs in contemporary narratives” Leo Spitzer and Marianne Hirsch describe photographs as ‘points of memory’.\footnote{191} Photos are a powerful link enabling the connection:

between past and present, memory and postmemory, individual remembrance and cultural recall, photographs can offer evidence of past crimes and function as haunting spectres that enable an affective visceral connection to the past.\footnote{192}

During her stay in Guadeloupe, her grandfather Jacob introduced Claude to her maternal family through family photos. As Claude sees it, ‘ce jour-là, mon grand-père tenta de couvrir la ligne d’infamie « Née de père inconnu...» Oui, il tenta de m’enraciner!’ (218). Spitzer and Hirsch assert that photographs:

have a memory of their own that they bring to us from the past, that memory tells us something about ourselves, about what/how we and those who preceded us once were; that they carry not only information about the past, but enable us to reach an emotional register.\footnote{193}

\footnote{190} Ibid.
\footnote{192} Ibid.
\footnote{193} Ibid 250.
Another source for the retrieval of memory and the recreation of the past in *La Vie Scélérate* is a dialogue between generations. Claude unearths her mother’s past through conversations with her mother’s lovers, including Gesner and Manuel. However, the most fruitful source of information is Claude’s grandfather Jacob. Jacob introduces Claude to many deceased members of the Louis family. He reveals that ‘[t]outes les familles cachent un crime, celui-là c’est le nôtre. Mon demi-frère Albert, que mon père avait eu d’une négresse anglaise qu’il avait connue à Panama...’ (219). Through his stories Jacob introduces the hidden members of the Louis family from Albert’s first marriage.

Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, in their study of the nature of testimony and crises of witnessing, discuss the relationship between listener and witness, asserting that ‘it takes two to witness the unconscious’. Dori Laub suggests the listener of the narrative of extreme trauma finds himself in a unique situation in that he is looking for a record that is yet to be made. The degree of the trauma prevents its registration; the recording mechanisms of the human mind have temporarily malfunctioned. The process of bearing witness to trauma through the victim’s narrative begins with ‘someone who testifies to an absence, to an event that has not yet come into existence, in spite of the overwhelming and compelling nature of the reality of its occurrence’. This means that whilst there may be ample evidence to signal the presence of trauma, until it is heard it is not considered to have been truly witnessed. Therefore, the listener is ‘the blank screen on which the event comes to be inscribed for the first time’. This is the process which gives birth to the ‘knowing’.

Laub also suggests that through the act of listening, the listener of trauma also becomes a participant in the traumatic event. The victim’s relationship to the


195 Ibid 57.

196 Ibid.

197 Ibid 57-58.
traumatic experience thus impacts on the listener’s relationship to it. Similar to the trauma victim, the listener will also experience hurt, confusion and bewilderment. In order to execute his role as the listener, he must address these emotions. Therefore, the listener takes part in the victim’s struggle with the memories of his or her traumatic past.

Yet the listener is also a distinct individual, and in playing the role of witness, does not become the victim, but shares in the victim’s experience. He maintains his separate place. In other words, the witness does not take on the trauma of the narrator to the same degree as those who may have experienced it first hand. This means that he has to be a witness to the trauma and a witness to himself. As Laub writes ‘[i]t is only in this way, through his simultaneous awareness of the continuous flow of those inner hazards both in the trauma witness and in himself, that he can become the enabler of the testimony-the one who triggers its initiation, as well as the guardian of its process and of its momentum’.199

The dialogue paves the way for the witness to dig up his/her repressed memory and bring it to surface. Laub further asserts that this relationship is ‘a dialogical process of exploration and reconciliation of two worlds - the one that was brutally destroyed and the one that is - that are different and will always remain so’.200 It is a contention which receives further support from Caruth who suggests that ‘trauma is an encounter with another, an act of telling and listening, a listening to another’s wound, recognizable in its intersubjective relation’.201 The dialogue helps memory to surface as a result of cooperation between two generations.

The leitmotif in Claude’s narrative is remembrance and memory, the revitalization of an essentially imagined past. Through this she constructs her identity and thereby

198 Ibid 58.
199 Ibid.
201 Caruth, Unclaimed Experience 14.
creates a sense of belonging to a family and to Guadeloupe. Claude’s quest for identity is successful in that she recovers the stories of those who have been excluded from her maternal family and becomes a part of a more inclusive, more entire, family. This enables her to root herself, that is to identify herself, as ‘belonging’ to the island. She establishes her identity as ‘la fille naturelle de Thécla, elle-même fille légitime et tant désirée de Tima et de Jacob, lui-même fils favori d’un côté...’ (334).

1.5 Conclusion

In my discussion of Chair Piment and La Vie Scélérée I have focused on particular themes which are integral to my analysis in subsequent chapters. My overarching focus in the latter will be an investigation of narratives of memory that are embedded in each of the novels. I have in this chapter explored critical issues relevant to discussions of memory. These include the relationship between one’s past and present, colonisation and its representation in fiction, personal and collective memory and lived and inherited memory. In each of the selected novels, memory is described as an activity that recuperates the past by placing it into the context of the present.

This reference to memory is subjective, creative and unique; it is not the same for each generation. As in Chair Piment some memories correspond to personal experience, whilst some exist as second-hand ‘post-memories’ as in La Vie Scélérée. In both novels, the protagonists (re)construct memory through the information gathered from external sources, such as elders of their families or elderly friends, photographs and interviews. Mina’s intention is to retrieve the submerged memory of her trauma and bring it to the surface of consciousness. Claude, on the other hand, does not possess any personal experience, or a memory of a traumatic past. She has, however, inherited a familial dysfunction from her mother, which initially derives from the trauma of her great-grandfather. Each case provides evidence to support Huyssen’s contention that memory is ‘powerfully alive and distinct from the archive or any mere system of storage and retrieval’.²⁰²

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The depiction of characters such as Mina and Thécla remind us that although they are free from the sexual oppression of their ancestors, they are still controlled by their hereditary promiscuity. Their bodies represent a collective and familial historical entrapment that deprives them of complete autonomy over their bodies. However, in the novel they not only extract themselves from their sexual and historical bondage, but also become estranged from their newly found families. The novels begin with the protagonists’ desire to trace their family lineage. However, the stories end with the protagonists’ grounding of their common memory in the island.

Whilst this chapter established issues that generate dysfunctionality in an individual’s life and in turn within the family, following chapters will extensively examine one issue at a time. Chapter Two will position the trauma of women created by their experience of physical and sexual abuse. This chapter will attempt to answer the questions: ‘How does trauma - Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Multiple Personality Disorder (MPD) - divide the self into ‘before’ and ‘after’? How does the occurrence of a subsequent event trigger the memory of an original traumatic event? And how do the protagonists recover their repressed memory and reconstruct their self?
Chapter Two
Reclaiming Memory from the Trauma of Physical and Sexual Abuse

The traumatic event, although real, took place outside the parameters of “normal” reality, such as causality, sequence, place and time. The trauma is thus an event that has no beginning, no ending, no before, no during and no after. This absence of categories that define it lends it a quality of “otherness,” a salience, a timelessness and an ubiquity that puts it outside the range of associatively linked experiences, outside the range of comprehension, of recounting and of mastery. Trauma survivors live not with memories of the past, but with an event that could not and did not proceed through to its completion, has no ending, attained no closure, and therefore, as far as its survivors are concerned, continues into the present and is current in every respect.

2.1 Introduction

Whilst Chapter One discussed the unspeakable nature of trauma, the conflict between a trauma victim’s inability to recollect the memory of the traumatic experience and the will to claim that memory, this quotation suggests that trauma is not a memory, but an unformed and unresolved event which recurs in the mind of the victim of trauma. The quotation also implies that, because trauma takes place ‘outside the parameters of “normal” reality,’ it is not accessible to day to day memory. In other words, the memory of the trauma is unformed, yet is present in a ‘repressed’ state and leaks into the consciousness of the individual. Therefore, trauma victims often experience a sense of lack or void. Until they can resolve the event through understanding and situating it in terms of ‘causality, sequence, place and time,’ it haunts their present and affects every aspect of their life.

Trauma can be collective or individual. Collective trauma can be caused by events such as war, torture or the Holocaust persecution. Individual trauma is caused by events such as the death of a loved one, or any other personal tragedy. In this chapter I examine the trauma created by the unresolved experience of sexual and physical abuse and the victim’s attempt to reclaim the memory of the experience. In the first instance, it is important to understand the notion of abuse. The psychoanalyst Renee

203 Felman and Laub, Testimony 69.
Fredrickson defines abuse as a form of trauma performed ‘deliberately, wrongly, and unjustly to harm another human being’.\textsuperscript{204} According to Fredrickson, and as is often the case, physical and emotional abuse occurs in front of someone whilst sexual abuse often has no witnesses. Whilst all forms of abuse may result in repressed memories, sexual abuse is more likely to cause repressed memories than physical or emotional abuse.\textsuperscript{205} The shame and fear experienced by the victim at the time of sexual abuse prevents the victim from communicating this experience to others. It is a form of trauma that a family is reluctant to discuss. Because of this, the victim of sexual abuse is likely to repress their memory of the event. It could be argued that sexual abuse is both physical and emotional. However, my use of the term physical abuse points to any deliberate action that contravenes an individual’s physical integrity. This may include acts such as whipping, cutting and even murder. The term sexual abuse is used when the physical abuse is directed at an individual for sexual purposes. It includes rape, incest, voyeurism, assault and intimidation, coercion and bullying of a sexual nature.\textsuperscript{206} In light of this, the chapter will examine the trauma of Caribbean women and children which derives from their experience of physical, emotional and sexual abuse and its literary representation in selected novels.

The two novels which focus on numerous manifestations of abuse are Maryse Condé’s \textit{Célanire cou-coupé} and Gisèle Pineau’s \textit{L’Espérance-macadam}. \textit{L’Espérance-macadam} is set in an urban ghetto called Savane Mulet in Guadeloupe. From the beginning of the novel, Pineau depicts Savane Mulet as a place where many violent crimes are committed. These include murder, infanticide and sexual assault. Savane Mulet is described in the novel as ‘la chambre même du diable’ (34). The primary theme depicted in the novel is physical and sexual abuse, primarily perpetrated by men against women and children. Most importantly, Pineau explores the theme of incest.

\textsuperscript{204} Fredrickson 23.
\textsuperscript{205} Ibid.
However, as the title suggests, the characters in the novel who are the victims of abuse retain a certain degree of hope (L’espérance) to retrieve the memory of and ultimately resolve their traumatic experience. As Pineau affirms, her intention of writing *L’Espérance-macadam* was to ‘relate the violence that is done to women and girls’; and particularly the violence of incest.\(^{207}\) However, Pineau also wanted to depict hope, particularly in the character of Angela who was a victim of incest. As Pineau states ‘I wanted there to be hope, with this young woman, Angela, able to rebuild herself, because that’s what matters, showing that we can rebuild ourselves. Never forget but rebuild’.\(^{208}\)

Lorna Milne in “Sex, violence and cultural identity in the work of Gisèle Pineau” suggests that the characters in *L’Espérance-macadam* are deeply conditioned by the colonial history of violence that has encircled them.\(^{209}\) For instance, the violence executed by Ranélien, the first husband of the protagonist Eliette embodies the violence of a black slave. For instance, his reasoning for his aggressive behaviour is that ‘(...) il avait faim, et un Nègre qui a faim est comme un animal: son ventre se souvient du vieux temps d’esclavage, du manque de pain et la rage se lève du mitan de son âme’ (148). Pineau further argues that violence is a prominent feature of Caribbean society. Slavery deprived Africans of their humanity, exiled and exploited them.\(^{210}\) Although slavery was abolished in 1848, Caribbean society is still recovering from its scars:

> Tous les jours … la honte et les blessures remontaient des profondeurs du temps d’antan pour salir aujourd’hui, ses mirages, ses promesses de fabuleux demains. Non, rien n’avait changé depuis qu’on avait transbordé les premiers Nègres d’Afrique dans ce pays qui ne savait qu’enfanter des cyclones, cette terre violente où tant de malédiction

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\(^{207}\) Veldwachter 181.

\(^{208}\) Ibid.


\(^{210}\) Milne 193-194.
According to this quotation violence is clearly linked to the practices and instruments of slavery. Sabre, rope and chain were used by the colonisers to subjugate African slaves; just as these same weapons have been used in the violent neighbourhood of Ti-Ghetto in Savane Mulet. For instance, Eliette’s neighbour named Régis cuts his woman, Hortense, into pieces with a sabre after suspecting her of having a sexual relationship with another man. Hermancia’s father slices with a cutlass the seven men who raped her. The two lovers, Esabelle and Christopher, string the deceived partner Marius up on the branch of a mango tree with a rope; whilst Eloise, Glawdys’ adopted mother leaves her chained to the post of her cabin. Pineau uses the sabre as a metaphor presenting it in sexual terms to symbolise the phallus. This symbolism is reinforced when ‘coup de sabre’ (34) is used as a metaphor to describe perfunctory sex; and again when prisoners fantasise of their ‘[e]nvie de presser un corps femelle.’ D’y fourrer l’épée. De couper. De coquer, Seigneur! coquer la femme...’ (249). The sabre represents the act of penetrating and the potentiality held by men for sexual violence. The nature of these events, however, also recalls the punishment executed by the colonisers against the slaves who were whipped and mutilated, as well as the female slaves who were sexually abused by the colonisers. Milne, therefore, suggests that the forms of violence depicted in Pineau’s novel can be conceptualised

211 Ibid 201.
212 Ibid.
213 Ibid.
214 Ibid.
215 Ibid.
216 Ibid.
as a re-enactment of the traumatic violence that Caribbean people have experienced in their past.  

Kathleen Gyssels asserts that *L’Espérance-macadam* is ‘surchargé de filles maltraitées qui ne réussissent pas à devenir des femmes victorieuses ou des mères résistantes’.  

Many of the female characters in *L’Espérance-macadam* have experienced violence and abuse, either as children or adults which has eventually transformed them into helpless women who are incapable of resisting the injustices done to them and their children. Nevertheless, Pineau does not explicitly link violence in *L’Espérance-macadam* to slavery. The characters in the novel, for instance, do not articulate an explanation as to the underlying causation of violence. Rather, they think of it as a curse, or conceptualise it as an act of God: ‘la maudition des Nègres, la calamité de la misère et l’espérance morte sur cette terre’ (280). Pineau reflects this attitude in her writing when she portrays the colonised as cursed, and violence as their nature, something which is just as unavoidable as the weather. For instance, Eliette’s mother Séraphine says that ‘[il y] avait toute cette scélératesse ensouchée en nous-mêmes, Nègres, depuis le septième jour de la Création jusqu’à la malédiction proclamée pour et cetera de générations à venir’ (127). Despite this there remains an unacknowledged recognition that slavery is in fact the curse which has traumatised generations of Caribbean people. This is further supported by Marie-Tyrane in *Femmes des Antilles* who believes that it ‘était bien sûr que l’esclavage, c’était notre malédiction à nous les nègres. On payait pour les nègres du temps d’avant Jésus-Christ’. For the inhabitants of Savane Mulet, their poverty and the crimes that beset their town are evidence of this curse. It is their experience of slavery that occupies an important place in Pineau’s writing.

217 Ibid.


219 Ibid.

220 Pineau and Abraham 144.
Célanire cou-coupé is another novel which depicts incidents of physical, emotional and sexual abuse. The novel includes human sacrifice performed as ritual, unexplained deaths and murder. Condé describes a landscape filled with elements of the supernatural; evil spirits roaming in the night, witch doctors causing sudden deaths and natural disasters such as fire and disease. Above all, Condé tells the story of a new born baby named Célanire who survives a slashed throat, executed deep in the jungles of Africa as ritual sacrifice by a criminal named Madeska. Célanire cou-coupé tells of Célanire’s search for her father, and for those responsible for her mutilation during the failed ritual she endured as an infant. The setting of the story moves from Africa to Guadeloupe, to Paris and the Ivory Coast, then to Guyana, back to Guadeloupe, and on to Peru. The story ends in Guadeloupe.

Based on my reading of the two novels, I will in the first instance and in order to fully understand the nature of trauma arising from physical and sexual abuse, identify the different forms of abuse which Caribbean women and children have endured. I will then explore the historical, social and psychological factors that condition and perpetuate these particular forms of abuse in future generations. It is clear that some forms of abuse are transgenerational, that is, an adult who has been the victim of abuse in his or her childhood becomes the perpetrator of abuse against their own children in adult life. While taking into consideration the link between psychoanalysis and literature, I will next examine how the trauma of abuse divides the self into ‘before’ and ‘after’. I will then investigate the nature of the repressed memory of the victims of abuse and how the occurrence of a second event brings back their repressed memory. As such, the interplay between the individual and collective memory of the Caribbean is a theme which runs through the chapter. As memory is invoked in the construction of identity, I will finally examine the link between the process of recovering memory, and the protagonists’ construction of identity.

2.2 The self ‘before’ and ‘after’: the disruption caused by trauma

The examination of the literary representation of trauma in L’Espérance-macadam and Célanire cou-coupé invokes an inevitable discussion between literature and psychoanalysis. As mentioned in the ‘Introduction’ to this study, Caruth affirms that
the link between literature and psychoanalysis is created through its interest in ‘the complex relation between knowing and not knowing’. 221 The intersection of knowing and not knowing is the crucial point where ‘the language of literature and the psychoanalytic theory of traumatic experience precisely meet’. 222 In light of this, I will examine the complex ways that knowing and not knowing, or the ‘remembering self’ and the ‘forgotten self,’ are entangled in the narrative of trauma. Thus, the following section will explore the link between literature and psychoanalytic theory.

In both L’Espérance-macadam and Célanire cou-coupé, the central characters have fallen victim to traumatic events. Eliette, for instance, was raped by her father; whilst Célanire’s throat was mutilated during an unsuccessful ritual sacrifice. These traumatic events mark a distinction between the self in the past and the self in the present. Nicola King suggests that trauma may herald distinct psycho-emotional cleavages in a person’s life; sometimes dividing it into ‘before’ and ‘after’. 223 Furthermore, the relationship between the self ‘before’ and ‘after’ becomes even more complicated in cases of sexual abuse and violence. 224 Such instances may initiate a distinction between the narrating ‘I’ in the present and the subject of the narration of the past. In other words, there is a distinct division between the person pre and post - traumatic event, the self who went through the traumatic event, and the self who later on suppresses the experience. Moreover, the self who suppresses the experience draws our attention to Caruth’s idea of the knowing self who recollects the memory of the traumatic experience and the not knowing or forgotten self who struggles to recall the memory. In the case of sexual abuse, the victim often dissociates during the traumatic experience. 225 This means that the victim does not experience the event as if it were happening to them. Thus, they do not remember the event or remember it as if it were

221 Caruth, Unclaimed Experience 3.

222 Ibid.

223 King 2-3.

224 Ibid.

225 Ibid.
happening to somebody else. Hence, this dissociation causes the division between ‘before’ and ‘after’. In light of this, the following section will examine the literary representation of the notion of trauma of the protagonists Eliette and Célanire and their self ‘before’ and ‘after’ their traumatic experience.

In *L’Espérance-macadam* the central character is Eliette. During the course of the novel she undergoes immense personal transformation by recovering the memory of the traumatic experience of rape at the age of eight. It is her neighbour Angela, another victim of incest who triggers Eliette’s recognition of her own rape. Being unable to protect her daughter from the horrific event of incest, Eliette’s mother Séraphine slides into madness. Consequently she withdraws herself from her daughter’s life physically and emotionally. This has a profound effect on Eliette who becomes reclusiv and distances herself from the relationships that she has in her life.

The story is narrated when Eliette is sixty eight years old. Even at this age she displays a delayed response to childhood incest. What she experiences might commonly be referred to as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The literary critic of psychological trauma Cathy Caruth explains the importance of analysing the symptoms of PTSD in literature as follows:

> Indeed, the more we satisfactorily locate and classify the symptoms of PTSD, the more we seem to have dislocated the boundaries of our modes of understanding—so that psychoanalysis and medically oriented psychiatry, sociology, history and even literature all seem to be called upon to explain, to cure, or to show why it is that we can no longer simply explain or simply cure. The phenomenon of trauma has seemed to become all-inclusive, but it has done so precisely because it brings us to the limits of our understanding: if psychoanalysis, psychiatry, sociology, and even literature are beginning to hear each other anew in the study of trauma, it is because they are listening through the radical disruption and gaps of traumatic experience.  

According to Caruth the location and classification of symptoms of PTSD help to understand the nature of trauma. The juncture of these disciplines fulfils this purpose and literature is one of them. Trauma has the potential to dislocate traditional disciplinary boundaries. Its unsettling force allows us to ‘rethink our notions of

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experience, and of communication, in therapy, in the classroom, and in literature, as well as in psychoanalytic theory.\textsuperscript{227} As Cathy Caruth affirms, the various disciplines ‘are beginning to hear each other anew’\textsuperscript{228}; sociology, history and even literature are being called upon to heal and rescue the victims of trauma.

Eliette’s story is mediated to the reader through the symptoms of PTSD. These include a constant reliving of the event, a complete inability to remember it, dreams, flashbacks, attempts to avoid circumstances and situations that could trigger a memory of the event, and feelings of detachment or estrangement.\textsuperscript{229} Eliette’s rape even caused her to lose her speech for several years. She prefers solitude and to live within the confines of her home. Her character is different from other women presented in French Caribbean literature.\textsuperscript{230} Her experience of rape caused her to be indifferent, shy and weak. The language used by Condé to describe Eliette includes ‘lâche, indifférente, faible et molle’ (125). She fails to fulfil her role as a wife in both her marriages. The visions of her previous husbands and her unfulfilled desire to have a child reflect as a ‘maladie de la pensée’ (21). The nature of this ‘maladie’ (sickness) is ‘tourner et retourner les visions, [...] remâcher les mêmes paroles, brasser les souvenirs’ (21). The use of corporeal verbs such as ‘tourner’ (turn), ‘retourner’ (turn over), ‘remâcher’ (munch again) and ‘brasser’ (shuffle) to depict Eliette’s emotional status attests to the physicality of her mental illness.

\textsuperscript{227} Ibid 4.

\textsuperscript{228} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{230} Characters such as Reine Sans Nom and Télumée in \textit{Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle}, Tituba in \textit{Moi, Tituba, sorcière...noire de Salem} gather strength by forming relationships with other women around them.
Anthropologist Roberta Culbertson discusses the emergence of another ‘self’ in the experience of sexual abuse. She suggests that the ‘extreme victimisation’ and ‘powerlessness’ associated with sexual abuse can sever the normal process of memory and disrupts the recognised sense of self. Eliette’s rape produces a solitary individual who ‘cherchait rien d’autre sur cette terre que la paix de sa case .... Yeux et oreilles bouchés, elle luttait pour repousser au loin la peine des autres’ (8). Eliette’s sense of self is cleaved between the ‘child who knew’; and the child who has no knowledge of the abuse. Moreover, this cleavage of the self, specifically the ‘child who knew,’ preserves the dormant memory of the past event until such time that it is retrieved by the victim in the present. This contention is further supported by van der Kolk who asserts that traumatic memories of abuse are not ‘encoded into narrative memory’. Rather, they are preserved elsewhere ‘as fresh and painful as the day they happened’. The creation of this ‘other self’ is a manifestation of the trauma that the psyche could not register.

Eliette’s rape by her father is a trauma which is not registered by the conscious self of the child. Culberton believes that trauma produces in the body certain neurological responses which serve to impair complete recognition of the experience:

[...] sometimes merely to the reflexes; siphoning senses of fear and panic off into other parts of the brain so as not to destroy the potential for action as required. Thus events and feelings are simply not registered, but this does not mean they are forgotten; they are located in other parts of the mind and the parts of the body affected as well, though separated from the continuing integrated story of the self.

231 King 63.
232 Ibid.
233 Ibid.
234 Antze and Lambek 7.
235 Ibid.
Culbertson suggests that retention of the traumatic event occurs in a different compartment of the ‘mind,’ and in the body, which is not accessible to one’s narrative memory. This process creates a separate self. Parallels can be seen in Culberton’s analysis of survivors of war trauma and Dori Laub’s investigation of Holocaust survivors. Laub explains the ‘simultaneous existence of [the] more or less functional self and the truncated, surviving self.’ This means that the ‘surviving self’ remembers the trauma whilst the ‘functioning self’ has forgotten. Laub further mentions that this other self does not relate to MPD but to an ‘existential division’ between the functioning self of the present day and the surviving self who has experienced the trauma in the past. Thus, it is an ‘internal psychic splitting’ which results in ‘two distinct “people” living side by side, one behaving as if s/he were part of the world and the other as if s/he had no contact with it whatsoever.’

Eliette’s rape takes place the day before cyclone Hugo hit Guadeloupe in 1928. In fact, her memory of the rape is usurped by that of the cyclone. Eliette’s life has been so altered by both that the rapist and the cyclone are melded into one indistinguishable force. Eliette, for instance, grows up with a ‘peur des hommes et des cyclones, de leurs yeux mauvais’ (160). Pineau uses the cyclone metaphorically to symbolise the rape. For example, Eliette is frightened by the ‘souffles’ that she imagines outside her door at night:

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Cerbons soirs, elle aurait juré qu’une bête égarée se tenait debout derrière sa porte, balançant entre deux idées: rentrer pour l’égorgier ou bien attendre que son cœur déraille et s’arrête. Des moments, elle entendait, clairs, deux souffles qui luttaient et

237 King 71.
238 Ibid 178.
239 Ibid 178-179.
240 Ibid 100.
s’opposaient sans paroles. ... Il est arrivé combien de fois que la nuit soit fendue à coups de coutelas et toute crevée de cris. (37)

Milne suggests that since ‘souffle’ can mean both human breath and the breath of air, it evokes not only the burst of the cyclone but also the breath of the rapist.242 Again, Eliette’s fear of men, and the thought that someone is waiting by her door at night, are common symptoms of PTSD. People who experience PTSD also attempt to avoid activities and situations that evoke their trauma. They also experience distressful memories of the event through sudden flashbacks of the scene of the abuse at unexpected times.243 Although Eliette’s post trauma self does not remember the arrival of the rapist and his breath, her pre trauma self or the self ‘before’ where this memory is restored stimulates her present self to fear men and to imagine someone with a heavy breath by her door.

The life of Célanire in Condé’s Célanire cou-coupé is punctuated by several traumatic events. First, she was taken from her mother at birth and sold to the criminal Madeska to be sacrificed in the name of Agénor de Fouques-Timbert, a wealthy white plantation owner in order to magically increase his political power. Her throat slashed, left to bleed to death, she was rescued by the police officer Dieudonné and treated by Dr Jean Pinceau. The childless Dr Pinceau and his wife Ofusan later adopted Célanire. However, Célanire grew to detest Ofusan although she deeply loved her. Célanire only desired love from Dr Pinceau. However, Célanire is rejected by her biological father and her adopted father Dr Pinceau. Her biological father was complicit in the sacrifice and Dr Pinceau is unable to love Célanire because of the fear instilled in him by her scarred throat. Célanire’s scar remains a constant reminder of the violence she experienced as an infant.

Dr Pinceau observes how Célanire, as a child of ten years, is fascinated by the scar and examines it regularly:

242 Milne 193-194.

243 Fredrickson 226-228.
Parfois, je la surprenais à considérer devant un miroir sa monstrueuse cicatrice. Ses yeux se gonflaient de larmes comme elle se demandait qui étaient ses véritables parents. Elle s’était mis dans l’idée qu’ils avaient été forcés de se séparer d’elle parce qu’ils étaient trop pauvres pour l’élever, et cela la remplissait de chagrin. (121)

As Célanire stares into the mirror she reflects on the unknown experience which led to her scarring. The scar is the only physical evidence of her trauma. Yet the scar is an outward sign of her internal wound, the inescapable reality of a traumatic experience which marks the distinction between the self ‘before’ and ‘after’.

Parallels can be drawn between Célanire’s case and the case of Wolf Man. In the Wolf Man, Freud explains that:

[a]t the age of one and a half the child receives an impression to which he was unable to react adequately; he is only able to understand it and be moved by it when the impression is revived in him at the age of four: and only 20 years later, during the analysis, is he able to grasp with his own conscious mental processes what was then going on in him.

The ‘impression’ described by Freud is Wolf Man’s witnessing of his parents having sex. Wolf Man describes this as a ‘primal scene’ in which he sees his parents copulating like animals. The ‘impression’ is rekindled when, at the age of four, he dreams of white wolves in the tree outside his bedroom. Célanire’s own primal scene is the mutilation enacted during the sacrificial rite. When she touches the scar on her throat a pain is reborn the origins of which are veiled from her memory. Although she is not able to comprehend why, the scar triggers a deep seated source of suffering. This draws our attention to Caruth’s assertion that the traumatic experience, although unable to be recollected through narrative memory, may be stored in the body. Caruth’s assertion is supported by Maeve McCusker who argues that the memory of the traumatic experience remains inscribed in the body of the victim ‘which is presented as both an archive and as an active witness, bearing stubborn and unique testimony to the

244 Wolf Man is the nick name of Sergei Pankejeff, a Russian aristocrat and a patient of Sigmund Freud. Freud gave him the pseudonym Wolf Man to protect his identity after a dream he had of white wolves on a tree outside his bedroom window.

horrors of the past. This suggests that the trauma of Célanire as well as the Wolf Man was inscribed in the body and could be retrieved at a later time. Thus, the body bears witness to their forgotten story of trauma.

Condé’s portrayal of the character of Célanire offers us an opportunity to investigate the psychiatric diagnosis of MPD. MPD points to a fractured sense of identity, those affected by it have altered or split personalities. As Paul Ricoeur suggests ‘either there are too many selves or one that doesn’t hang together’. MPD sufferers display any number of identities, each with its own behavioural pattern. This disorder is often caused by overwhelming stress or by a traumatic experience such as child abuse. Consequently, MPD sufferers experience a type of memory loss which extends beyond the limits of normal forgetfulness. They display multiple and dissimilar mannerisms, attitudes and beliefs. MPD sufferers experience sudden attacks of anger, often accompanied by irrational thoughts and behaviours. They experience a sense of depersonalization and derealization. Depersonalization is an anomaly by which an individual watches oneself act without having any control over one’s actions. Depersonalization is unreality in one’s sense of self; derealization is the sense of unreality in the outside world. Furthermore, these altered personalities can be triggered by ‘objects, words, situations in everyday life that act like hypnotic cues’.

In Célanire’s behaviour one can identify symptoms of MPD. Throughout the course of her life she displays multiple personalities; she is at once portrayed as a woman with supernatural powers who causes mysterious deaths; as a kind woman who cares for orphans; as a feminist; and as a woman with a tendency towards promiscuity and

246 McCusker 173.
247 MPD is more recently known as the Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID). Antze and Lambek, eds. Tense Past 6-7.
248 Ibid 6-7.
249 Ibid 7.
250 Ibid 8.
251 Ibid.
lesbianism. Quite similar to MPD sufferers, Célanire also does not possess a coherent identity. One example of her multiple identities is evident in her work in Foyer des Métis, an orphanage run by Mr Desruisse. With her arrival in Ivory Coast after several years in Paris, Célanire is presented to the reader as the carer for orphans in Foyer. Condé depicts her as a kind-hearted, genuine woman whose intention is to care for orphans. In Ivory Coast she also plays a dominant role as a feminist who is determined to help the destitute women to liberate themselves from patriarchy deriving from the African familial and political structures. Célanire transforms the Foyer into an establishment to provide education and shelter for women who have been abandoned or abused by their husbands. However, her reputation as a carer and feminist is eroded through her sexual advances towards many of the men who come to the Foyer. Célanire soon becomes reputed for her promiscuity as the Foyer becomes likened to a brothel.

During this time Célanire is also recognised as somebody who possesses supernatural powers. A mythification of Célanire emerges as she becomes accredited with doing both good and evil. The mysterious deaths that happen seem to advantage Célanire. For instance, soon after Célanire’s arrival in Ivory Coast, Mr Desruisse dies and Célanire is appointed Head of the orphanage. Soon after she meets Thomas de Brabant, deputy governor of the colony, they become lovers. With the death of the Governor Alix Pol-Roger, Thomas is promoted to the post. Shortly after the arrival of Thomas’ wife Charlotte and their daughter Ludvinie in Ivory Coast, Charlotte is killed by a wild beast. Célanire then marries Thomas and becomes the wife of a powerful governor.

Célanire’s scar is, for the first time disclosed to the people around her when it is accidentally unveiled by Hakim, the mulatto director of the local school. As he describes it:

une monstrueuse cicatrice.

Un garrot de caoutchouc violacé, épais comme un bourrelet, repoussé, ravaudé, tavelé, enserrait le cou. On aurait dit que celui-ci avait été coupé en deux parties égales, puis rafistolé tant bien que mal, les chairs rapprochées par force et bourgeonnant dans tous les sens comme elles le voulaient. ...
Tout le restant de la journée, Hakim demeura terré dans sa chambre. Ainsi, la superstition était vérité. Célanire était un «cheval» et son signe se cachait dans son cou. C’était cette cicatrice extraordinaire qu’il avait vue, vue de ses deux yeux. (72)

As a result of his rejection of Célanire’s sexual advances and having seen her scar, Hakim believes that he will fall victim to some form of evil. In fact, immediately after, Hakim is found guilty of the murder of his friend and a student and sent to a penal colony in Guyana. The mythification of Célanire as a creature with supernatural powers is further asserted by one of the supervisors of the Foyer. She asserts that Célanire is capable of transforming herself into a snake:

Une autre monitrice assura que Célanire avait la faculté de quitter son corps comme un serpent qui mue laisse son fourreau dans les taillis. Une nuit que la pluie et le vent faisaient claquer les volets, elle était entrée à l’improviste dans sa chambre et avait vu devant la fenêtre grande ouverte un petit tas de peau et de chairs molles, informes. Cachée derrière une penderie, elle avait assisté au retour de la jeune femme aux premières heures du matin. La bouche barbouillée de sang, elle avait reniflé son enveloppe charnelle et avait regagné son lit tout tranquillement. Ah oui! Célanire était au service de puissants aawabo. (84-85)

When she returns to Guadeloupe to search for answers to her past, Célanire becomes interested in same sex relationships. In Guadeloupe Célanire builds a second sanctuary for women and a conservatory of music. She calls this Au Gai Rossignol. She takes two female lovers; Amarante, a Wayana woman and Elissa de Kerdoré. Au Gai Rossignol gains a reputation as a paradise for lesbians, a place where women can openly express their love for each other. Abeysinghe suggests that Célanire demonstrates her dual identity of ‘dangereuse féministe’. On the one hand Célanire works for the deliverance of oppressed women, and on the other as an agent of supernatural forces capable of revenge and destruction.252

Apart from these divergent personalities, Célanire throughout the course of her life displays irrational behaviour. At the age of ten, for example, Célanire accuses her adopted father, Dr Pinceau, of raping her. However, it is inconclusive as to whether she has actually been raped by her adopted father or whether she is making a false accusation. Throughout her childhood Célanire unsuccessfully attempts to gain Dr

252 Abeysinghe 48.
Pinceau’s attention. As Dr Pinceau explains, Célanire had the habit of calling him ‘petit papa chéri’ (121) and:

[I]’embrasser dans le cou, de se frotter contre [lui] comme une chatte. ...Précoce qu’elle était, au début de cette année-là, les règles lui sont venues. Et elle a pris l’habitude de lui en causer, en pleine table, devant des gens, comme si c’était notre complicité.... (121-122)

The accusation of rape made against him is supported by Célanire’s nurse, Melody. As a result, Dr Pinceau is taken into custody and sent to a penal colony in Guyana, and Célanire to a convent in Paris. One can assume that Célanire may have convinced Melody to take part in her false accusation. Even Dr Pinceau is confused as to whether he really abused Célanire or not. This leads to the reader being unsure as to the accuracy of her accusation. Condé’s creation of ambiguity, her ability to express more than one interpretation contributes to the effectiveness and richness of her work. However, this obscurity can at the same time confuse the reader. As Condé mentions in *Feasting on Words*, she wanted *Célanire cou-coupé* to be a humorous novel. Therefore, it is possible to assume that her intention in portraying ambiguity is an effort to create humour.

According to Dr Pinceau, it was Célanire who instigated sexual advances. As he explains:

Je bouillais. Du jour au lendemain, un abcès gros comme un œuf de canne lui a gonflé l’aïne. J’étais bien obligé de l’examiner et, alors, elle s’est carrément offerte. ... Trop de femmes de mauvaise vie se sont pâmées devant moi pour que je ne connaisse pas leur manège, et cette enfant le répétait à la perfection. Cela se passait un matin dans sa chambre. Je me demandais s’il fallait inciser son abcès quand elle s’est mise à rouler des yeux, se tortiller, dénuder sa poitrine où pointaient les goyaves de ses seins, prendre ma main pour la fourrer dans les endroits les plus inconvenants. Comme je protestais, elle a gémis : «Petit papa chéri, prends-moi. Je t’aime tellement!» (122)

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253 Hakim and Dr Pinceau meet each other in this same penal colony and find out through their conversation that they have both been accused by Célanire.

Célanire’s determination to make love to her adopted father and her accusation of rape seems to be an anomaly. One can assume that her imagining of rape stems from a desire for her adopted father; an anger which manifests from his refusal of her advances or perhaps originates from her mental illness. It may be a completely imaginary event that never occurred in Célanire’s life.

The novel centres on Célanire’s multiple identities, providing a number of examples for a reading of symptoms of MPD. Célanire does not seem to reach any form of reconciliation of these multiple personalities. However, she does embrace the multiplicity of these identities, not seeking integration yet still managing to achieve some sort of peaceful co-existence. The scar on her neck is a constant reminder of the trauma she experienced as an infant. It is also the trigger for the birth of these multiple personalities. As Paul Antze and Michael Lambek assert, the ‘multiples’ are usually the victims of ‘early and repeated’ childhood traumas.

Both Condé and Pineau write on a theme which is commonly located in discussions surrounding trauma and literature. That is, the notion of an internal division of self created by a traumatic experience. Condé and Pineau do not simply depict their protagonists as victims of trauma but also demonstrate how their experiences of trauma have created a self ‘before’ and ‘after’. The ‘after self’ of Eliette displays symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder; whilst the ‘after self’ of Célanire demonstrates symptoms of Multiple Personality Disorder. Whether it be symptoms of PTSD or the presence of alter personalities, the victim begins to exhibit symptoms only as an adult. As many abuse therapists believe, these reactions and symptoms direct

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257 Antze and Lambek 8.
the victim to the knowledge of the trauma itself. However, in an attempt to heal their trauma, it is important to reclaim its memory.

2.3 Eliette’s recovery of her repressed memory and (re)construction of self

Judith Herman contends that gaining knowledge about one’s childhood abuse grants adult survivors access to ‘become comprehensible to themselves’: 258

When survivors recognize the origins of their psychological difficulties in an abusive childhood environment they no longer need attribute them to an inherent defect in the self. Thus the way is opened to the creation of new meaning in experience and a new unstigmatized identity. 259

This suggests that for the healing of the victim an understanding of the abuse itself is more important than the facts or details of the abuse. In order to reach some sort of resolution or healing, the protagonists in the novels must reclaim their repressed memories. Freud, for instance, recognizes memory as being buried beneath the present, or hidden behind ‘the screen’. Freud identifies memory as being in conflict with the counter-forces of repression. Traumatic events often cannot be remembered because they have been ‘repressed’ or dissociated into a succession of compartments separate from everyday consciousness. 260 Freud believes that the ‘burial’ of the past necessitates its ‘preservation’; that the unconscious is ‘that part of the self which had become separated off from it in infancy’. 261 This means that memory is repressed in the unconscious and as such is preserved to be retrieved at a later time. L’Espérance-macadam represents the reclamation of the memory of trauma. Eliette attempts to retrieve the memory of her rape. Thus, in the first instance, I will examine the concept of repressed memory and its process as it is embodied in L’Espérance-macadam. Because the rape of Angela by her father was the catalyst for Eliette’s memory

258 Ibid 9.

259 Ibid 127.

260 Ibid 7.

recovery, section two will examine how a subsequent event which is similar to the first may allow for the arising of the protagonist’s ‘forgotten’ traumatic memory.

According to Renee Fredrickson repressed memories are:

pieces of [one’s] past that have become a mystery. They stalk your unconscious and hamper your life with their aftermath. They will tell you a story if you can listen to them, and the story will help you to make sense of your life and your pain.  

The shame and shock experienced during sexual abuse are profound, especially for children. Whilst some childhood traumas can be recalled with precision, some others, such as the trauma of sexual abuse, can be so dreadful and incomprehensible that the conscious mind represses the traumatic memory in the unconscious. Later on, this repressed memory haunts its victim until he or she confronts and retrieves its memory.  

Pineau’s portrayal of Eliette requires an examination of the concept of repressed memory syndrome. This is a term used to describe those who do not possess any memory of the trauma they have suffered, or those who have a vague or a confused memory of the event. The term is often applied to the long term responses to childhood sexual abuse. Fredrickson contends that repressed memory syndrome engenders four behavioural responses: ‘attractions, fears, or avoidances unexplained by known history; indications of emerging memories; evidence of dissociation; time loss or memory blanks’. The first of these responses is triggered in victims of sexual abuse by subsequent events and circumstances which are reminiscent of the abuse. Although the memory of the event is stifled by victims of childhood sexual abuse, a reaction still manifests when they are confronted by objects, people or any situation that reminds them of the abuse. Some victims attempt to avoid encounters of this kind out of fear; whilst others are actually attracted to such encounters. In relation to the second response, dreams are often primary indicators of an emerging repressed

262 Ibid 24.


264 Fredrickson 40-47.
memory. Buried memories may haunt the victim through recurring dreams, images, flashbacks or bodily sensations. The third response is primarily focused on children who tend to dissociate more than an adult during abuse. The dissociative state becomes a permanent part of life, resulting in feelings of numbness, unreality or estrangement. Even if the memory is lost the dissociative state remains. The fourth response asserts that the victims of childhood sexual abuse are unable to coherently recall the full memory of the event; there are blanks and gaps.

In *L’Espérance-macadam*, Eliette’s behaviour conforms to the four responses associated with repressed memory syndrome. For instance she displays an irrational fear of men. She avoids having people around her. She imagines the sighs of a man standing outside her bedroom door and conflates his presence with that of the cyclone. Furthermore, when Eliette witnesses Rosan being arrested for abusing his daughter Angela, it sparks a rememory, a re-emergence of her repressed memory of her own rape. The dissociation that Eliette experienced during her rape leaves her unsure of the specific details of the event. However, she knows that the trauma that she experienced is somehow linked to the cyclone.

Renee Fredrickson states that in many cases of child sexual abuse, especially that of incest in which the perpetrator is a family member, the family indirectly induces the victim to forget the event.\(^{265}\) Those abused children who realise there is no possibility of disclosure, expect nothing more than to ultimately forget the abuse. Thus, as Caruth explains, ‘trauma is not simply an effect of destruction, but also, fundamentally, an enigma of survival’.\(^{266}\) Thus, it is also possible to argue that Eliette’s repressed memory is not only a product of her traumatic experience, but also her own effort to forget it in order to survive. Eliette’s effort to forget her traumatic experience is facilitated by her mother who tries to convince her that her trauma originates solely from the cyclone of 1928. One example in Eliette’s mother’s story is the ‘grosse poutre tombée qui avait

\(^{265}\) Fredrickson 64-65. According to Fredrickson, the perpetrator of child sexual abuse is often from within the family.

\(^{266}\) Ibid 58.
manqué fendre Eliette en deux parts’ (93). Milne suggests that, whilst recovering from the traumatic experience of rape, Eliette confuses the fictitious ‘poutre’ (beam) in her mother’s story with the image of a tall figure, presumably her father the rapist, and his phallus. Milne also suggests that the association between the rapist and the cyclone is further strengthened by her mother’s use of ‘Le Passage de La Bête’ (22). This refers to both the destructiveness of the cyclone and, in a metaphorical sense, to the rapist. Her mother’s stories of the cyclone distort her memory of the rape. Thus, Eliette believes that it is the cyclone that has made her who she is today:

A cause du Cyclone de 1928, tellement mauvais qu’il lui avait fait perdre la parole pendant trois ans pleins, l’avait blessée à la tête et au ventre, l’avait dépossédée de toute foi en elle-même. On l’avait levée dans le sang, sa peau de Nègresse noircie jusqu’aux genoux d’une humeur épaisse, collée par plaques, luisante comme laque. Elle ne savait plus que trembler, sa bouche battant une peur, phénoménale. (124-125)

According to Renee Fredrickson a repressed memory may resurface when the victim witnesses a situation similar to the original trauma. In the case of Eliette, her repressed memory of rape begins to come into focus when her eyes meet those of her neighbour and half brother Rosan, the man who raped his daughter Angela. Angela had for many years been repeatedly raped by her father. Like Eliette, Angela loses her voice for a short time which reduces her to a state of powerlessness: ‘Elle voulait crier encore une fois, mais elle avait perdu la parole’ (158). Furthermore, she grows to be withdrawn, as Pineau describes, Angela ‘se sentait exclue du monde, pareille à ces jeunes perdus qui dormaient leurs vies devant l’église de Ravine Guinée’ (197). When Angela realises that her father’s next target is her sister Rita, she decides to reveal what he has done to the police. By doing this she gives her sister the protection that she did not receive from her mother Rosette. Angela’s experience wakes Eliette from her malaise. Although Eliette had an instinctual fear of men, when she saw Rosan

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267 Milne 193.

268 Ibid.

269 Ibid.

270 Fredrickson 37.
being arrested by the police, she begins to feel for the first time an interest in the lives of others. This conforms to Frederickson’s first response to childhood sexual abuse according to the concept of repressed memory syndrome. Her fear of men, her attempt to avoid others and her reaction to Angela’s rape were caused by the repressed memory of her own experience of incest and are compatible with Frederickson’s stated responses to childhood sexual abuse.

Pineau’s portrait of Angela’s mother Rosette hints at the way in which Caribbean women encourage or allow their husbands to behave irresponsibly. Rosette’s complete ignorance in relation to Rosan’s abuse is consistent with Pineau’s claim that many Caribbean women accept male abuse:

[f]emmes toujours prêtes à couvrir la faute du mâle, à pardonner les outrages, à accepter coups et insultes. Femmes prenant l’homme comme un grand enfant, répondant à tous ses caprices, acceptant tous ses abus.271

By defending her husband and evicting Angela from the family home, Rosette abdicates her maternal responsibility for protecting her daughter. Through the depiction of a powerful indictment of maternal love, Pineau contradicts the representation of the caring mother figure in Caribbean literature.

Through Rosan, Pineau draws attention to incest in the Caribbean. According to Nina Hellerstein “l’inceste témoigne d’un profond malaise identitaire masculin, qui résulte de l’incapacité d’assumer son propre être.”272 Sandra Butler suggests that sexual aggressors display frustration and insecurity and believe that they can overcome their powerlessness by sexually assaulting the powerless. Butler asserts that “[w]hen all else in their lives fails, they have been led to believe that the exercise of the power of their genitals will assure them of their ultimate competence and power.”273 This weakness is evident in Rosan who victimises his defenceless daughter. Jacques André suggests that

271 Pineau, “Ecrire,” 293.


the frequency of incest in the Caribbean relates to the lack of recognition the father has in matrifocal Caribbean society; where men do not intimately bond with their children.274 Through Rosan, Pineau depicts fathers who look for ‘la lumière entre les cuisses de leurs enfants’ (166). Pineau’s examination of incest in Caribbean society is confirmed by Maryse Condé who states that we ‘have lived with the illusion that these things don’t happen in our societies...the truth is crystal clear’.275

Being evicted from home by Rosette, Angela becomes a surrogate daughter to Eliette. While listening to Angela, Eliette realises that she has been through the same experience. Through their common experience as victims of incest, a strong bond and mutual understanding grow between them. This bond empowers the well being of both the old Eliette and the young Angela. Angela’s healing commences when she is able to narrate her experience to Eliette. Similarly Eliette begins to understand her shyness, silence and fears were not caused by the cyclone, but rather her rape at the hands of her father. She realises that the ‘bête’ was not the cyclone but her own father. The cause of her mother’s madness was not the cyclone but the knowledge of her husband’s incest. Gradually, Eliette retrieves her memory of the event and emerges towards the end of the novel as a more confident and hopeful woman.

It is important to examine the notion of ‘afterwardsness’276 in order to investigate how a second event with similarities to the first can trigger the recovery of the memory of the original event. The notion of afterwardsness or Nachträglichkeit identified by Freud in the 1890s derives from the German adjective ‘afterwards’ or ‘deferred’ (nachträglich).277 This is a term which points to the belated effects of trauma. Although Freud used this term frequently, he never developed a theory around it, or offered a

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275 Pfaff 135.

276 After Freud’s death the French psychoanalyst and psychiatric Jacques Lacan brought this theory back from obscurity and used the term après-coup.

precise definition. However, this psychoanalytical concept of deferred action had already appeared in Freud’s *Studies of Hysteria* (1895). In a paper in 1896, referring to the same term, Freud mentions that the effects of childhood trauma become visible retroactively with the child’s arrival at a subsequent stage of sexual development. The same idea was put forward by Freud in his study of ‘Wolf Man’. In ‘Wolf Man’ Freud suggests that the effects on his patient who claimed to have witnessed his parents’ copulation were postponed. However, at the age of four when he dreamt of white wolves, and twenty years later when he grasped it with his conscious mind, the event had the same effects on him as if it were a recent experience.

The notion of afterwardsness has been extended by Post-Freudian psychoanalytic theorists such as Jacques Lacan and Jean Laplanche. Lacan has used the term *après-coup* rather than *nachträglich*, a term which was enthusiastically taken up in French psychoanalysis. In 1953 Lacan drew attention to this theory in his revision of Freud’s ‘Wolf Man’ case, but did not in any extensive way explore its implications. After Lacan, Jean Laplanche used the concept of afterwardsness to imply ‘something very different’. Laplanche’s definition of afterwardsness contributes to Freud’s concept when he highlights:

Freud’s concept of afterwardsness contains both great richness and great ambiguity between a retrogressive and progressive directions. I want to account for this problem of the directional to and fro by arguing that, right at the start, there is something that goes in the direction from the past to the future, and in the direction from the adult to the baby, which I call the implantation of the enigmatic message. This message is then

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278 Ibid.
279 Ibid.
280 Ibid.
retranslated following a temporal direction which is sometimes progressive and sometimes retrogressive (according to my general model of translation). 283

Literary scholars Andrew Benjamin and Peter Nicholls have also used it as a conceptual tool to analyse the narrative of trauma victims and the relationship they have to the past.

In its simplest sense, afterwardsness means ‘a mode of belated understanding or retroactive attribution of sexual or traumatic meaning to earlier events’. 284 This suggests that following a latent traumatic (albeit ‘unregistered’ or ‘forgotten’) original event, ‘only the occurrence of a second scene can endow the first one with a pathogenic force’. 285 In other words, the traumatic memory within the individual is only activated at a later time. It will only become active a ‘second time’ when it is triggered by a subsequent event. The memories of the first or the primary event are registered in a first time but are understood retroactively.

The recovery of Eliette’s memory can be explained through the concept of afterwardsness. The memory of her rape is present but lies dormant in a repressed state. Her secondary consciousness is triggered when she witnesses Angela’s rape. It is with this incident that Eliette realises she is also a victim of sexual abuse. While listening to the horrific experience that Angela had been through for many years, Eliette’s memory of her rape surfaces. In the first instance her memory assumes the form of a nightmare: ‘Elle avait crié dans son sommeil, réveillant son petit chat [...] Ses yeux, toujours secs d’ordinaire, avaient pissé l’eau comme fontaine charriant la lie d’une souffrance sournoise et rance, nichée au dernier coin de sa mémoire’ (231).

Through Angela, Eliette discovers a decisive event in her past. Angela’s rape operates to bring Eliette’s awareness to what was previously repressed. Thus, the retrieval of


Eliette’s memory is belated and in retrospect with a subsequent event which is similar to the primal experience.

Angela’s rape by her father Rosan hints at the transgenerational nature of incest and allows Eliette to discover her unresolved experience of rape. Eliette’s character affirms the French philosopher and literary theorist Jean François Lyotard’s suggestion that ‘the search for lost time can only be interminable: the ‘immemorial’ is ‘always “present” but never here-now, always torn apart in the time of consciousness, of chronology, between a too-early and a too-late’. This means that what one thinks is forgotten is always there, buried deep in the conscious mind. As Fredrickson asserts, Eliette receives ‘the tremendous reward of knowing [one’s] own history’ of knowing ‘who [one is] and where [one] came from’.

2.4 Recovery of memory and reclaiming of identity

Dori Laub suggests that ‘[o]ne has to know one’s buried truth in order to be able to live one’s life’. Although Laub’s research was focused on the experience of Holocaust survivors, her observations are equally relevant to Célanire’s search for knowledge of her past. Abeysinghe suggests that in the case of Célanire, the fact that she suffered her trauma in infancy intensifies the lack of knowledge she has of the event. Because Célanire was only days old when her throat was violently slashed, she plunders the memory of others around her in an attempt to piece together the event which occurred and reconstruct the incident which altered the course of her life. The following section will examine how the narratives of others have helped Célanire to uncover the truth surrounding her traumatic experience and construct a more coherent self identity.

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287 Ibid 127.


289 Ibid 49.
One of Antze and Lambek central arguments is that any invocation to memory is part of an identity discourse. They suggest that ideas of memory presuppose and serve to construct certain notions of identity. Memory and identity are interrelated. While memory underpins identity, identity strengthens memory. An individual’s notion of self is linked to memory, or at least what they claim to remember. In this sense, memory serves as both explicit and implicit grounds of identity. It is implicit when we know who we are and the circumstances that have made us so. Identity is explicitly constructed when we interrogate our memories in an attempt to understand ourselves, or when we present particular stories about ourselves with the intention of creating a certain impression. Although memory is supposed to bolster one’s identity, at times memory undermines identity through slippages of memory and uncertainties. Within these circumstances it is important to look at the ‘symbols, codes, artifacts, rites, and sites’ in which memory is embodied and narratives which frequently operate memory.

Memory also plays a crucial role in the construction of Célanire’s identity. The past is invoked to construct, legitimate or reconstruct her identity. Célanire’s memory often functions through narrative. From a young age, Célanire had a desire to locate her biological parents in order to gain a better understanding of her own identity. As in many of Condé’s other novels, the protagonist only embarks on a journey to the site of her trauma as an adult. Célanire returns to Guadeloupe as the wife of the newly appointed governor; and as a woman with supernatural powers. In attempting to uncover the circumstances surrounding her ritual scarring and the identity of her biological parents, the narratives of others become critical. Célanire eventually meets


291 Ibid.

292 Ibid xvii.

293 Ibid xii.

294 Ibid xvii.
Agénor de Fouques-Timbert, the wealthy planter who plotted the sacrifice of the baby. Célanire also meets Melody, her childhood nurse. However, Condé does not reveal any details about the conversations that Célanire has with Agénor de Fouques-Timbert or Melody, except for the fact she had long conversations with them.

Yet, such findings through conversations are multifaceted and as such complex. There is no simple retelling but a work of interpretation and understanding. It depends on the way Célanire interpretes these conversations. The memory which is presented through these conversations operates in the present as a symbol of the past. They are ‘acts of commemoration, of testimony, of confession, of accusation’. They do not simply describe Célanire’s relation to the past but place her quite specifically in reference to it. The invocation of memory signals association with the event as opposed to dissociation and continuity over discontinuity.

In her attempt to identify her biological parents and the reasons why they abandoned her, Célanire also accesses archival records of the church and hospital at St Hyacinth, the place where Célanire was thought to have been born. Most importantly, however, she searches for answers from the stories of the women (récit des femmes) in the village of the Ravine Vilaine. In so doing, she becomes fascinated by the legend of a local saint named Masoeur Tonine, who is believed to have performed numerous miracles including enabling barren women to become pregnant. It is through the narratives of the women in the village that Célanire hears the story of her mother.

Paul Antze and Michael Lambek argue that ‘people emerge from and as the product of their stories about themselves as much as their stories emerge from their lives’. The narratives gleaned from others invoke memory, which in turn makes the life of the person who is in search of his or her history meaningful. It enables them to identify with various narrative types such as ‘hero, survivor, victim, guilty perpetrator, etc’. They will either be able to construct a narrative of minimal coherence or an excessively determined story in which there is an overidentification with a particular character. For

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296 Antze and Lambek xviii.
instance, through the stories of the women of Ravine Vilaine Célanire learns her history and genealogy. She finds out that her mother is probably a Creole woman of African, Indian and Chinese descent. The meaning that Célanire attributes to her life is that she is a survivor who was a victim of her father who was complicit in her abduction as a baby. Célanire comes to peace with her past by providing funds to build a cathedral in the name of Masoeur Tonine as a memorial to her mother. By establishing this monument to her past, she finds the ability to move on in her life and to a future as a mother herself.

When a victim of trauma is dispossessed of its memory, they spontaneously turn towards the memory of others in order to recover their history. Célanire utilises the memory of others to acquire information surrounding her birth, identity and the failed sacrifice. She collects narratives of the women in Ravine Vilaine and significant others as well as archival records. Through this Célanire comes to an understanding of her origins and also the mystery of her scar. As Nicholls asserts, this process of memory ‘is not simply a matter of recovering a lost memory, but rather of the restructuring which forms the past in retrospect as “the original site [...] comes to be reworked”’.\(^\text{297}\) Her scar provided the physical evidence of her trauma and was also a sign directing her to the primal event which altered the course of her life. As most abuse therapists would argue the recovery of the memory of the event facilitates the healing process.\(^\text{298}\)

2.5 Conclusion

L’Espérance-macadam and Célanire cou-coupé include women as victims of physical, sexual and emotional abuse, and as such, victims of trauma. Both Condé and Pineau believe that the narratives of trauma are a result of the violence the Caribbean people have experienced at the hands of colonisers. Biringanine Ndagano suggests that in Femmes des Antilles, Pineau attempts to replace the shame the Caribbean has experienced through slavery by substituting it with a sense of pride:


\(^{298}\) Antze and Lambek 8.
Chapter Two


Through their analyses of violence, these writers have explored the shared cultural experiences and identity of Caribbean women. It is within the paradigm of writing through trauma that Condé and Pineau have constructed their characters in _L’Espérance-macadam_ and _Célanire cou-coupé_. They give voice to Caribbean women and reveal the trauma inflicted upon them by men. In fact, layer after layer of traumatic experience is uncovered in the lives of the novels’ characters, including physical, sexual and emotional abuse. They believe it is only through revelation that they can come to peace with the circumstances of their life. Through their writing, they encourage the entire Caribbean society to accept their traumatic past without shame and offer hope in overcoming their traumatic experiences.

Whilst both authors inscribe hope in their protagonists, Condé’s writing differs from that of Pineau in that Condé transforms stereotypical depictions of female sexuality as passive objects of male desire by indicating that sexuality can provide means of empowering for women. In fact, Célanire derives great delight from her inmate relationships with men and is easily accepting of her sexuality. Sexuality allows Célanire to assume the fullness of her identity and leads to a deep sense of self-expression. Her position as an independent individual allows her to better negotiate the hardships of life and make choices with strength.

Furthermore, Condé depicts women who desire one another. Through the depiction of Célanire as a woman who desires women as well as men, Condé challenges the traditional views of women who are expected to be subservient and passive. In her article ‘Order, Disorder, and Caribbean Literary Production’ Condé writes that the Caribbean novel was expected to portray only heterosexuality. 300 Condé defies this


300 Ibid 156.
expectation by depicting same sex relationships. In fact, Condé’s portrayal of bisexuality of women dates back to her early novels. For instance, apart from their heterosexual relationships, Tituba in *Moi, Tituba sorcière...noire de Salem*, Thécla in *La Vie Scélérate*, Reynalda in *Desirada* and Célanire in *Célanire cou-coupé* are all engaged in same sex relationships.  

Condé’s work is appealing in that she shows that desire and sexuality in the Caribbean are not limited to heterosexuality. Keja Lys Valens extends this contention by arguing that Condé represents a generation of Caribbean women who struggle to articulate not only their history but also the future and desire of Caribbean women in the Caribbean and, in turn, in the world.  

Whilst this chapter established the trauma of sexual and physical abuse as the cause of dysfunctionality in a woman’s life, the next chapter attempts to examine the dysfunctionality created in the daughter’s life by the trauma of physical and emotional neglect of the mother. This will try to answer the questions: How does maternal neglect and absence affect the daughter’s life? How does memory of the women of first and second generations serve as hope for the women of the third generation? Expanding the discussion initiated in the first two chapters, the third chapter will focus on the transmission of memory between generations.  

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301 Tituba is sexually involved with Hester whilst Thécla maintains a relationship with Otavia. Fiorella attests to Reynalda’s desire for women whilst Célanire is in love with both Tanella and Amarante.  

Chapter Three

The Intricate Mother-Daughter Relationship and its Impact on the Identity of Postcolonial Women

My past was my mother....Oh, it was a laugh, for I spent so much time saying I did not want to be like my mother that I missed the whole story: I was not like my mother-I was my mother.303

3.1 Introduction

This quote provides an insight into the complex mother-daughter relationship in the Caribbean. The mother-daughter relationship is marked by love as well as hatred, and a blurring of identity. The daughter’s childhood years are often characterised by an absence of maternal love. The daughter spends time trying to understand her mother and her mother’s indifference. Eventually, this distance and the often futile attempt to understand why lead to an animosity towards the mother. This type of mother-daughter relationship is the catalyst for a pattern of dysfunctionality which has reverberations later in the daughter’s life.

This theme has had extensive coverage in analysis of Caribbean literature. The mother-son relationship, on the other hand, has received very little attention. This is because the mother-daughter relationship is differentiated by an individuation which cannot be found in the mother-son relationship.304 The discussion initiated by Sigmund Freud on the uniqueness of the mother-daughter relationship vis à vis the mother-son relationship has been extended by psychoanalysts and psychiatrists such as Jacques Lacan, Nancy Chodorow, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva. While Irigaray and Kristeva discuss the pre-oedipal or semiotic period of infancy as the basis of the daughter’s relationship with her mother, Chodorow’s discussion centers on the ‘social


construction of mother-daughter relationship’. The common argument shared by these three psychologists is that the relationship that the daughter has with her mother during her infancy is seminal in defining the daughter’s adult life. The works of many of the Caribbean women writers who discuss the mother-daughter relationship through the daughter’s resemblance to and dissimilarities with her mother have been shaped by their personal experiences of complex maternal relationships. Thus, the complexity and significance of the relationship between mothers and daughters explains the reason why women writers choose to focus on the mother-daughter relationship, rather than the not so complicated mother-son relationship.

Maryse Condé’s Desirada and Gisèle Pineau’s Fleur de Barbarie clearly demonstrate this mother-daughter conflict, and in particular the mother’s neglect of her daughter. Both Condé and Pineau show that a woman who is denied motherly love in her childhood is, in her own role as mother, often incapable of giving love and affection to her daughter. The relationships between Nina and Reynalda, and Reynalda and her daughter Marie-Noëlle in Desirada; and Théodora and Pâquerette, and Pâquerette and her daughter Josette in Fleur de Barbarie, highlight the pattern of transgenerational dysfunctionality which arises from a mother’s emotional disengagement from her daughter.

Both Pineau’s and Condé’s work demonstrates that childhood and adolescent crises can arise from the non-existence of a strong emotional bond within the family. If the emotional stability of a child is built on a positive bond between parent (or foster parent) and child, then this promotes the child’s development and wellbeing. At the social level, the stability of society, and in relation to this study, most pertinently

305 Ibid.


307 Caribbean authors such as Jamaica Kincaid, Maryse Condé and Gisèle Pineau have all had difficult, cold and at times complex relationships with their mothers.
Caribbean society, is collectively predicated on some form of emotional stability within family units. As emphasized in Pineau’s writing, the core of the dysfunctional family is the disintegration of bonds of love and nurturing. Patterns of dysfunctionality arise when, in childhood, an individual experiences patterns of harmful behaviour which are reproduced in their own adult life and in turn are transmitted to their children. This contention is supported by Porter\textsuperscript{308} who argues that parents who create an unhappy childhood for their own children may themselves have suffered abuse or abandonment in their childhood years. Dysfunctionality is the patterned reproduction of childhood experiences in adulthood. For instance, sexually abusive parents may have also suffered abuse or abandonment in their childhood.\textsuperscript{309} They are often emotionally dependent and immature, and have a poor sense of self worth. A child’s psychological damage can derive from a breakdown in trust between the child and even one neglectful parent. Pineau and Condé use parent-inflicted wounds as a motif in many of their novels.

Maryse Condé’s novel \textit{Desirada} is the story of three African women in the Caribbean; Marie-Noëlle, her mother Reynalda, and grandmother Nina. Together they represent three generations of Guadeloupean women who have all experienced racial and sexual oppression. The story of these three women, is presented through an omniscient, third person narrator (although the text does include, in part, some first person narration). The novel interweaves the protagonist Marie-Noëlle’s testimony with that of her mother Reynalda, her grandmother Nina, her step-father Ludovic and her adopted mother Ranélise. In reality, it is through her relationships with these characters that Marie-Noëlle tries to piece together the mysteries surrounding her life, in particular,


the tragic and violent circumstances of her birth, and abandonment by her birth-
mother. Marie-Noëlle also attempts to make sense of her experiences as a child in
Guadeloupe, and as a migrant in both France and the United States.

In contrast, Gisèle Pineau’s *Fleur de Barbarie* tells the story of a young Guadeloupean
girl named Josette (who is later given the name Joséphine by her foster family in
France). Josette’s life in Guadeloupe is shared with her mother Pâquerette and her
grandmother Théodora; and in France with the members of her foster family - Tata
Michelle, Mémé Georgette and Pépé Marcel. The stable home she finds with her foster
family in France is shattered when Pâquerette orders her to return to Guadeloupe to
live with her grandmother Théodora. It is during this time that Josette attempts to
rediscover her Guadeloupean roots, making a long and a painful journey from the farm
in Sarthe, France, to Marie-Galante. Josette’s arrival at Théodora’s house in Marie-
Galante marks the beginning of her search for the ‘true story’ of her family; in
particular, the circumstances surrounding her birth, the reasons why she was
abandoned by her mother Pâquerette, and the identity of her abusive father.

An investigation into the lives of the protagonists in Condé’s and Pineau’s novels
reveals the complicated and often dysfunctional relationships they have with their
mothers. In order to understand these complex relationships, one needs to take into
account the traumatic experiences that they have endured, stemming from the
practices of colonisation. The impact of these relationships has led them to search for
answers to their own identities. Marie-Noëlle and Josette desire to piece together
their identities through knowledge of their biological fathers, points allegorically to the
deracinated Caribbean population who could never adequately come to terms with the
legacy of violence and disruption of colonisation. By extension, the search by the
individual for his or her identity reflects the search for the collective identity of
Caribbean society. The first section of this chapter will initially examine the
experiences of trauma suffered by Nina and Théodora; the women of the ‘first
generation’ in each novel in order to provide historical context for trauma.
Subsequently, it will then investigate the way this has impacted on the relationships
they have with their daughters. The second section of the chapter will focus on
Reynalda and Pâquerette; the women of the ‘second generation’ in each novel, and their experiences of sexual violence. This section will further investigate how the transgenerational (re)production of dysfunctionality has affected their lives - in particular their inability to establish a stable family life because of the sexual violence they have endured. The final section of the chapter will examine the emotional neglect of daughters as experienced by Marie-Noëlle and Josette; the women of the ‘third generation’ in each novel, and their personal quest for a coherent identity narrative. Central to the analysis is an examination of memory of the first and second generations, and how memory serves as a source of hope for the third generation.

3.2 Patriarchal oppression: Impact of slavery?

Both Condé and Pineau focus on the historical evolution of gender roles in Guadeloupe. In particular, they examine the harsh realities of being a woman in the Caribbean. The ‘relation homme-femme peut être présentée alors sous la forme d’un contrat que seule la femme aurait signé’. 310 Alibar and Lembeye-Boy contend that a woman in the Caribbean is faced with many disadvantages, particularly in her relationship with men. This quote points to the inequalities which exist between men and women in French Caribbean society, inequalities which derive from the experience of slavery. Condé and Pineau provide powerful examples of these inequalities in Desirada and Fleur de Barbarie.

The life of Nina in Desirada offers an intimate account of the exploitation and complex nature of work in plantations in the colonial period in Guadeloupe. Even before she was able to speak, Nina learned to work in plantations with her mother.

Elle m’a fait travailler dès que j’ai pu me tenir debout sans tomber sur mes deux pieds. J’ai appris à cueillir les capsules de coton, les bonnes, celles qui n’avaient pas de vers roses, avant même de savoir parler. (184)

Nina’s personal story reflects the larger socio-historical context of slavery in Guadeloupe, where the white plantocracy exercised absolute power over black

families. With the introduction of the *Code Noir*\textsuperscript{311} by Louis XIV in March 1685, the children who were born to a slave would also become slaves and they would belong to their mother’s master. As it is explained in article 12 in *Le Code noir* ‘les enfants qui naîtront des mariages entre esclaves seront esclaves et appartiendront aux maîtres des femmes esclaves et non à ceux de leur mari, si le mari et la femme ont des maîtres différents’.\textsuperscript{312}

Plantation society nurtured a virulent form of patriarchy and female submissiveness by separating black slaves from their families. Black slaves were at the bottom of the social hierarchy of the plantation. Furthermore, black female slaves were oppressed by race, gender and class.\textsuperscript{313} While all slaves were considered the ‘‘damned’’ of colonial society,\textsuperscript{314} Barbara Bush writes that the black female slave suffered from further oppression because of her sex. ‘The common image of the woman slave, culled from planter and abolitionist sources alike, is a compound of the scarlet woman, the domineering matriarch and the passive workhorse’.\textsuperscript{315} The slave mother not only had to perform hard labour on the plantation, but also raise her children who would similarly become slaves themselves. Furthermore, apart from their contribution to the plantation economy, women slaves also had sexual duties to perform. These sexual duties were foremostly performed for the white master. In this manner the subservience of the black female slave was reinforced by her sex.

When Nina becomes a servant in the Coppini household in La Pointe, the sexual relationship she has with Coppini typifies the nature of relations between the master

\textsuperscript{311} *Code Noir* is a document which sets out the rules and expectations of the plantation system with a direct influence on the daily life of the slaves. See, for example, Sylvie Brodziak, “Le Code Noir,” *Esclavage: libérations, abolitions, commémorations*, eds. Christiane Chaulet-Achour and Romuald-Blaise Fonkoua (Paris: Séguier, 2001) 43-61.

\textsuperscript{312} *Le Code Noir* (1685) www.assistancescolaire.com/.../le-code-noir-de-1685-h_th26t02.


\textsuperscript{314} Phaf 170.

\textsuperscript{315} Bush 5.
and the black female slave. For instance, Coppini uses Nina purely for his own sexual gratification. He uses her body as an object to satisfy the need his wife cannot fulfil for him. A typical encounter is described by Condé in the following quotation: ‘Il est entré dans la pièce. Il a vu ses fesses offertes et, sans même prendre la peine de lui dire quelque chose, il y a planté son pieu’ (70). This image of the slave woman being ‘taken’ by her master without her consent demonstrates the sexual degradation of the slave in the master’s house.

In *Fleur de Barbarie* there exists a similar master slave relationship. Théodora’s mother Gloria has a relationship with her master Edgar Solin; a union which ultimately results in Théodora’s birth. Both Nina and Gloria become the property of their masters - as was the case for slaves in Caribbean plantations during the period of colonisation. Franklin W. Knight suggests that it is their skin colour which positions them as servants and sexual partners to their master. Within the plantation system, ‘the colour of one’s skin immediately and effectively fixed both social position and occupation, with blackness indicating low status and arduous menial labour and whiteness superiority and leisure’.

Nina and Gloria represent the powerlessness of slaves in the face of white masters whose intention was to subordinate black women. The depiction of the characters of Nina and Gloria by Condé and Pineau clearly shows the lack of autonomy that the slaves had over their bodies and the lack of control over their destiny.

However, Nina and Gloria, although it was not their choice to initiate the relationship, prove sex with white men is in fact empowering. In his seminal Antillean text, *Peau noire, masques blancs*, Frantz Fanon explains that the African Caribbean is negrophobic in their desire to become white. Neither Nina nor Gloria resists the sexual encounters with their masters. In fact, they are as much besotted with their white

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masters as they despise black men. Nina had long been reminded by her aunt Tertulie that black men are the primary cause of women’s unhappiness:

Elle m’a dit que je ne devais jamais au grand jamais laisser un nègre monter sur moi pour me donner un enfant de sa misère. Mieux valait un Blanc, un mulâtre, un coolie même. Les nègres d’après elle, étaient responsables de tout le malheur des femmes, de tout malheur du monde. Les nègres, c’étaient des cyclones et des tremblements de terre”.

Furthermore, Nina admires Coppini and is eager to submit to him, declaring that:


Gloria, in Fleur de Barbarie, has similar feelings for her master Edgar Solin: ‘Elle y avait trouvé son plaisir; Monsieur n’était pas le seul coupable. Elle avait trompé de manière éhontée la confiance de Madame et méritait sa punition’ (366). It could be that Nina and Gloria, rather than loving their masters, were infatuated with all that whiteness symbolised. Fanon, for example, theorises the black woman’s desire to have a white man as her sexual partner. Once desired by a white man, the idea of blackness and the associated negative representations begin to dissolve. Through her white male partner, the black Caribbean woman is recognised as worthy of white love and gains access to the privileged white world. She may also acquire feelings of an ‘inner whiteness’; a notion that has come to be known as ‘lactification complex’. 318 According to Fanon, the black Caribbean woman prefers to marry a man with skin lighter than her own so that she can produce light-skinned children. Hence, the pregnancy becomes the manifestation of an inner whiteness.

Caribbean feminist literary critics including Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory Fido use the term ‘woman’ universally when arguing that all women are subject to

318 Frantz Fanon, Peau noire, masque blanc (Paris: Seuil, 1952) 47.
patriarchal oppression. For instance, regardless of their skin colour all of the women in the Coppini household are overtly submissive in relation to Coppini, the reigning patriarch. For Coppini’s wife Arcania, and his sisters Zita and Lia, Il lago di Como (the Italian name given to the house) is a place of physical and emotional suffering. Because of her illness, Arcania is unable to have an intimate relationship with her husband. Under their brother’s control, Zita and Lia feel imprisoned in Il lago di Como. They are also unsuccessful in forming sexual relationships with men. Arcania points out that Nina is not the only one to suffer from male oppression:

Ma pauvre Nina, ta vie est pareille à un champ d’orties. Pourtant ne crois pas que ce soit ainsi à cause de ta couleur. Regarde-moi. Regarde Zita et Lia. Nous sommes blanches et nous souffrons le martyre comme toi. (196)

Arcania compares Nina’s life to a ‘champ d’orties’ (field of nettles). The quality of nettles, the stings it causes is indicative of Nina’s pain that derives from her hard life at Il lago di Como. This quotation further suggests that white women also suffer from oppression, and that education, rather than skin colour, is for women of greater importance in determining autonomy.

Guadeloupean literature often depicts the alliance between black and white women. The wives of plantation owners, for example, endure the same patriarchal, colonial structures as female slaves, and as a result often befriend their black servants. Hence, a sense of ‘sisterhood’ between black and white women can arise, irrespective of racial or class difference. However, despite the so-called sense of sisterhood felt by women, Spivak and Spelman suggest that it is black women who are


320 For instance, whilst Condé’s Moi, Tituba, sorcière... Noire de Salem depicts an alliance between Tituba and Hester, Desirada portrays a close relationship between Nina and Arcania.


322 Ibid.
caught between ‘indigenous patriarchal oppression’\textsuperscript{323} and Western imperialist oppression.\textsuperscript{324} By extension, one could argue that black women are more oppressed than both black men and white women. It also suggests the existence of a hierarchy of oppression which positions white men at the top and black women at the bottom.\textsuperscript{325}

Black women experience two forms of oppression: they are oppressed by racism, and in a similar way to white women, they are subjugated by hegemonic masculinity. For instance, Gayatri Spivak points out that ‘Western’ and ‘indigenous’, ‘coloniser’ and ‘colonised’ cannot exist as completely opposite and exclusive terms because of black and white women’s similar experience of patriarchal oppression.\textsuperscript{326}

When Arcania states that ‘Pour nous toutes les femmes, c’est deuil et servitude quand nous n’avons pas l’instruction pour nous libérer’ (196) it draws our attention to the colonial history of Guadeloupe and reveals slaves’ illiteracy, and lack of autonomy over their bodies and destinies.\textsuperscript{327} Slavery excluded slaves from accessing education. In fact, learning to read and to write was an activity punishable by law and enforced by threat of physical violence.\textsuperscript{328} For instance, Bébel Gisler contends that ‘la sûreté des Blancs exige qu’on tienne les nègres dans la plus profonde ignorance’.\textsuperscript{329} The autonomy of the colonised is diminished through their illiteracy and this allows the colonisers to consolidate their power including over the bodies of the colonised. Nina possessed no more than the ability to sign her name and believed that education could have offered

\textsuperscript{323} This term refers to the oppression executed by black men towards black women.

\textsuperscript{324} Haigh, \textit{Mapping} 5-9.

\textsuperscript{325} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{327} Haigh, \textit{Mapping} 166-168.

\textsuperscript{328} Charles T. Davis and Henry Louis Gates, eds., \textit{The Slave’s Narrative} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985) xxiv-xxv. They discuss the penalties incurred for teaching a slave to read and write.

her a better life: ‘[u]n peu d’instruction, un peu de bonne chance, j’aurais fait la Guadeloupe chavirer’ (202). According to Marie-Noëlle, ‘[m]a grand-mère Nina croyait que l’instruction donne la clé du bonheur. Elle pensait que sa vie aurait été différente, aurait-elle su lire et écrire’ (256). In spite of Nina’s inability to love Reynalda, she was determined to provide her daughter with a good education. Education represents a form of liberation not only for Nina but also for the white women in the Coppini house. Education is also something Reynalda passionately believed in.

Whilst the lack of education remains a shared indication of oppression for both black and white women, black women alone have the added burden of oppression by black men. Nina’s rape at the age of fourteen by her cousin Gabin is an example of indigenous patriarchal oppression during slavery. Pineau believes that the origin of black men’s aggressive behaviour towards black women lies in their past experience of humiliation by not being able to protect their women from the white masters. Pineau further argues that the black man’s behaviour in contemporary Caribbean society is an attempt to make up for this past humiliation. The insecurity and humiliation experienced by black men is played out as violence towards black women. Consequently, the relationship between the black men and women can manifest as a reproduction of the master-slave relationship which existed during colonisation. This view is supported by the literary critic Ida Eve Heckenbach who writes ‘le transfert de pouvoir de l’homme blanc à l’homme noir assure la continuité du schéma de dominant/dominé, cette fois-ci vis-à-vis de la femme.’

Nina’s rape set the course for the relationship she would eventually have with her daughter Reynalda. In appearance Reynalda resembled her rapist father and it was for


331 Ibid.

this reason that Nina came to despise her. Nina admitted that she had never loved her only child Reynalda, declaring that:

Mais quand la sœur a mis Reynalda dans mes bras après mon accouchement, elle était tellement laide, déjà le portrait craché de Gabin, noire-noire comme lui, avec ses yeux globuleux, que tous mes bons sentiments se sont envolés aussitôt. Elle couinait comme un rat et ne pesait pas plus lourd. ... Je n’ai jamais aimé cet enfant-là, la seule jamais sortie de mon ventre. (190)

Nina’s comparison of Reynalda to ‘un rat [qui] ne pesait pas plus lourd’ (a rat that is not very heavy) indicates her ugliness and the aversion that it generates in her mother. Furthermore, the blackness that Nina sees in her daughter reminded her of the sense of shame and humiliation she experienced during the course of her life as a black woman. According to Fanon’s lactification complex the ‘ugliness’ that Nina saw in Reynalda insinuates a removal from the white world she so desperately wants to be part of. Nina rejects her daughter who is ‘laide’ and ‘noire-noire’ in the same way she rejects the blackness of the black man.

Like Nina, Théodora, in Fleur de Barbarie, is another example of an illegitimate child born to a black slave mother from her relationship with her colonial master. Born as a result of her mother Gloria’s relationship with her master Edgar Solin, Théodora does not share the same privileges as Edgar Solin’s legitimate child Margareth. For instance, Théodora is simply known as ‘Théodora’; whilst Margareth is given her father’s family name. In fact Théodora only discovered her father’s identity upon his death. This situation illustrates the status of an illegitimate child born to a servant woman. Edgar Solin typifies a master who wishes to hide the existence of his illegitimate child by not acknowledging the paternity. Hilary McD. Beckles argues that mixed-race children in the Caribbean did not constitute an empowered group that could inherit property.333 For this reason the child at birth acquires the status of the mother, and in turn becomes a slave. In this manner Théodora becomes the servant of her half sister,

Margareth Solin, a ‘decorated woman of letters’.\textsuperscript{334} Margareth’s relationship to, and abuse of, Théodora, illustrates another variation of the master-slave relationship in the colonial era.

3.3 Resisting patriarchal oppression

Reynalda and Pâquerette, in 	extit{Desirada} and 	extit{Fleur de Barbarie} respectively, are the products of a transgenerational history of sexual violence. This has been one of the most painful legacies of the slave trade. Their personal experiences of sexual violence have generated psychological scars which are transmitted to their own (often illegitimate) daughters. Even if these women were able to establish some semblance of a ‘traditional’ family unit, they are inevitably unable to emotionally engage with their family. However, unlike their mothers who embraced whiteness, women of second generation articulate a resistance to hegemony of whiteness and patriarchal oppression. The following section will examine the nature of their inherited trauma, and their inability to relate to their daughters. This will also investigate how the women of the second generation resist the male oppression.

Rape was the most significant form of trauma suffered by Reynalda. Whilst in the novel Condé does not directly identify Reynalda’s rapist, it is assumed to be the Bishop, who later convinced both Reynalda and Nina to move from La Désirade to La Pointe. Reynalda’s subsequent pregnancy led her to attempt to drown herself. The nature of her attempted suicide can be examined from within the context of her personal crisis, or it might be argued that it is a response conditioned by her inherited situation as a black Caribbean woman. On their journey from Africa to the Caribbean islands, slaves attempted to commit suicide by throwing themselves into the ocean. Suicide represented the ultimate act of refusing enslavement; it also ensured the termination of pregnancy. It was a radical act of resistance to slavery because it deprived the ‘master of his investment; [that is], the female slave [who] was purchased as a future

producer of labour power’. Maeve McCusker suggests that these experiences of violence ‘have been deeply repressed in the collective unconscious [...]’ of the Caribbean people. Despite their attempt to repress these traumatic experiences, they resurface in future generations. Reynalda personifies a conditioned response to enslavement displayed by slaves during the Middle Passage.

This argument can be extended by suggesting that Reynalda’s attempted suicide entails both a refusal of motherhood and of whiteness. The sexual violence which led to her pregnancy is symbolic of the forced intrusion into Reynalda’s black and female body by white religious power. The rejection of motherhood and whiteness through suicide counters the argument for the lactification complex introduced by Fanon. For Reynalda, the pregnancy was the ultimate form of white brutality and the child, a living testament to rape. Reynalda demonstrates a virulent resistance to the same hegemony of whiteness that her mother embraced. Her attempt to drown herself is an act which suggests that the black Caribbean woman may not desire the whiteness of a white man in quite such a manner that Fanon asserts.

Reynalda and Pâquerette both experience rape and a resulting pregnancy. Reynalda’s rape was so traumatic that she could not recall the events surrounding the rape. Even the identity of the rapist remains imprecise. Pâquerette’s memory is similarly affected by her experiences of sexual violence, to the point where the reader is uncertain as to whether she was actually raped or not. Only when Théodora reveals it to Josette does it become clear to the reader that Pâquerette had suffered sexual abuse. The following quotations demonstrate how Pâquerette was exploited by the unidentified man who fathered her daughter: ‘Après les sérénades et les déclarations d’amour, le type s’est

335 Haigh, Mapping 32-33.
336 McCusker 171.
337 Haigh, Mapping 32.
338 Cited in Haigh, Mapping 32.
339 Haigh, Mapping 33.
mis à la battre comme plâtre...’(257). ‘Depuis le début, le type en question avait dans l’idée de mettre ta mère sur le trottoir. Elle en avait peur comme du diable’ (258). Like Reynalda, Pâquerette experienced a trauma which completely possesses her, to the point where she is unable to verbalise the precise details surrounding the circumstances of her rape/abuse.

Janet and Freud categorise trauma victims into three groups.340 The first consists of victims who have become amnesic through their experience and thus cannot recall the event. The second group remembers their traumatic event but at the same time dissociate from it. The third group, although they are unable to talk about the event, it still lives within them to the point where it dominates or overwhelms their life.341 Both Reynalda and Pâquerette display symptoms of each of these categories.

Janet and Freud further argue that unlike other experiences, trauma is rarely assimilated within conscious awareness.342 Because they are disconnected from conscious awareness, trauma is processed in a different way and cannot be recalled as a memory. These ‘unassimilated traumatic experiences’ may later manifest through the victim as re-enactments. The most common re-enactment is through inflicting violence against self or others. The survivor takes the role of the victim or the victimizer and metes out all forms of violence and abuse on himself and others. Cathy Caruth suggests that re-enactments can also take the form of obsessive thoughts, nightmares or chronic illness.343 In all of these re-enactments, the trauma ‘victim’ is engaged in a project of reconstruction. The victim is attempting to reconstruct or understand the precise event which occurred to them but which is locked away in their subconscious. It is a reconstruction which has the potential for inaccuracies and


341 Ibid.

342 Ibid.

343 Caruth, Unclaimed Experience 4.
incompleteness, deletions and revisions; it can also manifest as a ‘false memory’. Reynalda’s own ‘false memory’ is lived through the text and poses questions to the reader, who at times struggles to understand whether it is Coppini who rapes her, the bishop, or perhaps even another male member of the household. Because she has repressed these events the rape remains unwitnessed and the rapist’s identity remains uncertain to the reader. As an experience ‘reconstructed in memory,’ it can never be a complete possession of the truth. In reality, the knowledge of the traumatic experience ultimately remains elusive and inaccessible. Many early researchers on psychological trauma, such as Charcot, Erichsen, Freud and Janet, suggest that the traumatic experience of an individual is stored ‘outside’ of memory and is therefore not retrievable through the normative process of remembering. In the absence of remembering, the experience of trauma generates silence or the ‘traumatic silence’.

This is the case for both Reynalda and Pâquerette. Both Reynalda and Pâquerette are unable to establish what would typically be considered as stable and emotionally satisfying relationships with their husbands and families. Reynalda’s life experiences, in particular the rape, led her to become an introverted woman incapable of forging affective or intimate relationships with her step-family. Despite living with Ludovic and her children in their Paris apartment, Reynalda isolates herself within its walls, remaining coldly indifferent to their presence and removed from all contact with the external world. Reynalda confines herself to her room, working on her thesis, being aloof from everybody and rarely venturing from the apartment. Reynalda’s silence has also muted Ludovic who was once the founder of a political-cum-religious association called Muntu. Condé writes that:

[italics] Ils ne sortaient pas le soir. Leur voiture restait au parking à prendre la poussière tandis qu’ils passaient leurs vacances enfermés dans la prison des tours. Jamais un ami, un collègue de travail ne montait l’escalier jusqu’à leur palier. Jamais le téléphone ne sonnait sauf quand des cousins de Ludovic appelaient de Belgique...(41)

The family she creates with Ludovic bears the scars of dysfunctionality, primarily because Reynalda refuses to connect with any of them emotionally. Nor does she fulfil

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344 Ibid.
the expectations normally associated with a wife and mother. In fact, it is Ludovic who assumes this role, he is the one:

qui faisait les courses, la cuisine, le ménage—plus rarement, il est vrai, qui lavait le linge au sous-sol, le mettait à sécher devant les fenêtres, conduisait Garvey à la crèche ou passait l’y chercher après l’avoir baigné et habillé. De la même manière, il avait la charge entière de Reynalda. (39)

Pâquerette also lives in a dysfunctional family, this time with a man to whom she bears three sons. Pâquerette’s suffering, in particular as a result of her husband’s affair with another woman, is articulated through her son’s voice: ‘il avait une autre femme. Maman avait beaucoup souffert. Je l’ai surprise plusieurs fois en train de pleurer, seule, assise dans la cuisine. Dès qu’elle me voyait, elle séchait ses larmes’ (318). This narrative focuses again on the infidelity of black men and depicts the master - slave relationship that existed during the period of slavery. Pineau further supports this by asserting that the black man ‘[a] imité le maître dans son droit d’avoir autant de femmes qu’il voulait’.345 Her two sons also contributed to her suffering. Her eldest son Ben migrated to Canada with his homosexual partner, and Steve, at the age of eighteen became a father.

Neither Reynalda nor Pâquerette were willing to share their personal ambitions. However, it was clear they believed their only chance of emancipation was through education and career. As Pierre Janet explains, education and employment carry the potential for hope and the promise of accomplishment; they are attempts to repair the troubled psyche of a traumatised person.346 Despite the passivity shown by Reynalda and Pâquerette in their daily life, they retain an ambition to become educated and have a career, goals which Janet argues can be associated with the healing of wounds of trauma.

Hope always lives in the characters of Reynalda and Pâquerette. Eventually, her job allows Pâquerette to acquire a certain social standing in society. From her son’s point

345 Belugue 90.

of view, she is ‘une vraie reine sur son trône. Maintenant, elle s’occupe des clients au service des prêts. Elle a son bureau. Elle traite des dossiers de crédits. Quand je pense qu’elle est partie de rien’ (318). Although Reynalda is unwilling or unable to fulfil the expectations of wife and mother, in the obsessive writing of her thesis, *Les Jours Etrangers*, she tries to create for herself a new identity. In fact, her writing is the sole productive activity she undertakes in the home. The following quote epitomises the intensity she brings to the pursuit of her dreams:

Dans un bureau au premier étage de la mairie, avec une secrétaire à ma dictée. C’est le travail et pas autre chose. Aujourd’hui, je ne connais ni maître ni maîtresse. Je fais ce que je veux, comme je veux, quand je veux. Pendant des années, les gens m’ont traitée comme un chien. Ils mejetaient leurs paroles comme des os à ronger et me commandaient: «Reynalda fais ceci, Reynalda fais cela.» C’est bien fini. (62)

As discussed earlier, the female slave was dispossessed of her own body, a body from which she was physically and often violently alienated: ‘un corps déchiré à coups de verge jusqu’à ce que le sang coule de toutes parts’. However, the slaves were also dispossessed of what we might call ‘mind’, ‘selfhood’ or subjectivity; they were denied the possibility of saying ‘I’, and to a large degree they were denied their own humanity. To flee slavery is, therefore, to take possession for the first time of a body and mind which has never belonged to the slave. To say *I*, is to claim an identity beyond that which has been marked upon the body by the master. It is to assert one’s own identity as a human subject. Reynalda’s writing, therefore, represents nothing less than ‘freedom from non-being’, it is the act of ‘self-writing’ in a quite


349 Ibid.
literal way and a mode of ‘healing the breach between mind and body created by
slavery’. Like their mothers, Reynalda and Pâquerette endure other forms of sexual abuse. However, there is a generational difference in terms of their preparedness to resist patriarchal oppression of both white and black men. Unlike their mothers, both Reynalda and Pâquerette shun the submissive role of the servant. The transformation of Reynalda and Pâquerette into educated, successful women suggests a refusal not only of the colonial practice which ensured the slave remained illiterate, but also of patriarchal oppression. Furthermore, Reynalda’s abandonment of her husband Ludovic after she obtains literary success may suggest that the marriage may have either represented for her little more than a symbolic form of enslavement or a stepping stone towards freedom.

3.4 The memory of the first and second generations: A source of hope for the third generation in their quest for identity?

Central to the novels Desirada and Fleur de Barbarie is the secret guarded by the protagonists’ mothers, namely, the identity of their biological fathers. Driven to learn more about the mystery surrounding their fathers’ identity, Marie-Noëlle and Josette frequently travel between the Caribbean and France in search of answers. In doing so, they are afflicted by a profound sense of social isolation and spatial displacement. They are neither able to connect to a place of belonging, nor to a stable intimate or familial relationship. Above all, the protagonists are engaged in a project of discovering their identity. In the formation of their identity, the relationship they have with their mothers is critical as they are the ones who possess the answers to their questions. In light of this, the following section will investigate how the memory of the first and second generations serves as a source of hope for the women of third generation in the search of their identity. I adopt Hirsch’s concept of postmemory as the protagonists attempt to understand the impact of the experiences of a past of a generation on the identity of the following generation.

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Chapter Three

The relationship between Reynalda and Marie-Noëlle is characterised by Reynalda’s complete lack of maternal affection. Marie-Noëlle is raised without the love and emotional support of her mother, in much the same fashion as Reynalda is raised by her own mother Nina. Marie-Noëlle not only experiences her mother’s physical absence during her childhood in Guadeloupe, but also the intense emotional neglect of her mother in Paris. In the quotation below, Condé gives voice to Marie-Noëlle’s feelings toward her mother:

[c]haque fois que l’on parlait de sa maman, Marie-Noëlle avait l’impression d’un danger. Il lui semblait qu’un vent glacé soufflait insidieusement sur ses épaules et qu’elle risquait la pleurésie. Elle s’efforçait rapidement de changer le sujet de la conversation, faisant admirer sa dernière rédaction ou demandant à réciter une leçon. Parfois, au milieu de la nuit, la pensée de sa mère la saisissait et la réveillait comme un mauvais rêve. Elle se mettait à pleurer, inconsolable, et la lumière du matin séchait ses joues. (21)

The way Marie-Noëlle feels about her mother draws our attention to Cathy Caruth’s conceptualisation of trauma as an ‘unclaimed’ event. According to Caruth, trauma is suspended in an unassimilated state in the mind. An assimilation of the event into the conscious mind is attempted through flashbacks or nightmares. For Marie-Noëlle, the thought of her mother evokes feelings akin to a nightmare. In fact, when Marie-Noëlle imagines her mother she feels an impending danger - hinting at something sinister which may have occurred in the past. ‘Un vent glacé’ (icy cold wind) is used in a metaphorical sense to describe the nature of this danger, something which is sudden and imminent. It implies the lack of warmth, the coldness and disdain felt by Marie-Noëlle in her relationship with her mother. The unassimilated nature of her psychological trauma manifests in her body in the form of a ‘mauvais rêve’.

Marie-Noëlle’s feelings towards her mother come to light in the protagonist’s journey of self discovery. For instance, when at ten years old she is summoned to France by her biological mother, Marie-Noëlle is uprooted from Guadeloupe and torn from Ranélise; her loving foster mother. The impending loss of her home in Guadeloupe and foster

351 Caruth, Unclaimed Experience 4.
mother are so painful that her reaction manifests as a physical illness. She was gripped by high temperature, seized with violent convulsions and fell into a coma. Regaining consciousness after a week, she shouted in an agonized voice: ‘Je veux rester chez ma maman!’ Even though she was able to recover from her illness, there were some lasting effects. Marie-Noëlle’s transformation was evident from the time she regained consciousness:

... la Marie-Noëlle qui, un matin de juillet, sortit de l'Hôpital général, à demi portée par Ranélise, n'était pas celle qui y était entrée près d’un mois plus tôt. La fillette joufflue et lutine, capricieuse et caressante qui avait enchanté le cœur de Ranélise, n’était plus. Avait pris sa place une grande gaule, la peau sur les os et les yeux éteints, fixant les gens à l’entour d’une manière qui les mettait mal à l’aise, car elle semblait poursuivre à travers eux une obsession intérieure. Elle autrefois si imaginative, un véritable moulin à paroles qui rempissait la tête de Ranélise avec des contes fantastiques, ne prononçait pratiquement plus un mot. Elle restait des heures entières sans bouger, à regarder droit devant elle, puis elle appuyait sa joue sur l’épaule de Ranélise en laissant couler ses larmes. (28)

Condé’s description of Marie-Noëlle’s malady suggests a vocabulary of trauma. Marie-Noëlle’s impending separation from Ranélise and departure from Guadeloupe manifest as a ‘obsession intérieure’ (personal obsession). This personal obsession haunts her to the point where it is transformed into a form of trauma:

Marie-Noëlle porta toujours ces images et ces sensations en elle. Sans la prévenir, elles resurgissaient et reprenaient possession d’elle-même. L’instant s’arrêtait. Au beau milieu d’une phrase ou d’un geste, elle semblait tomber en état et s’immobilisait les yeux vides, comme hébétée. (32)

The state of immobility in the middle of a sentence or a gesture is a sign of Marie-Noëlle’s psychological fragility. By invoking a vocabulary of trauma to describe Marie-Noëlle’s condition, Condé reveals the relevance of the representation of traumatic experience in literature.


353 Ibid.

Although Marie-Noëlle has not seen her mother at this point in the story, she is at the centre of Marie-Noëlle’s trauma. Marie-Noëlle’s experience of abandonment is one that her mother has also lived. This is further supported by Dawn Fulton who concludes that the images and sensations that haunt Marie-Noëlle, and her reactions to them, resemble those of her mother.  For instance, when swimming in the ocean Marie-Noëlle imagines she might imitate Reynalda’s suicide attempt and ‘descendre à coups de talon vers la paix éternelle’ (30). Furthermore, the inhabitants in La Pointe who notice the similarity between Marie-Noëlle’s ‘obsession intérieure’ and that of her mother ‘finirent par s’y habituer et par la croire un peu braque. Comme sa mère avant elle’ (32).

Pineau, through the protagonist Josette, also explores the impact of the absence of a maternal figure in the daughter’s life, as well as the sense of ‘unbelonging’ that imbues Caribbean society. Repeating the rejection that began when her own mother abandoned her on learning of her early pregnancy, Pâquerette deliberately withdraws from her daughter Josette’s life. Josette’s sexual abuse at the hands of her father attests Pâquerette’s inability to protect her daughter. As Madam Bella, a confidant of Théodora states:

Il t’a tripotée, l’enfant de salaud...T’étais son jouet. A posé ses mains sur toi pendant que Pâquerette faisait le pied de grue sur le trottoir... C’était son plaisir à l’animal. Sa langue dans ta bouche et dans ta petite chatte. Et sa grosse queue de cochon puant, il la promenait sur ta figure. (258)

This demonstrates the extent of the cruelty Josette endured at the hands of her father during her mother’s absence. At the age of four, depriving her of maternal love and abandoning any prospect of a stable family life, Pâquerette sent Josette to a Parisian foster family.

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355 Fulton 82.

356 Ibid.

357 Ibid.
In the Caribbean, when mothers feel unable to deal with the complications of raising children, a common practice is to send them away in the belief that someone else can care for them better than the mothers themselves are able to.\(^{358}\) As is evident in Condé’s and Pineau’s work, black woman often have motherhood thrust upon them through the experience of rape; and black motherhood is also often associated with the absence of a father.\(^{359}\) However, Olive Senior suggests that many Caribbean women enter into stable relationships including marriage later on in their lives and the responsibility of the first children is left to another female kin who becomes the substitute mother. As is the case with Reynalda, some Caribbean mothers leave their children with relatives for longer or shorter periods and migrate to other countries in search of work. The children may find stability with relatives or a foster family but there is always the potential for the mothers to disrupt that security.

Just as Reynalda ends Marie-Noëlle’s contented life with her foster mother Ranélise; Josette’s secure relationship with her foster family dissolves when Pâquerette decides to send Josette to Marie-Galante to join her grandmother. Eventually this leads Josette to question: ‘Pour quelles raisons? Quelle faute avais-je commise pour qu’elle m’écarte de sa vie? Et plus je pleurais, plus je me sentais misérable, me disant que je n’avais pas mérité son amour’ (254). The deep emotional scars created by her mother’s absence and the separation from her foster family haunt Josette throughout her childhood and adult life. In Josette’s brief reunion with her mother prior to moving to Marie-Galante from France, her mother’s indifference produces an overwhelming disappointment in Josette. Her unfulfilled final petition for maternal love resounds in the following quotation: ‘Je n’allais pas lui demander des comptes. Je voulais juste qu’elle me reconnaisse comme sa fille’ (260). Her trauma created by the lack of motherly love is evident in a conversation she has with her half brother Teddy:

\[
\text{je suis tourmentée depuis que je suis toute petite. Je vis avec des fantômes...Moi, je n’ai pas eu la chance de vivre auprès de ma mère...Tu sais, certains matins, je me demande}
\]

\(^{358}\) Senior 10.

ce que je fais sur terre. Je me dis qu’elle aurait dû me tuer, me jeter dans une poubelle. Je me triture les méninges. Je crève d’avoir été une enfant abandonnée... J’ai besoin de son amour .... (330)

Consequently, both Marie-Noëlle and Josette attempt to establish a stable home space and identity, both of which have persistently eluded them throughout their lives. The protagonists’ search for identity invokes an analysis of memory and the significant role it plays in bridging the rift in self caused by the trauma of separation from their mothers.

Memory is linked with identity. Memory helps us to know who we are and the circumstances that have made us so. In these novels, memory has a significant role to play in the protagonists’ journey to learn the secrets which their mothers are often reluctant to reveal. It is the memory of the first generation, and particularly the second generation, that helps the protagonists to unearth the family secrets and to make sense of the past. In other words, it is the memory of the grandmothers and the mothers that assists Marie-Noëlle and Josette to trace the identity of their biological fathers and thereby establish their own identity.

Memory often operates by means of narrative. In other words, memories derive from personal experience and require an interlocutor. We draw on our experiences to create the narrative and in turn it shapes our identity. Information about the past, in particular concerning the mothers’ experience of rape, is communicated across generations through dialogue. Through dialogue, memory comes to the surface and finds voice in the daughter’s life. In their attempt to uncover their mothers’ untold stories, Marie-Noëlle and Josette engage in conversations with their grandmothers. In so doing they attempt to grasp the memories of a past generation.

They attempt to recover or reconstruct their mothers’ past in order to explore the ways in which those experiences might have contributed to the formation of their own

360 Antze and Lambek xii.
361 Ibid xvii.
362 Ibid xviii.
identity. Hirsch asserts that the ‘aesthetic strategies of postmemory are specifically about such an attempted, and yet always postponed, repositioning and reintegration’. I consider the term ‘translation’ to be useful in understanding the transmission from memory to postmemory between generations. While the Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology defines translation as:

remov[ing] from one place to another and ‘turn[ing] from one language into another’; The American Heritage Dictionary defines it as ‘express[ing] or interpret[ing],’ ‘express[ing] in different words; paraphrase,’ ‘transfer[ring] from one place or condition[ing] to another,’ ‘forward[ing] or retransmit[ting].

In Desirada and Fleur de Barbarie, the daughters attempt to interpret their mothers’ past. Through translation, they articulate a memory which, as Marianne Hirsch has explained, is of a form whose ‘connection to its object or source is mediated not through recognition but through an imaginative investment and creation’. Phrases such as ‘elle se croyait’ (she believed), ‘il lui semblait’ (it seemed to her) further prove the articulated memory which is not in Marie-Noëlle’s possession.

The protagonists strive to negate any claims to common experience with their mothers. They try to convince themselves to believe that they are unlike their mothers. They do so in the belief that they are able to erase their own trauma that is so critical to readings of their past. However, the spectre of rape and other forms of sexual violence are inseparable from the protagonists’ search for their genealogical past. The particularities of their narratives - and the eventual failure of their search for identity based on a unified understanding of the past - expose the numerous slippages that are inherent within any reading of traumatic experiences both on a personal and collective level. Foremost among these slippages is the rupture occurring between the protagonists and their mothers. In particular, the genesis of this rupture is located in the primary event of Reynalda’s and Pâquerette’s experience of sexual violence. At the same time, these experiences are the most inaccessible, thwarting Marie-Noëlle’s and


364 Ibid 22.

365 Fulton 90.
Josette’s attempts to piece together a narrative that would disclose important aspects of their identities. The silence which veils these experiences only reveals the unspeakable status of traumatic events. While their mothers’ silence implies a tenuous relationship between victim and event; Marie-Noëlle’s and Josette’s relationship to the event is even further removed, and its inaccessibility and distance amplified by the absence of a coherent narrative. In an attempt to make sense of the incoherent narratives of their mothers, the daughters try to interpret their mothers’ stories and express them in their own language which indeed is the role of translation.

In relation to Marie-Noëlle’s and Josette’s quests for self discovery, it is important to understand how the protagonists question the notion of Caribbean identity through their experiences in France particularly Paris. In contrast to the emotionally stunted life waiting for her in the Caribbean, France is for Josette a land of security and promise. Josette struggles to find an identity for herself in Guadeloupe, a place where for her ‘an unresolved past and an unsettled present loom large’. On the other hand, France for Marie-Noëlle evokes feelings of strangeness and unknowability when compared to her familiar home in Guadeloupe. For instance, it is in her mother’s house in Paris that she feels the most displaced. The protagonist’s quest for identity highlights the difficulties of defining one’s identity when one’s sense of ‘homeland’ is inconclusive.

Despite these feelings of displacement, both Condé and Pineau invest in their protagonists a degree of hope. Just as Reynalda and Pâquerette gained some semblance of happiness by ‘reinventing’ themselves in France, Marie-Noëlle and Josette also eventually attain a sense of self awareness that holds the possibility of overcoming the emotional absence of their mothers during childhood. For instance, the decorated writer Margareth Solin provides an opportunity for Josette to come to terms with her past. Josette spent her time as a child scribbling down her ideas, inventing new worlds for herself and creating an identity and a place of consolation.

366 Fulton 92-96.

Through Margareth, she discovers the power of writing, which provides for her a sense of justice in a seemingly unjust world. Influenced by Margareth’s writing, Josette begins her writing trajectory with an exploration of her own past: ‘je me réinventais un passé d’eaux calmes, sous les ailes d’une mère aimante et d’un père connu. Je me composais une enfance créole bercée par les alizés de Marie-Galante, auprès d’une grand-mère saine d’esprit’ (298). Josette is eventually able to reconcile her identity and as an adult is able to return to Marie-Galante on her own terms.

Marie-Noëlle is likewise inspired by Anthea Jackson, an educated woman teaching in a university. It is while teaching French to Anthea’s daughter that Marie-Noëlle completes her doctoral studies. With the help of Anthea, Marie-Noëlle publishes a few articles and gains a ‘petit nom’. Like Josette, she also returns to Guadeloupe in search of her own identity, which she terms ‘une mission précise. Demander justice pour Reynalda’ (146). Furthermore, towards the end of Desirada, the third person narration shifts to the first person which points to Marie-Noëlle’s ultimate finding of her own ‘voice’.368 She comes to accept who she is, and remains optimistic, stating that: ‘[d]’une certaine manière ma monstruosité me rend unique. Grâce à elle, je ne possède ni nationalité ni pays ni langue’ (281). Despite the echoes of a traumatic past, Marie-Noëlle reconciles her search for happiness through the discovery of ‘alternative knowledge’ rather than conceptualising it as a ‘lack’. ‘Mon chemin,’ she claims, in opposition to narratives of happiness, ‘est tracé ailleurs’ (281). Marie-Noëlle’s closing thoughts suggest a personal insight that forms the material of a revised narrative of self.

The narratives of Marie-Noëlle and Josette are consistently diasporic, as their narratives emerge as a result of a process of memory of the Caribbean and France. They are narratives drawn from movement rather than stability, built on indeterminate multiplicities rather than a stable genealogy. Condé’s and Pineau’s novels provide the reader with a powerful sense of hope, despite the postcolonial critic Mireille Rosello predicting that ‘les peuples de la Martinique et de la Guadeloupe

368 Fulton 91.
ne guériront peut-être jamais à le définir’. Many of their books portray the painful realities of Caribbean exile, whilst enacting a literary return to the native land which allows their characters to come to terms with their heritage. Their protagonists disclose the connection between the place of origin and place of exile, inscribing a recurring cycle of departures and returns that reflects their struggle to come to terms with their identity.

Condé and Pineau explore the nature of contemporary Caribbean life which clearly still bears the scars of colonisation. They do this most forcefully through their protagonists, Marie-Noëlle and Josette. In these two characters they give voice to the experiences of those who are marginalised by offering in their work alternative representations of postcolonial women. By narrating the stories of both Marie-Noëlle and Josette, Condé and Pineau attempt to retrieve a subaltern history which, as Young explains, ‘rewrites a history of the excluded, the voiceless, of those who were previously at best only the object of colonial knowledge and fantasy’. However, while some female characters of Desirada and Fleur de Barbarie have been presented as objects of colonial desire, others have been objectified by the colonised themselves. Unable to come to terms with or understand their mothers’ emotional and physical abandonment, both protagonists search for answers which might explain their life situations. This includes the search for the identity of their biological fathers, which, by extension, points at the search of the Caribbean people for their collective identity.

3.5 Conclusion

Through a comparative and a critical analysis of Condé’s Desirada and Pineau’s Fleur de Barbarie this chapter attempted to show the complex issues and relationships between mothers and daughters of three generations. Condé’s and Pineau’s depictions


370 Thomas, “Utopia and Dystopia,” 190.

of the experience of trauma of first generation women resonates with the trauma of the black female slave during the period of colonisation. The lives of the women of the second generation are defined by sexual violence, whilst the women of the third generation, the daughters born out of this sexual violence, are consumed in discovering the identity of their biological fathers. The lives of the women of these three generations also illustrate the cycle of dysfunctionality generated by trauma and perpetuated across generations.

In the quest for, and struggle of, the women of the third generation in claiming their identity, the daughters become the translators and interpreters of their mothers’ and grandmothers’ memory. They transform the silence of previous generations into a cohesive narrative. This is an argument which derives from Hirsch’s notion of postmemory, whereby she describes the strategies of ‘repositioning and reintegration’. As Spitzer and Hirsch write ‘The work of postmemory consists in learning . . . to be able to translate the ‘gémissements’ from the past into the present and the future where they will be heard by generations not yet born’.

Condé’s and Pineau’s representation of the mother-daughter relationship through rejection, disengagement and oblivion rewrites the primary sustaining myths of black womanhood. It is the female characters’ indifference that affects the affectionate ambiance within the family. Thus, Condé’s and Pineau’s writing bears evidence that in the Caribbean literature the theme of motherhood has often been considered central to female identity either through oppression or their strength. While the characters of both Condé and Pineau represent this reality, they also form a striking contrast to each other. Unlike Pineau’s characters Condé’s characters Reynalda and Marie-Noëlle emerge as overwhelmingly positive characters with their tenacious fight to establish a financially secure future through stable occupations.

373 Spitzer and Hirsch, “What’s wrong?” 250.
Whilst this chapter looked at women of three generations, their trauma and how the memory of women of the first and second generations facilitates the women of the third generation in establishing their identity, the following chapter will elaborate on the relationship between women of the first and third generations; grandmothers and granddaughters. When the daughters are left with their mothers’ trauma, they reach out to their grandmothers to learn more about their mothers and, in turn, come to peace with their past. In light of this, chapter four will attempt to answer the following questions: What is the role of the Caribbean grandmother? and How do they offer optimism, resistance and resolution to their granddaughters in their quest for identity?
Chapter Four

The Grandmother: An Icon of Optimism, Resistance and Resolution

c'est [la grand-mère] qui assure le lien entre les générations et fait en sorte qu’il n’y ait pas de rupture entre le passé et le présent. Avec elle, l’enfant continue les gestes, les paroles de toujours, et ce don qu’il reçoit de ses grands-parents est une espèce d’éthique qui lui ouvre graduellement tous les secrets de vie.\(^\text{374}\)

4.1 Introduction

As shown in the previous chapter, Caribbean literature often depicts a significant emotional gulf between mothers and daughters; often with the daughter being left to question the origins of this void. It may emerge from the physical absence of the mother as a result of rape, illegitimacy and abandonment; or the mother’s concern with adapting to French colonial values whilst devaluing her Caribbean identity. The latter means that her daughter’s own connection to a Caribbean identity is made more tenuous. Because of this emotional void, granddaughters often turn to their grandmothers for both maternal love, and answers to the questions they have concerning their birth and the reasons for their mother’s neglect. As the quote above suggests, grandmothers are the conduit between generations. This chapter examines how granddaughters, with the assistance of their grandmothers, attempt to piece together their life narrative, particularly in respect to the significant and often traumatic experiences endured by their mothers.

Maryse Condé and Gisèle Pineau write of women who are ‘victims’ of dysfunctional mother-daughter relationships and who often turn to their grandmothers for solace and resolution. In Maryse Condé’s own life there was in fact an estrangement between her and her mother. It was not a relationship which included affection. However,

Condé believes she had a ‘multifaceted’ relationship with her mother. Condé’s concern about her mother’s indifference toward her as a child is reflected in the nature of the relationship between Condé and her mother, Jeanne Boucolon; and between Jeanne Boucolon and her mother (Condé’s grandmother) Victoire. In other words, the quality of the relationship was replicated over three generations. In *Victoire, les saveurs et les mots* Condé writes within the spaces between these three generations; narrating the complex nuances of the mother-daughter relationship and, in particular, how these women are unable to express their love for each other.

Pineau was raised in Paris as the child of black Caribbean immigrants. Within this city she experienced a profound loss of cultural identity. Because Pineau’s mother Daisy had no inclination to dwell on issues of cultural inheritance, Pineau’s grandmother Julia was left to fulfil Pineau’s desire to understand the cultural vacuum she felt. *L’Exil selon Julia* is a biography of Pineau’s adolescence. In order to relate how their grandmothers helped them construct identities as Caribbean women, both Pineau and Condé document the life circumstances of their grandmothers and their mothers, whilst weaving into the narrative the historical and cultural legacies of colonialism.

Through the analysis of the relationships between grandmothers and granddaughters in the autobiographical narratives of Maryse Condé (*Victoire, les saveurs et les mots*) and Gisèle Pineau (*L’Exil selon Julia*) this chapter will first provide a brief overview of the image and role of grandmothers as they are presented in Caribbean literature. The chapter will then explore Condé’s and Pineau’s personal experiences of exile. This will be followed by an examination of the experience of exile of their grandmothers. Finally, the chapter will show how Caribbean grandmothers assist their granddaughters to acquire an understanding of their own heritage as a means to resolve experiences of displacement and exclusion. In this chapter I argue that both Pineau and Condé are, in their writing, attempting to resolve a sense of ‘not


376 Unlike Pineau, Condé has never met her grandmother. However, she documents her grandmother’s life in order to make sense of her own past.
belonging’. Central to this analysis is an understanding of the optimism, resistance and resolution that the granddaughters draw from their grandmothers.

4.2 The Caribbean grandmother

Simone Schwarz-Bart characterises elderly women as possessing ‘wisdom, kindness and inner strength’; qualities that granddaughters depend upon to overcome emotional neglect and feelings of ‘not-belonging’.\(^{377}\) Gallagher suggests that grandmothers have a significant role to play in the broader ‘context of Caribbean memory’.\(^{378}\) In particular, this role is visible in the relationships they have with their granddaughters.\(^{379}\) She is the ‘mère déplacée vers l’origine, la mère de la mère, métonymie maternelle’.\(^{380}\) Grandmothers are also the custodians of (family) history. For instance, grandmothers play an important role in the transmission of family stories to subsequent generations by carrying on the oral storytelling tradition. Ormerod, for instance, states that:

... a traditional prestige attaches to the grandmother as substitute mother, offering care, protectiveness and a stability that the birth mother may not be able to provide. She symbolises the strength of the matrifocal household that was born of the shattering of African family pattern during slavery.\(^{381}\)

In Caribbean fiction, characters such as Man Tine, the caring grandmother in *La Rue Cases-Nègres* by Joseph Zobel; and Reine Sans Nom in *Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle* by Simone Schwarz-Bart, are examples of the significance of the Caribbean grandmother, not only as a substitute mother, but as symbolic figure representing endurance and resilience. Plantation life has transformed the Caribbean grandmother


\(^{378}\) Gallagher 102.

\(^{379}\) Ibid.

\(^{380}\) Cited in Gallagher 102.

\(^{381}\) Ormerod, *An Introduction* 102.
into an icon of female fortitude. Grandmothers empower their granddaughters by sharing their firsthand experiences and strategies for personal survival, and an understanding of the psychological stress caused by exile and alienation in the diaspora. Caribbean grandmothers are able to infuse a more authentic sense of self in younger women who feel marginalised in an immigrant milieu. Through their grandmothers granddaughters are able to learn about Caribbean culture, tradition and values. Caribbean grandmothers in this manner embody ‘optimism, survival and resistance’\footnote{Beverly Marilyn Randall,  \textit{Gender, Body, and Age in the Writings of Simone de Beauvoir, Marguerite Duras and Simone Schwarz-Bart}, diss., U of Texas, 1997, (Ann Arbor: UMI, 1997, 9803000) 137.} in a postcolonial context.

Female Caribbean writers highlight the significance of elderly women, particularly grandmothers, for their ability to unlock family secrets. In Condé’s \textit{Desirada}, for instance, Nina provides her granddaughter Marie-Noëlle with an important clue to the identity of her biological father. In Pineau’s \textit{Chair Piment}, Mina’s grandmother relates to her the truth behind the terrible trauma which has beset her family.

Condé has written of her grandmother in three autobiographical texts; a collection of short stories entitled \textit{Le cœur à rire et à pleurer: souvenirs de mon enfance} (1999); a short essay entitled “‘The Voyager In, the Voyager Out’”,\footnote{This short story was published in \textit{Autrement}, « La Guadeloupe », collection Monde hors série 123 (janvier 2001): 250-259.} and her autobiographical narrative \textit{Victoire, les saveurs et les mots} (2006). This study will focus on \textit{Victoire, les saveurs et les mots} although some reference will be made to the other two autobiographical texts. In the title of \textit{Victoire, les saveurs et les mots}, Condé makes a connection between ‘saveurs’ (savoury) and ‘mots’ (words). In this unusual association she emphasises what she interprets as being a parallel between her own vocation and that of her mostly unknown grandmother. As referenced in the title, Condé sees some significance in Victoire’s vocation as a cook, and her own profession as a writer. In doing so, Condé conceives of a way to relate to her grandmother through their shared commitment to creativity.
Apart from *L’Exil selon Julia*, Pineau writes of her grandmother in *Mes Quatre Femmes* (2007). In this chapter, however, I will focus on Pineau’s depiction of her grandmother in *L’Exil selon Julia*. Pineau’s grandmother Julia (Man Ya) is the catalyst for the exploration of her Caribbean identity. Pineau draws parallels with her grandmother in terms of their experiences of exile; primarily Julia’s exile in Paris, and Pineau’s exile in the Caribbean as a ‘Negropolitan’.\(^{384}\) Julia’s life in Paris paves the way for Pineau to examine her own ‘exile by inheritance’.\(^{385}\) It is the ‘love-hate relationship with France, homesickness and [associated] sense of unbelonging’ that inspired Pineau to become a writer.\(^{386}\) Both Condé’s and Pineau’s grandmothers typify the archetypal Caribbean grandmother in that they are able to make sense of the cultural disjunction felt by young women in the diaspora. Although Pineau has lived experiences with her grandmother, Condé never had the opportunity to meet hers. Therefore, Condé brings her grandmother Victoire to life through her mother’s stories. Before exploring the complexity of their grandmothers’ experiences of exile, it is necessary to first consider those of Condé and Pineau.

### 4.3 Experiences of exile: Condé and Pineau

The theme of exile is prevalent in Francophone literature.\(^{387}\) Its implications for the identity of French Caribbean people have also been highlighted by Condé and Pineau. These writers have used their own experiences as a lens through which to investigate the concept of exile and related notions of ‘otherness and displacement’. Through the child protagonist Gisèle in *L’Exil selon Julia* Pineau depicts her own experiences of discrimination as a young black student in Paris.\(^{388}\) At the beginning of the 1960s, only a relative handful of black students attended schools in France; places not always of

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\(^{384}\) Veldwachter 182.

\(^{385}\) Ibid.

\(^{386}\) Ormerod, *An Introduction* 213.


\(^{388}\) The character Gisèle represents the young Pineau.
racial harmony. From the age of five, Pineau became a victim of racism. Told to return to her ‘own country’ by her French classmates, even her class teacher was prepared to vilify her: ‘Les enfants! La Noire a déjà fini sa copie! Alors vous pouvez le faire aussi!’ (80). Pineau had experienced firsthand the bigotry of some elements in French society and the institutionalised racism, which maintained black people in an inferior position, despite their French nationality. Pineau also describes spending an entire term under her teacher’s desk as a punishment for having smiled ‘ironically’ at her:


The discrimination that the young Gisèle experienced at school was the impetus which pushed her to explore her familial and cultural heritage. Gisèle’s desire to know of the ‘own country’ she was told to return to by her French classmates and the reasons behind her teacher’s animosity are of no interest to her mother who sees their past as merely a source of ‘humiliation,’ one which is better forgotten. The crisis of identity Gisèle experiences in France, particularly at school, kindles in her a need to explore the past, what was then an imaginary homeland. Gisèle’s desire to culturally define herself is made even more problematic with the family’s return to Guadeloupe after eleven years in France. Gisèle again feels marginalised, particularly by her inability to speak Creole. Gisèle, her brothers and sisters ‘s’efforcent à parler créole. Mais l’accent parisien ne les quitte pas. Dans leur bouche, les paroles s’enlisent et s’arrachent’ (292).

Unlike Pineau, Condé is born and raised in Guadeloupe. However, it is Guadeloupe that Condé feels imprisoned. Condé describes her adolescence in Guadeloupe as essentially a series of long and boring years confined to home and school: ‘la mer qu’on ne

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regardait que pour avoir le désir de s’échapper des Antilles. [...] Donc, quand j’ai quitté
la Guadeloupe, [...] j’avais l’impression que j’allais enfin commencer à vivre’. 390 Her
French-speaking parents did not allow her to associate with other children for fear she
would learn to speak Creole. Later on, Condé migrated to Africa in search of an
authentic ‘homeland’; only to feel further alienated. As Condé states:

When I was living in Africa I was just a French West Indian living in the motherland ... Africa helped me to discover that I am not an African. I lived in Africa and I was so terribly unhappy ... I understood that I did not really belong there. I am not an African. I am West Indian and I belong to the West Indies. Africa helped me to see exactly who I am.

It is important to briefly examine the life circumstances of Condé’s parents, in
particular her mother Jeanne. According to Condé, an alienated individual is one
‘qui cherche à être ce qu’elle ne peut pas être parce qu’elle n’aime pas être ce
qu’elle est. A deux heures du matin, au moment de prendre sommeil, je me fis le
serment confus de ne jamais devenir une aliénée’. 392 Similar to Pineau’s mother
who appreciated only French values, Condé’s bourgeois parents did not educate her
about their African origins. In fact, they all but renounced their African traditions,
did not themselves speak Creole, nor did they encourage their children to speak
Creole. Condé’s parents believed that by not educating Condé about slavery and
their African roots they would somehow protect her. 393 Rather than value African
culture they embraced French values:

Mes parents étaient-ils aliénés ? Sûr et certain, ils n’éprouvaient aucun orgueil de leur
héritage africain. Ils l’ignoraient. C’est un fait! ... Comme ma mère, [mon père] était
convaincu que seule la culture occidentale vaut la peine d’exister et il se montrait
reconnaissant envers la France qui leur avait permis de l’obtenir. En même temps, ni
l’un ni l’autre n’éprouvaient le moindre sentiment d’infériorité à cause de leur couleur.

391 Taleb-Khyer 355-356.
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Ils se croyaient les plus brillants, les plus intelligents, la preuve par neuf de l’avancement de leur Race de Grands-Nègres. Est-ce cela être “aliéné”? 394

The alienation of Condé’s parents dates back to her mother Jeanne’s individual alienation which plays a significant part in *Victoire, les saveurs et les mots*. The disaffection between Jeanne and her mother (Condé’s grandmother) had much to do with this. Jeanne was a black daughter born to a light skinned mother. Caribbean tradition recognises Jeanne as ‘mal sortie’. 395 Jeanne struggles against preconceived notions of race and skin colour and becomes one of Guadeloupe’s most influential black school teachers. Jeanne is abandoned at a very young age by Victoire when she leaves Guadeloupe to live in Saint-Pierre with her Martinican boyfriend Alexandre. In addition, Jeanne despises her mother’s lifestyle, particularly her sexual intimacy with her employer Boniface Walberg. It makes for a difficult relationship between the two women, despite their underlying love for each other. Although Victoire spends her later life living in comfort in her daughter’s house, the silence between them is maintained. The sorrow felt by Jeanne at her mother’s death bed is expressed by Condé as follows: ‘Jeanne s’enhardisant, posait la tête sur les genoux de sa mère, son amour pour elle l’étouffant aux lèvres: «Pourquoi a-t-elle été toujours si froide avec moi? Se demandait-elle. Si lointaine? Si réservée?»’ (247). The adjectives used by Condé; ‘froide’ (cold), ‘lointaine’ (distant) and ‘reservée’ (reserved) define the antagonistic relationship between Jeanne and Victoire. This relationship between Jeanne and her mother Victoire was repeated in the relationship that Jeanne had with her own daughter Maryse. Through the distant relationships they maintain with their daughters, both Jeanne and Victoire deconstruct the image of the Caribbean woman as *femme matador* (or the Head of the household) who cares for her children.

Louise Hardwick in “La Question de l’Enfance” suggests that Condé, being the youngest in a family of eight, felt neglected within her family. 396 However, Condé’s interest in colonialism in the Caribbean was sparked by Anne-Marie de Surville, a white

394 Ibid.
395 Ibid.
396 Ibid 48.
girl Condé met as a very young girl whilst on a walk to Pointe-à-Pitre with her parents. Condé writes of this meeting in *Le cœur à rire et à pleurer*. She portrays de Surville as a dominant and authoritative young girl who, when playing with Condé, mimics the type of abusive relationship that might exist between a colonial master and his slave:

> Je fus la mauvaise élève et elle me tira les cheveux. En plus, elle releva ma robe pour m’administrer la fessée. Je fus cheval. Elle monta sur mon dos et elle me bourra les côtes de coups de pied. Je fus la bonne et elle me souffleta. Elle m’abreuvait de gros mots. 397

de Surville believes that Condé deserved to be treated with condescension simply because she is black: ‘Je dois te donner des coups parce que tu es une négresse’. 398 Acknowledging this Condé is driven to understand the Middle Passage - the history of her people before they have been transhipped to the Caribbean. She also became aware of the need to return to Guadeloupe in order to explore her Caribbean identity. Condé was also eager to unearth the mystery surrounding her grandmother.

### 4.4 Experiences of exile: Julia and Victoire

Exile is a theme common to both *Victoire, les saveurs et les mots* and *L’Exil selon Julia*. The term ‘exile,’ together with ‘diaspora,’ and ultimately the very concept of postcolonisation, is in flux. Exile can refer to both a geographical dislocation and/or a psychological state. In *L’Exil selon Julia*, Julia is torn from her home in Guadeloupe. This is an example of *geographical* dislocation; whilst the child Gisèle, being a black girl among her white French school friends, embodies the *psychological* condition of exile. 399 Of course exile can manifest as both when the former situation causes the latter condition.400 Exile is an imposed situation in the case of colonised subjects.401 The experience can disrupt one’s unitary sense of self and leave in its place fractured

397 ibid.

398 Condé, *Le cœur* 49.

399 Abeyesinghe 105.

400 ibid.

401 ibid.
or multiple identities. Displacement and alienation emerge at the centre of exile. The following section will explore the nature of exile experienced by Julia and Victoire in *L’Exil selon Julia* and *Victoire, les saveurs et les mots*.

Said and Depestre argue that exile engenders a sense of dispossession of homeland, from which emerges a profound sense of personal loss. The Haitian literary critic René Depestre describes the exiled as ‘arraché à son sol natal, coupé de son enfance et sa langue maternelle, vivait en terre étrangère une douloureuse épreuve de deuil et de nostalgie’. Edward Said says that exile is the ‘unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted’.

Because they are trapped between two cultural worlds - one familiar yet denied, the other alien and inaccessible - exiles often feel the need to renegotiate their identity. Exile is not only a physical, but a cognitive form of isolation where despite the fact they might participate in their host society; they feel they do not truly ‘belong’. Their only hope is to return to an increasingly ‘imagined’ homeland, which over time also seems impossible. In fact, ‘home coming is out the question’. Exile is not only a historical fact, it remains a contemporary reality.

The characteristics of exile, outlined by Depestre and Said, are identifiable in the characters of both Pineau and her grandmother Julia. As Depestre explains, Julia feels ‘arraché[e] à son sol natal’ when she is compelled to leave her husband Asdrubal, and her home in Guadeloupe, to live in France with her son Maréchal. Julia spends six years with Maréchal and his family in a very racist suburb of Paris. The title *L’Exil selon Julia* refers to the exile Julia experiences in Paris. Despite being born in Paris, Pineau’s

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404 Ibid 179.

405 Veldwachter 180-186.
childhood there can also be likened to an experience of exile. Whilst the novel *L’Exil selon Julia* relates the broader story of Julia and her extended family, Pineau focuses primarily on the relationship between Julia and her granddaughter Gisèle. It is above all Julia and Gisèle who embody the characteristics of exile. It is at the intersection of these experiences of exile of Julia and Gisèle that Pineau constructs Julia’s story in *L’Exil selon Julia*.

There is a profound sense of discontinuity in the once ordered routine of an exiled person’s life. They are less settled, perhaps because their lives are estranged from the habitual order of home. Julia’s exile is keenly felt when she is unable to take ‘sa joie dans le jardin; planter, suer, récolter’ (132). Home for Julia means above all her garden in Guadeloupe. Since arriving in France she feels that ‘[e]lle n’est pas délivrée (...). Elle pleure sur son pays perdu. Elle regrette déjà sa vie raide’ (49). Whilst in France Julia misses her garden the most: ‘Plus que sa case de Routhiers, son jardin lui manque infiniment’ (20). The garden symbolises the fidelity she feels to her ancestors. Upon her departure from Guadeloupe, it was her garden that she was most concerned about, commenting that: ‘et mon jardin? Qui s’occupera de mon jardin?’ (47). The association between exile and nature is a recognised feature of French Caribbean identity.\footnote{Thomas, “Memory, Nature and Exile in the Works of Gisèle Pineau,” *Essays in French Literature*, 43 (2006): 238.}

Julia’s grandchildren were keenly aware of their grandmother’s feelings of displacement in French society. They note, for instance, that the routine absence of the sun in Paris deprives her not only of the familiar Caribbean warmth, but also of the only way she knew to tell the time.\footnote{Abeysinghe 115.} Her alienation emerges from the disruption to her everyday routine in Guadeloupe, including the gardening, housework and washing: ‘... Man Ya déracine, sème, arrose et veille l’ascension des jeunes plantes. Manier la terre, la tourner, la sentir entre ses doigts, l’exalte. Elle fait sienne ses terres. Les traits de son visage disent la sérénité ... Le travail de la terre lui donne vie, la sustente’ (89-...
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90). A vocabulary defining the garden and activities that one can do in the garden shows Julia’s bond with nature. Leaving the garden for Julia is likened to leaving Guadeloupe, it means dispossession of all that is familiar and routine.

During colonisation, the Africans were uprooted from their homeland, their culture and language, and transplanted in the Caribbean islands as slaves.408 In their exile they attempted to create a sense of belonging through an attachment to nature.409 Their intimacy with nature was tied to an economy based on sugarcane production. In Femmes des Antilles: Traces et Voix, Pineau and Abraham promote a resolution with nature in order to understand and accept the injustices of slavery. Their symbolic reconnection with nature implies taking root in a new land; an idea which permeates Caribbean literature. For instance, Pineau also explores this relationship in her novel La Grande Drive des Esprits; and Simone Schwarz-Bart in Pluie et Vent sur Telumée Miracle. In both novels, the garden reflects the principal characters’ state of mind. When they are unhappy and emotionally unstable, the garden becomes overgrown. Thus, the garden is used as a metaphor for mind and state of mind.

Julia’s identity is intrinsically linked to nature.410 Her strength whilst in Paris is nourished by the memory of the fruitfulness of her garden in Guadeloupe. It is a memory which sustains her in France. She considers her little house in Guadeloupe, open on all four sides and filled with the familiar sounds and smells of the surrounding hills and countryside, as a place of permanence. These memories are related to her grandchildren, and particularly Gisèle. In the spring Julia reconnects with the earth through her son’s garden. After the long winter she rediscovers the familiar pleasure of handling the soil, digging the earth, turning it over and feeling it between her fingers. She is further sustained by her cultural beliefs; the practice of traditional herbal medicine, Roman Catholicism and the powers of the supernatural. It is this spiritual

408 Ormerod, An Introduction 1-2.
410 Ibid 241.
bonding with nature and her culture that defines her identity as a Caribbean woman during her exile in Paris.

Julia’s loyalty to her Caribbean identity is remarkable during her stay in Paris. She is a monolingual Creole speaker. She is not interested in learning French, nor does she want to adopt Parisian clothes. In fact, she is presented as a ‘vieille nègresse maronne dans la campagne’ (72) at all times. The episode of the military coat, for instance, illustrates her cultural ignorance. At one point in the story Julia uses her son’s Khaki army coat to shield herself from the rain, ignoring those who stop to stare at her. The police arrest her for they believe she has worn this army coat deliberately to disrespect the French military:

Les Blancs . . . portaient des mines contrites comme si la France venait d’être envahie par un de ses sempiternels ennemis, comme si l’honneur de la Patrie était piétiné, là, devant leurs yeux, comme si la guerre était déjà entrée dans le village et qu’ils doivent à leur tour sortir leur pétroire de derrière les fagots, brandir leurs fourches pour que le sang impie abreuve le sillon. (97)

Abeyesinghe suggests that whilst French society alienates and makes her feel different; she does not interiorise any sense of inferiority. Abeyesinghe cites Fanon, ‘il est infériorisé mais non convaincu de son infériorité’. In fact, while Pineau’s mother Daisy provides explanations in French to the police, Julia seems ignorant of the situation and seems proud to be a Creole speaker among French speakers.

It is obvious that during colonisation slavery favoured the French. This situation still impacts Caribbean people who may attempt to repress their island identity and acquire the values of the French as a means to achieve better social standing. Bonnie Thomas argues that this is an attitude which has created an impasse in French Caribbean identity. That is the belief that to achieve social status, one must suppress one’s Caribbean identity and acquire a French identity. Pineau’s parents, and their French speaking friends who encouraged their children to speak only French and who

411 Cited in Abeyesinghe 113.
413 Ibid.
had little interest in Caribbean values, attest to this reality. Julia’s presence is a constant reminder for Pineau’s family and friends of the identity they try to leave behind. In other words, Julia’s attitude represents the ‘other end of the spectrum to the Caribbean people who want to become more French than the French’. 414

While Pineau’s grandmother feels exiled in France due to the blackness of her skin: Condé’s grandmother Victoire feels exiled amongst the black community primarily because of her relatively white skin. Victoire’s feelings of difference began at birth, an event made all the more significant by the collective surprise of her family at her skin which was ‘coloriée en rose’ (21). This skin of a ‘blancheur australienne’ (13) provokes an authorial ‘malaise’ (13). Whilst Victoire’s biological father remains unknown, her white skin suggests she has been fathered by a white man. The illegitimacy of her birth, together with her métisse identity, provokes this ‘malaise’. The métisse is considered ‘orphan,’ ‘bastard,’ ‘half-caste’. 415 Although it is an identity which has been ‘repressed and denied’ it is an entrenched characteristic of Caribbean culture. 416

Nevertheless, Victoire also experiences exile in a similar way to Julia when she moves from La Pointe - where she worked for the Walberg family and gained her fame as a cook - to La Mouille, where her daughter worked as a teacher. In her daughter’s home Victoire is deprived of her familiar daily routine, which was primarily cooking: ‘Jeanne ne se nourrissant pas ou si peu, il n’y avait rien à cuisiner. Je me demande ce que signifiait pour Victoire le fait de ne plus s’approcher d’un potajé. Ne plus marier les saveurs, les couleurs. Ne plus respirer l’odeur des épices. Ne plus être Dieu’ (158). Just as Julia’s identity in L’Exil selon Julia is intrinsically linked to her garden; Victoire’s identity is intrinsically linked to cooking. Whilst residing in her son’s house in Paris Julia mourns the loss of her garden in Guadeloupe. Victoire laments the fact that whilst in the home of her daughter she is unable to find any ingredients for cooking. But there are additional reasons for her unhappiness in her daughter’s home. She misses

414 Ibid 243.
415 Haigh, Mapping 35.
416 Ibid 144.
Boniface, with whom she had an affair, and Anne-Marie who shares similar interests with her. She is also still affected by the losses she experienced as a young woman. These include the death of her loving grandmother and the abandonment by Dernier after she became pregnant to him:

... la mort de Caldonia, l’abandon de Dernier et toutes les vilenies de Marie-Galante lui avaient desséché le cœur. Elle avait tellement aimé sa grand-mère que, privée de sa chaleur elle se replia sur elle-même. Quant à l’île qui l’avait tellement maltraitée, elle le lui rendait. (81)

Exile is also associated with both Julia and Victoire’s linguistic ‘otherness’. She’s inability to speak French contributes to her marginalisation. Even her own grandchildren, educated in France and unable to speak Creole, at first consider her to be strange. Julia rejects assimilating into the French lifestyle; choosing instead to retain her Caribbeanness. Her inability (and unwillingness) to learn French is illustrative of this. Later on, Pineau finds herself exiled in Martinique by not being able to speak Creole fluently. In _Eloge de la Créolité_ the Creoliste writers such as Patrick Chamoiseau, Jean Bernabé and Raphaël Confiant highlight the importance of assimilating to and accepting the diversity as a way of reconciling with exile and alienation. Eventually Pineau becomes able to accept this diversity of her identity and assimilate both Creole and French cultures.

Victoire was similarly a monolingual Creole speaker and loved by her grandmother Caldonia. However, despite the fact that education was free, Caldonia, who brought up Victoire did not think it was important to enrol her in a school. As a result, Victoire never learnt to speak French fluently, something which manifested as a problem later in life. For instance, when her daughter Jeanne began courting Guadeloupe’s new black elite, among the French speaking gathering: ‘Assise sur le bord de sa chaise Hepplewhite, elle demeurait muette à travers toutes les conversations parce que incapable de manier le français, cette arme clé sans laquelle les portes de la civilisation

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417 Rosello 93-94.

demeurent closes’ (165). In fact, Victoire was ridiculed by her daughter’s more sophisticated, French speaking friends.

One remedy for those who suffer from ‘la maladie de l’exil’ is a return to home country. Although Victoire never had the opportunity to return to ‘Marie-Galante, terre de naissance, Martinique, terre de son amour perdu’ (205), contrary to what Said affirms, return does become possible for Julia. We find the metaphorical image of mère/terre (mother/land)\(^{419}\) in *L’Exil selon Julia*, something which is often present in Caribbean literature. Upon Julia’s return to Guadeloupe she comes to the garden which nourishes her. For Julia, her return represents the rediscovering of her creole identity, an identity which came into greater focus, or was lent greater clarity in her exile in France. Although her physical body was in France, her mind remained in Guadeloupe. Upon her return Julia witnessed a (re)union of both body and mind. During her exile in Paris she realised she could flourish only in her familiar Guadeloupe. Paris was in this regard a journey of self discovery, and an opportunity for self-disclosure to her grandchildren, particularly to her granddaughter Gisèle.

Whilst *L’Exil selon Julia* and *Victoire, les saveurs et les mots* briefly examine the experiences of exile of mothers and daughters, these works are primarily focused on the grandmother’s experience of exile. As discussed, their exile stemmed from several factors: being uprooted from their native land and transplanted into an unfamiliar cultural environment; the colour of their skin; and their linguistic distinctiveness. These issues bear a relationship with the Caribbean experience of slavery. Although in many ways the experience of exile of Pineau’s grandmother resembles that of Condé’s grandmother, it is ironic that Julia experiences alienation as a black woman within a white, European milieu, whilst Victoire, feels exiled within her own (black) community as a woman with light skin, born to a black mother.

In their works Condé and Pineau contrast the experiences of exile of the women of the first and second generations. Whilst Julia and Victoire, the women of the first

\(^{419}\) Ibid.
generation, are alienated through their refusal of French values; Jeanne and Daisy, the women of the second generation, attempt to assimilate French values and identity and actively reject their Caribbean heritage. They deny their children the chance to speak Creole and instead encourage them to attain a better social standing through a French education. Because of this, the women of the third generation are destined to also experience a form of exile.

4.5 Exile: Legacy of slavery?

Alienation and displacement, loss of pride in one’s race and of confidence in oneself are essentially a series of themes which have come to play a significant role in Caribbean literature. In a broader sense, the exile(s) of Julia and Pineau, and Victoire, Jeanne and Condé originates from experiences of slavery. Through these characters, Condé and Pineau demonstrate how the haunting memories of colonisation and slavery have an impact on successive generations in postcolonial societies. However, the following section will focus only on Julia and Victoire in order to examine how their lives have been shaped by the colonial practice of slavery.

Both Victoire and Julia are products of the island’s history. Pineau affirms that Julia represents the descendants of slaves by stating that: ‘Man Ya illustre à elle seule toutes ces pensées d’esclavage qui leur viennent parfois et qu’ils étouffent et refoulent comme le créole dans leur bouche. Ils sont infiniment redevables à la France’ (115). During the colonial era the plantation owners considered themselves as proprietors not only of the land, but also of the slaves who worked it. The fact that Julia likens herself to a piece of old furniture that one does not even bother getting rid of draws attention to the attitude of colonisers toward colonised:

Elle est là, inoffensive en quelque sorte, pareille à un vieux meuble démodé, taillé grossièrement dans un bois dur. Un genre de commode mastoc reléguée dans un coin de la cuisine depuis combien de générations ... Y a plus rien à faire pour la réparer, mais on ne s’en déféra jamais. (17)

420 Cited in Connolly, Transculturality 14.

The reference to ‘meuble’ (furniture) and ‘bois dur’ (wood) in L’Exil selon Julia signifies the kind of treatment to which black slaves were subject. Wood is symbolic of the desired quality in a slave; for it is his or her solidity which is essential for work in plantations. The Code Noir defines the slave as ‘meuble du maître’. The slave was a movable item that the master could sell, transfer or free at will. This metaphor of wood to designate the slave does not only attest to the expected quality of the slave but also to their powerlessness experienced at the hands of the coloniser. Julia also was considered to be ‘le meuble du maître’. Mulatto Asdrubal and Julia represent the coloniser and the colonised and embody the archetypal master-slave relationship. He is educated, yet she knows that ‘ça ne l’empêchait pas d’être féroce’ (136). Asdrubal believes he can execute his power over black slaves: ‘un droit sur les travailleurs nègres, ou indiens, sur les femmes aussi’ (132). He marries her because he sees it as a way of gaining power. Julia is not only black, but the ugliest of all: ‘la plus laide des négresses noires’ (132). This serves to empower Asdrubal and strengthen his master powers over his ‘slave,’ Julia. This lends support to the implied reason as to why Asdrubal subordinated her; because she is like a piece of broken furniture. However, for Pineau, and the remainder of the extended family, Julia is not a ‘broken object,’ but a woman whose heart wanders between France and Guadeloupe: ‘si son corps reste là, d’entre nous, son esprit voyage sans fatiguer entre la France et son pays Guadeloupe où chaque jour elle espère retourner’ (18).

A similar master-slave relationship is portrayed in Victoire, les saveurs et les mots. Victoire begins her life as a servant for the Jovial family, a place where her grandmother also worked as a servant. When she falls pregnant to Dernier, the man who was supposed to marry the Jovial’s daughter, she is forced to leave the island. Then again, in La Pointe, where Victoire begins her career as a cook in Boniface’s restaurant, she is exploited not only in this position but also as a sex worker for Boniface. Victoire, who served both the Jovials and the Walbergs without payment

422 Sala-Molins 146.

In their desire to confront the effects of colonialism the women of the third generation draw parallels with the women of the first generation. For instance, in Le cœur à rire et à pleurer Condé says that ‘[elle] aurait tout donné pour être la fille de gens ordinaires, anonymes’\textsuperscript{423} because she believes her parents are obsessed with the black bourgeoisie. Condé disapproves of her parents’ attempt to acquire French values and lifestyles.\textsuperscript{424} Pineau admires her grandmother and her Caribbeanness, appreciating Julia for who she is and in particular for her tales enriched with Caribbean values. The women of the third generation align themselves with the culture and values of their grandmothers, and at the same time distance themselves from their Francophile mothers. Because of this the grandmother is afforded an opportunity to understand and assist her granddaughter to make sense of their own sense of exile, and to impart a more authentic understanding of Caribbean identity. The following section will examine the role of the grandmother in facilitating the granddaughter’s project of identity formation.

4.6 The role of the grandmother in the resolution of the mother-daughter conflict, and in the reconstruction of the identity of the granddaughter

Kitzie McKinney, in ‘Memory, Voice and Metaphor in the Works of Simone Schwarz-Bart’ argues that ‘the voices of black women who bind together, through memory, voice and metaphor, the quotidian detail of community life, moral and spiritual insight, and the profoundly personal’ offer a distinct female viewpoint on colonisation and

\textsuperscript{423} Condé, Le cœur 47.

\textsuperscript{424} Condé, Le coeur (12-14) In a restaurant in Paris, Condé’s parents have been complimented by the waiters for they speak good French. Her father argues they are ‘aussi français qu’eux’ while her mother affirms they are ‘plus français’.
slavery, family histories and other past memories to preceding generations. Simone Schwarz-Bart describes the grandmothers as the soul of the Caribbean community. Condé’s and Pineau’s examination of their grandmothers’ lives, particularly their experience of exile, enriches Condé’s and Pineau’s understanding of their own lives. For instance, when Pineau is racially vilified at school in Paris (and in Guadeloupe because of her inability to speak Creole) Julia sympathises with her, having endured living in Paris, speaking only Creole.

Julia represents the role of the ‘conteuse’ or ‘maîtresse de la parole’ in Caribbean literature, educating Pineau, particularly through her storytelling, while Condé as writer translates her family history through facts she has gleaned from sources and her own imagination. Despite these differences, both Pineau and Condé investigate their grandmothers’ lives with the intention of reconstructing their own identities. As a black child Pineau realises she is something of a misfit in French society. Julia’s presence heightens her desire to learn of Guadeloupe and define her Creole identity. Condé also relates the story of her grandmother’s life as an effort to understand how she has been influenced as a woman and writer. In Victoire, les saveurs et les mots, the grandmother also plays a role in demystifying Condé’s mother Jeanne, which helps her to understand the nature of their relationship.

Of the two novels it is Pineau’s L’Exil selon Julia that most clearly demonstrates the Caribbean oral tradition of storytelling. It is through the oral tradition of storytelling that the Caribbean community has been able to resurrect a history from the ashes of the colonial past. In matrifocal Caribbean society, matrifocal woman such as


426 Randall 134.

427 Gallagher 111.

428 Ibid 139.
grandmothers often occupy the role of the storyteller. In ‘Simone Schwarz-Bart et la tradition féminine aux Antilles’ the critic Mary Jean Green emphasises the prominent role that women play in preserving oral traditions in Caribbean society:

Ce sont les femmes qui ont tout sauvé, tout préservé, y compris l’âme des hommes. Ce sont des gardiennes jalouses qui ont toujours lutté en silence. Quand l’homme antillais faisait des enfants sans revendiquer la paternité, celle qui devait assumer la lignée, accomplir les tâches quotidiennes, s’occuper des enfants tout en leur transmettant les traditions ancestrales, c’était naturellement la femme.

Catherine Clément and Hélène Cixous define contes as a collection of stories handed down from one generation of women to the other. They also consider this oral tradition as the way out for women who are otherwise ‘n’avaient pas de fonction culturelle dans la transmission du savoir’.

The oral tradition or the oraliture has four genres: folktalees, songs, proverbs, and riddles. The folktale has three major themes which have emerged from the plantation system. These are ‘ruse, hunger and revolt’. These folktale themes point directly to the injustices of plantation society. The tales operate for four purposes: ‘to give the community a medium to self-expression, to store memories, to entertain and to voice resistance’.

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430 Green xiv.


434 For more information, see for example, Ruth Pevsner’s “People create stories create people: history, language, content and performance in the oral Créole folk tale in Martinique,” diss., U of Manchester, 1993, 102-172.

Riddles have two important functions. First, they are used to initiate the storytelling because they generate a sense of unity among the listeners. Secondly, because they are often posed by a respected elder, riddles assist children in an understanding of how to position themselves in relation to different generations within the community.\(^\text{436}\)

The oral tradition is a common feature of Caribbean francophone writing. Edouard Glissant and Maryse Condé both believe that the folktales are a response to the cruelty of slavery and the erasure of origins. What is more, oral tradition provides strategies of resistance. It often includes tales of ‘la survie en milieu hostile et semé d’embûches’.\(^\text{437}\) Glissant believes that the *contes* allow Caribbean writers to create stories about ‘origin’.\(^\text{438}\) Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant, however, suggest that ‘face à la mort réelle et à la mort symbolique des esclaves, [le conte] incite à ne pas arrêter la vie, à ne pas soumettre au silence des afflictions, et, dans cette vie ressaisie, à vouloir exister’.\(^\text{439}\) In contrast to Glissant, Chamoiseau and Confiant believe this storytelling in plantations was more an act of resistance to the plantation system than an account of origins.\(^\text{440}\)

In *L’Exil selon Julia* Julia plays the role of the ‘conteuse créole’: ‘le conteur devra d’abord dissimuler son message’ (76). Julia, as the conteuse who conceals her secret is first shaped by her colonial past and then is imposed upon by the family and her social milieu. She gradually emerges from her silence to relate the slave history and educate her granddaughter. In so doing she ensures the continuity of history, a gendered, matrilineal transmission which she received from her mother and is now passing to her

\(^{436}\) Brooks 132.


\(^{439}\) Chamoiseau and Confiant 82.

\(^{440}\) Ibid 36, 63.
granddaughter. As ‘conteuse créole’ Julia provides Pineau with a helpful background for her own identity.

Chamoiseau and Confiant identify the four roles of the ‘conteur’/‘conteuse’: as someone ‘who gives voice to his [or her] group, who becomes the guardian of memories, whose intention is to distract, and to verbalise the resistance’. Julia gives a voice to her grandchildren, particularly to her granddaughter who comes to express herself through writing. She is the guardian of memories, and she educates with tales and legends of the Caribbean. Yet perhaps the most critical among these is the fact she verbalises resistance. Julia confronts the values of postcolonial France, and even her own family who to her have adopted an alien language, lifestyle and set of values. She inspires strength in young Gisèle. She finds comfort in having shared the experiences of her life in Routhiers, with her grandchildren, and in particular her granddaughter:

J’ai marqué le chemin pour eux... Et même s’ils parlent RRR dans leur bouche, ils entendent ma langue. Et même s’ils répondent rien qu’en français, ils sont la chair de ma chair. Et si un jour, ils s’en reviennent à Routhiers, ils seront pas perdus. J’ai marqué le chemin. (165)

Unwittingly, Julia instils in her grandchildren a sense of her own locality; her home at Routhiers in Basse-Terre, her knowledge of the Créole language, the landscape and beliefs of its people. By saying, ‘J’ai marqué le chemin’ she reveals that if ever her grandchildren come to Routhiers, they will not feel ‘lost,’ they will also belong to Routhiers. Furthermore, Julia also discloses to her grandchildren, particularly to her granddaughter Gisèle, that they do not belong in France. It is from Julia that they learn the existence of magic and evil, and the function of traditional healing. She, who is parted from the world of books, uses her interaction with the earth, her knowledge of natural forces, and her life as a black woman in her own race to assure Gisèle who has no previous sense of national or racial belonging.

In Julia’s presence Pineau and her family become aware of their own alienation in their attempt to assimilate French values and realise the need to define their identities

441 Ibid.
in light of Caribbean culture. They see Guadeloupe as a place of poverty and Creole speaking people. Julia’s lack of education and African features is for them a reminder of slavery, plantation life and primitive conditions of living in huts without electricity or water. The abjection associated with slavery permeates Julia’s life narrative. Even the reason for her presence in Paris points to oppression; having been beaten and abused for years by her mulatto husband, a former cane field overseer until being rescued by her son and taken to France.

The woman in the family who most emphatically denies her Guadeloupian identity is Daisy. Intent only on assimilating French values, Daisy reminds her children that their past is dead and buried: ‘le passé est mort et enterré’ (160), this past is ‘la honte et l’humiliation d’être descendants d’esclaves nègres africains’ (154). As such she is unwilling to respond to her daughter’s desire to understand her cultural heritage. Although Daisy tries to protect young Gisèle when she is racially abused at school, we understand that Daisy remains emotionally detached from her. Daisy’s wish to suppress the family’s origins is challenged by Julia’s presence; she is a constant reminder of a history Daisy is trying to bury:

elle est une pauvre vieille de la campagne, illettrée, talons cornés, jambes écaillées, gros ventre. Ils ne peuvent pas admettre qu’ils viennent de là aussi et mesurent, en se mirant les uns les autres, le chemin parcouru par le nègre. Man Ya illustre à elle seule toutes ces pensées d’esclavage qui leur viennent parfois et qu’ils étouffent et refoulent comme le créole dans leur bouche. (114-115)

Julia steps in to fill the emptiness between Daisy and Gisèle. Gradually Julia assumes the role of story teller, relating a past that Daisy refuses to acknowledge. She tells stories of Guadeloupe, its flora and fauna, rivers, volcanoes and the beliefs and traditions of the Caribbean. Her stories quite naturally include the practices of colonialism. Julia discloses the cruelty of the slave system, the abolition of slavery and the dreams of return to Africa. For Gisèle, an acknowledgement of the realities of slavery is an essential condition for an authentic understanding both Caribbeanness and her own identity. Here, Julia plays the role of educator; an integral quality of the Caribbean grandmother.
With Julia’s help Gisèle overcomes feelings of alienation as a child in Paris. She better comprehends the life of Caribbean immigrants in France, including her family. She also adjusts within Caribbean society despite the fact that she was not been brought up as a creole speaker. Gisèle’s relationship with her grandmother allows her to cultivate an awareness and acceptance of her own cultural identity. She especially draws on Julia’s experience of exile to make sense of her own feelings of estrangement from both French and Guadeloupeian societies. Gisèle, like Julia, imagines herself as an exile because she is racially and linguistically defined as ‘Other’; in France because of her black skin and in Guadeloupe because of her inability to speak creole. Julia cultivates a more positive image of the Caribbean and of creole identity in Gisèle.

Although Pineau courts the idea of leaving France, Maréchal’s decision to return to Guadeloupe proves problematic. The narrator becomes aware of the distinction between the ‘true country’ and the country where she was brought up. With this, Pineau realises that the remedy is not the return, but to write to express the problem of return. Pineau instead writes about Julia, her return to Guadeloupe, her garden, and her tales and legends. Julia has succeeded in providing an opportunity for awakening through tales of history, people and also ‘des mots pour dire l’impalpable et l’immatériel, l’insignifiant et l’oublié’ (19).

In L’Exil selon Julia, Julia’s storytelling inspires Pineau to write. Pineau’s L’Exil selon Julia is a novel which incorporates oralité with écriture. Pineau’s work draws on the stories she heard as a child. Pineau’s written narration which repeats words uttered by Julia, resonates the cyclical evolution of history, portrayed throughout the novel. Julia becomes the living memory of Guadeloupe which Pineau tries to preserve by writing down the words spoken by her grandmother. This ‘dialectical use of narrative’ combines notions of past and present while showing the reader their intimate interdependence.

In choosing this narrative style, Pineau uses her text to ‘mirror the
heterogenous nature of Caribbean culture and the processes by which it constructs itself.\footnote{444}

As stated under the title of the novel, \textit{Victoire, les saveurs et les mots} is a récit. In contrast to the role of ‘conteuse’ portrayed by Julia in \textit{L’Exil selon Julia}, Condé’s representation of her grandmother’s life in \textit{Victoire, les saveurs et les mots} is partly factual, partly imaginative. Because Condé had never met her grandmother, much of the narrative plays out as imaginings as to what her grandmother’s life would have been like. The notion of translation (discussed in pages 121 and 122) is again useful in examining Condé’s attempt to step from her grandmother’s unvoiced memory into language. Whilst the aspect of ‘interpretation’ in translation was the focus of chapter three, this section will examine translation and its creative aspect.

At a conference on Nietzsche’s work in Montréal Jacques Derrida gave the following answer to a member of the audience:

I am having trouble translating your last question to myself. I’ve received it, but I have not understood it very well, if by understanding one means being able to reproduce and translate it. Like everyone, I always try, I think, to translate or to translate myself-to autotranslate-which includes that gesture of appropriation that is part of translation.\footnote{445}(my emphasis)

Derrida describes an intricate process of transmission which is initiated upon the receipt of a message, followed by reproduction and translation, and ended by an attempt of appropriation. Extending Derrida’s notion of translation, Eugene Vance suggests that ‘through translation one lived experience is translated to another’.\footnote{446} Both Derrida’s answer and Vance’s suggestion are insightful in examining Condé’s attempt to unearth the mystery surrounding her grandmother’s life in order to complete her own autobiography.

\footnote{444}{Ibid.}


\footnote{446}{Ibid 138.}
Condé undertakes a similar project to that which Derrida explains. She uses the scant knowledge provided by her mother and supplements this with photos, interviews, letters and reports from local newspapers. What remains unknown is fictionalised. This is evident when Condé writes: ‘Il devient indifférent que je me souvienne ou que j’invente, que j’emprunte ou que j’imagine’. She sifts through her mother’s memories before arriving at a version of the past that she feels is accurate, yet is still followed by a shadow of uncertainty: ‘je livre le portrait que je suis parvenue à tracer, dont je ne garantis certainement pas l’impartialité, ni même l’exactitude’ (17). By virtue of necessity Condé writes her grandmother’s life as both factual and creative, biography and fiction.

Laurie Corbin, in ‘The Return To and Beyond the Mother: Maryse Condé and Representations of Maternity’ uses Edouard Glissant’s conception of ‘opacity’\(^\text{447}\) to understand Condé’s representation of her grandmother’s character in Victoire, les saveurs et les mots. Opacity is a term which refers to the author’s right to present a character which in some way remains unknown or unknowable. Condé’s recreation of her grandmother’s biography allows her to ‘know’ her grandmother whilst the fiction mythicises her grandmother’s life and creates around it a sense of mystery. Corbin argues that Condé accepts she will never completely know her grandmother\(^\text{448}\) and in this knowledge grants her grandmother the freedom of opacity. Condé imagines Victoire’s thoughts and feelings, creates dialogue whilst making clear the fact that no one can know Victoire with any certainty: ‘Il me plaît, quant à moi, que ma grand-mère demeure secrète, énigmatique, architecte inconvenante d’une libération dont sa descendance a su, quant à elle, pleinement jouir’ (255). This quote from the final page of Victoire, les saveurs et les mots reinforces Condé’s acceptance of the opacity that surrounds her grandmother’s life.


\(^{448}\) Corbin 241.
Corbin uses Julia Kristeva’s work to analyse how Condé constructs the story of her grandmother in *Victoire, les saveurs et les mots*. In *Colette*, Kristeva explains that ‘[w]e can imagine the other only on the condition that we lose it; and, as a result, thought is a capacity to send others from oneself and to reconstruct them, to make them exist in representation, beyond the mourning of that abandonment’. Kristeva suggests here a response to death, something which frames Condé’s presentation of her grandmother in *Victoire, les saveurs et les mots*. With the death of her grandmother, Condé attempts to ‘make [her] exist in representation’. Condé tries to (re)create her grandmother or translate her life circumstances always with the recognition that this will be partial.

In the context of the Holocaust, in an examination of the process of sharing the past between generations and “Vergangenheitsbewältigung” (mastering the past) Anne Fuchs suggests there is a need and desire of successive generations to locate their identity in response to their family’s past. This is a process which includes ‘retrospective imaginings that simultaneously articulate, question and investigate the normative self-image of previous generations’. Condé investigates her grandmother’s life for several reasons. First, she is driven by the desire to understand the effects of colonialism, something which her mother would not reveal to her. Secondly, Condé sought an explanation for her mother’s indifference towards her. By extension, the motivation behind the portrayal of her grandmother’s life is, like Pineau’s, a yearning to know more about her self, her identity and how history had shaped her life.

It is through the relationships between Condé and her mother Jeanne, and Jeanne and her mother Victoire that Condé comes to an understanding of her personal story. These relationships emphasise the struggle to restore family relationships that have been damaged by colonisation and slavery:


La solitude et l’ostracisme dans lesquels, croyant agir au mieux, [Victoire] condamna [Jeanne] à vivre son enfance, influèrent considérablement non seulement sur son caractère et son comportement, mais sur ceux de ses descendants. Je me demande souvent ce qu’auraient été mon rapport à moi-même, ma vision de mon pays, des Antilles et du monde en général, ce qu’aurait été mon écriture enfin qui les exprime, si j’avais sauté sur les genoux d’une grand-mère replète et rieuse,...’ (17)

Victoire’s influence is evident not only in Jeanne’s life, but also in the lives of Jeanne’s children. The portrayal of Victoire’s influence throughout three generations attests to the fact that damaged relationships impact on subsequent generations. Dysfunctional relationships have the potential to become transgenerational; they are often reproduced over time.

As is depicted in Le cœur à rire et à pleurer, it is clear that there was an element of personal pain in Condé’s relationship with her mother. One example is when Condé describes her mother’s cold response to her letters when she left for France at the age of sixteen. Condé admits that ‘even today I am still trying to find consolation’. However, it is in Victoire, les saveurs et les mots that the reader comes to an understanding of the reasons for the type of relationship she had with her mother. Victoire, les saveurs et les mots explores the maternal links between daughter, mother and grandmother, and attempts to shed light on the psychology of her mother. Although Jeanne is not the protagonist of Victoire, les saveurs et les mots, Victoire is originated through Jeanne because it is the distance felt by Condé with her mother that inculcated in Condé the desire to excavate Victoire’s life. Thus, the re-creation of the grandmother figure in Victoire, les saveurs et les mots is partially an attempt by Condé to come to terms with the relationship she had with her mother.

451 Corbin 239.
452 Condé, Tales from the Heart 132.
Caribbean literature often depicts narratives based on history. Condé’s grandmother is a product of the Caribbean’s colonial past. Nick F. Nesbitt⁴⁵³ in *Le sujet de l’histoire: Mémoires troublées dans Traversée de la mangrove et Le cœur à rire et à pleurer* notes that ‘Grâce à sa fidélité au registre vernaculaire et expressif de l’écriture, Condé articule une expérience de l’histoire antillaise individuelle, saturée d’affectivité’.⁴⁵⁴ The reader acquires an idea of who Victoire might have been, the sexual violence she experienced and the circumstances surrounding the birth of Jeanne. Victoire, like her mother before her, falls pregnant through an act of violence. Condé’s use of the word ‘violenté’ which suggests that Victoire is either raped or assaulted.⁴⁵⁵ As Nesbitt asserts, Victoire represents ‘the union between the individual and French Caribbean society, which exhibited a mixture of languages, ethnicities and cultures and was the legacy of French colonisation’.⁴⁵⁶ This is particularly evident in Condé’s writing of *Victoire, les saveurs et les mots*.

In contrast to the character and social milieu of her grandmother, Condé possesses a better understanding of those of her mother. Jeanne Boucolon was the only daughter of an illiterate mulatto woman named Victoire Elodie Quidal. Jeanne attempts to create a life completely different from that of Victoire, who had neither husband, property nor education; she was merely a cook. Jeanne excelled in education and was able to rise above the socio-economic class of her mother. Jeanne Boucolon stands in contradiction to her mother not only through education, but also in terms of financial stability and ultimately an arrogance which emerged from her new found social standing. Contrary to her mother, Jeanne absorbs society’s mores. Jeanne and Victoire are most alike in their inability to express love for each other.


⁴⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁵ Corbin 233.

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid 236.
The emotional void that haunted Jeanne and Victoire had consequences in the relationship that Jeanne had with Condé. In *Victoire, les saveurs et les mots*, Condé’s mother Jeanne is ever-present as a figure hovering in the background. This does not mean, however, that the central maternal figure in her work is her mother. The presence of the mother of the protagonist, as an estranged figure which plagues the protagonist’s life, is a common feature in Caribbean literature. It is also common for these protagonists to turn to their grandmothers for an explanation of this alienated character of their mother. In this situation the grandmother plays the role of the ‘other mother,’ or mythic mother figure, given the special, honorific status of ‘good’ nurturer. As Caroline Rody states:

> [t]raumatic disruptions of the mother-daughter relationship ... carry the emotional weight of a psychologically difficult inheritance. Thus Condé’s choice to focus on the grandmother corresponds to an acknowledged pattern of representations of matrilineage in the Caribbean. (15)

Rody sees this as a strategy enacted by the daughter to come to terms with the dissension she feels in her relationship with her mother. I believe that Condé’s exploration of Victoire’s life is motivated by a yearning to understand the nature of the relationship she had with her mother.

In the Introduction to *The Daughter’s Return: African and American and Caribbean Women’s Fictions of History*, Rody argues that:

> African, American and Caribbean women writers figure their creative relationships to the past by means of the unconventional, feminist story of a daughter’s return to repair a severed matrilineage. ... Further, given the histories of enslavement and colonisation told here, the mother-daughter figural mode must be seen to reclaim connections to maternal origins in the face of the historical destruction of families and lineages, in particular slavery’s systematic separation of mothers from their children.

Condé’s autobiographical text *Victoire, les saveurs et les mots* is a work which emphasises the reparation of maternal origins. Condé’s focus on her grandmother

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458 Rody 6-7.
constitutes the granddaughter’s attempt to repair maternal relationships and find resolution to the personal pain, the font of which, as Condé understands, can be traced back to colonisation and slavery.

Whilst it is commendable that Jeanne uses her skills and position as a teacher to work for racial equality, Condé and even more so her brother Sandriano, are disaffected by their parents’ obsession with the family’s material success; their status among the black bourgeoisie; and most importantly their parents’ claim that they are French. For Condé, Victoire is a symbol of the Creole world that her parents so stridently reject. Condé’s grandmother is a symbol for the truth which her parents work hard to bury.

Through the reconstruction of Victoire’s life, Condé also endeavours to reclaim her Caribbean heritage and what she feels is a more authentic self-identity. Condé compares herself as a writer to her grandmother as a cook. This has been used as a metaphor to develop an association between Condé and Victoire in terms of their creativity. While her grandmother identifies herself as a cook with ‘saveurs’; Condé recognises herself as a writer with ‘mots’.

Within the narratives of L’Exil selon Julia and Victoire, les saveurs et les mots Pineau and Condé have attempted to make sense of their lives. Julia plays the role of conteuse and nurturing grandmother, educating her granddaughter about Caribbean culture and values. She is the spiritual mother who gives birth to Pineau, the black creole writer. In Victoire, les saveurs et les mots, Maryse Condé adopts the position of a memoir writer imposing narrative order on a jumble of half-remembered events; arriving at a truth that is hers alone. As memoir writer she tries to make sense of her life and the circumstances, values and heritage that have conditioned her life. For both authors, the grandmother - granddaughter relationship opens a channel for the receiving of matrilineal memory. This allows Pineau to construct her own hybrid cultural identity which includes both ‘French’ and ‘Creole’ and which continues to nourish her writing.

459 Zinsser 6.
Writing the biography of her grandmother also affords Condé the right to position herself as a writer who can draw personally on the legacy of colonialism. In so doing, Pineau and Condé affirm not only their place in the literary world, but are also redefining and confirming the place of women in Caribbean society.

4.7 Conclusion

The exiles of Pineau and her grandmother Julia in *L’Exil selon Julia*; and Condé, her mother Jeanne and her grandmother Victoire in *Victoire, les saveurs et les mots* reveal the complexities and a continuity of the experience of exile in the Caribbean diaspora. Conditioned to abandon their Caribbean identity in order to assimilate French values, it remains dormant as a reality only later revealed by a mature older woman such as a grandmother, who takes the responsibility for transmitting to successive generations their collective history. These women are able to relate the violence inflicted by slavery, the difference of the motherland and the host country and language through their own experiences of slavery. Thus, the grandmothers have a strong influence over their grandchildren in their role as guardians of culture.

Transgenerational memory plays a significant role in bridging the gap between generations. It recuperates the hidden or forgotten memories of one generation and fills the gaps in memory of another. Pineau relies on her grandmother’s memories whilst Condé imagines her grandmother’s memories to define their own identity. However, they are both aware that the reconciliation with their exile as well as their past does not only completely rely on the grandmothers’ memories. Like the transgenerational memory which creates the link between the past and the present, their writing creates the link between their experiences of exile and their effort to establish their present identity.

While Pineau, through the character of her grandmother examines positive feminine qualities that are associated with nature, healing and spirituality, Condé through Victoire explores themes such as female solidarity and ostracism within the family and in the society. However, both protagonists, marginalise and repress the story of slavery, a story which acquires a greater importance as the novel progresses.
Furthermore, the literary style of Condé and Pineau mirrors the Caribbean tradition of oral history attributing particular attention to the role women have played in the transmission of folk tradition. The role of story telling is not traditionally assigned to women. In particular, créoliste literature depicts this role as traditionally a male occupation. By giving this voice to women, the authors attribute an active role to women, who were frequently left in the margins of history, in preserving the folk tradition and making history.

This chapter answered the questions raised in chapter three by the daughters regarding their dysfunctional lives handed over to them by their mothers. Whilst the chapter observed how the grandmothers, through their memories, helped their granddaughters to integrate and appropriate the life stories of their parents, the next chapter will take a different look in my attempt to examine the dysfunctionalities generated by race. The focus of chapter five will be the impact of race on partners and their mulatto children. The chapter will attempt to answer the questions: What is the nature of this dysfunctionality? How does it manifest in black and white skinned individuals? In mulatto children? And finally, how do interracial partners and their children deal with their dysfunctionality?

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460 Thomas, *Breadfruit or Chestnut?* 36.
Chapter Five

Interracial Marriage: The Impact of Race on One’s Relationship with Partners and Children

5.1 Introduction

In *Les couples dominos: Aimer dans la différence*, Thérèse Kuoh-Moukoury examines the challenges interracial couples face in Caribbean society. Unlike couples from the same ethnic group, they may not be accepted by either of their respective communities. Children born to interracial couples may also feel a sense of alienation, being made to feel that they are the progeny of those who have ‘transgress[ed] the unwritten laws of sexual behaviour between the races’. In light of these contentions, this chapter investigates the issues surrounding interracial marriage between black and white partners, and the impact upon their mulatto children in the Caribbean as it has been represented in Condé’s *Histoire de la femme cannibale* and Pineau’s *L’Âme prêtée aux oiseaux*.

Mixed marriage and the social and cultural conflicts that arise from them can be traced to the period of colonialism and the practice of slavery. During colonisation, relationships between white men and black women were a common feature of Caribbean society. These interracial unions inevitably produced light-skinned *mulattoes* who were, in many instances, more favoured than darker skinned children. Cécile Accilien argues that distinctions based on colour, which during times of colonisation, provided lighter skinned slaves (or black women who enter into relationships with white men) with privilege still prevail in the Caribbean. Accilien further suggests that this hierarchy of whiteness—which takes into account skin colour,

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463 Bush 11.

464 Accilien 121.
hair texture and facial features - is even taken as a measure of beauty and again remains a definitive norm in the contemporary Caribbean. Therefore, the desire of women to achieve whiteness (and therefore the status which is attached to whiteness) by being with a white man has its genesis in the period of colonisation.

The union between interracial couples is unsurprisingly a recurrent theme in Caribbean literature. Through the portrayal of the interracial union between Rosélie and Stephen, the ‘couple domino’ (52) in *Histoire de la femme cannibale*, Condé sheds light on the difficulty of being dark skinned in a white milieu. For a black woman who is in a relationship with a white man, there is still the potential for her to be dehumanised by white others. Even within Rosélie’s marriage it is Stephen who takes control over their relationship by completely disempowering her. Within the relationship Rosélie is unable to grow as an individual to the point where her identity is completely effaced. Condé’s novel relates experiences of racial exclusion within the defined context of interracial union. She portrays a coloured woman’s struggle to come to terms with her self identity which has been erased within her relationship with her common law white French husband. Rosélie’s subjugation within the confines of her relationship with Stephen is conceptualised through the metaphor of cannibalism. By situating the trope of cannibalism within a historical and postcolonial context, I argue that Rosélie is not merely a character in the novel, but a symbol of what was perpetrated against many of the colonised during the period of slavery.

In *L’Âme prêtée aux oiseaux* Pineau depicts the complex interracial relationships between a black woman and a white man, a white woman and a black man, and also the relationships between white parents and their mulatto children. The novel

465 ibid 121.
466 ibid 134.
467 According to the colour gradations of the Caribbean society, Rosélie can be considered a câpresse as she is born to a black mother and to a mulatto father. However, I agree with Clarisse Zimra who affirms that the grading of colour that exists in the Caribbean disappears in France. In fact, mulâtre, mulâtresse, chabin, chabine, câpre, câpresse are all labelled as black. Thus in my analysis I refer to Rosélie as a black woman. See, for example, Clarisse Zimra, “Patterns of Liberation,” 109.
discusses the conflicts in their relationships caused by racism through the narratives of three women of different generations; Sybille, a black single mother from Guadeloupe; Lila, a French woman; and Jenny, another black woman from Barbados. All have illegitimate children as a result of failed interracial relationships. This chapter will primarily focus on the lives of Jenny and Lila, two of the three central characters. Jenny falls in love with George Mac Dowell, the son of the rich plantation owner for whom she works. She has a mulatto son from this relationship named Henry. Unable to withstand the racist attitude of the white society, George Mac Dowell abandons his son. Henry moves to America upon hearing that he has been fathered by George Mac Dowell who is still his mother’s lover. Henry grows up to be an American soldier, who shortly after the end of World War II moves to France and enters into a relationship with Lila. Together they have a son named James-Lee. In the same way that Henry was abandoned by his white father, Henry’s son James-Lee is similarly deserted by his white mother. Henry moves back to America with James-Lee whilst Lila becomes a stranger in her son’s life. In this chapter I will analyse the relationship between Jenny and George Mac Dowell, and the dysfunctional father-son relationship between George and their mulatto son Henry. I will then investigate the conflict between Henry and his French partner Lila, and Lila’s subsequent neglect of their son James-Lee. This analysis will raise questions concerning colonisation, history and racism.

In relation to *Histoire de la femme cannibale*, my analysis will examine not only the way in which a conceptualisation of cannibalism can be applied to the colonisers but also how the colonised themselves made use of this trope to construct their oppressors. In other words my discussion will encapsulate the fear of both black and white that the trope of cannibalism has evoked during colonial rule. I will also explore the relevance of the trope of cannibalism in the institution of interracial marriage, and its representation in the French Caribbean novel. The ideology of *métissage* and the dysfunctional, and at times traumatic relationships it creates between mulatto children and their white parents, will be analysed vis à vis Pineau’s *L’Âme prêtée aux oiseaux*. I will use the concept of the lactification complex, developed by Frantz Fanon, to describe the internalisation of racism and the inferiority complex suffered by black
colonised subjects. I argue that skin colour and race serve as the basis for identity formation.

5.2 Subjugation of the coloured woman in her relationship with a white man

Maryse Condé’s *Histoire de la femme cannibale*, is set in both New York and Cape Town, South Africa. It is the story of an interracial relationship between Rosélie Thibaudin and Stephen Stewart. The story begins at the point in which Rosélie is experiencing the loss of her murdered common-law husband Stephen, with whom she has spent the last twenty years. Stephen was raised in Verberie, France. He was the child of an English father and French mother. Rosélie was born in Guadeloupe but ‘avait mollement étudié’ (26) in Paris. She was the daughter of Elie, a mulatto man, and Rose, a woman known as the ‘belle Négresse’ (15). Rosélie was taken to South Africa by her former lover who abandoned her there. She began working in ‘[l]e plus vieux métier du monde...’ (22) at the Saigon Bar in N’Dossou in Cape Town. It was there that she met Stephen, a professor of Irish literature, working in a university. One night in Cape Town, Stephen left the house to buy a packet of cigarettes, only to later be found mysteriously murdered. The novel is structured around the gradual revelation of the circumstances regarding his death. After Stephen’s death Rosélie is left with no means of financial support. Dido, her housekeeper and best friend, encourages Rosélie to take advantage of the supernatural gift she possesses and become a clairvoyant. Rosélie begins to rebuild her life after Stephen’s death, all the while searching for the truth behind Stephen’s brutal murder.

Whilst Rosélie is primarily the narrator of the story, it is also punctuated by Stephen’s voice. Kathryn Lachman suggests that there are three narrative genres at play.468 The first is Condé’s attempt to create the atmosphere of a detective story through the presentation of Stephen’s murder and Rosélie’s effort to trace the murderer and the

reason behind his death.\textsuperscript{469} On a second level, Condé depicts Rosélie’s transformation from a subservient, mourning woman to an ambitious artist who is more in control of her own life.\textsuperscript{470} On a third level, Condé gives her narrative the aspect of a screenplay.\textsuperscript{471} This is particularly evident at the beginning of the novel when the narrator’s gaze, like a camera, moves from above the ocean, over Robben island and finally lands on Rosélie. \textsuperscript{472} It is at the intersection of these three narrative genres that Condé develops \textit{Histoire de la femme cannibale}.

It was only until after his death that Rosélie learnt of Stephen’s secret life as a homosexual. Whilst he was alive Stephen attempted to hide this from Rosélie by limiting her contacts with the outside world. This thwarted her desire to develop as an individual and become a painter. She also discovered that Stephen used their marriage to disguise his homosexuality and present himself as a respectable university lecturer. Stephen’s murder opens the doors to a side of his life that had been hidden to her, in particular it revealed an understanding of the real nature of their relationship which had formerly eluded her.

\textit{Histoire de la femme cannibale} is the story which is structured around the theme of cannibalism. The trope of the cannibal can be used to explore Rosélie’s relationship with Stephen. In the novel, the term cannibal is not literally used to indicate the actual consumption of human flesh. Rather, it functions as a metaphor for imperial exploitation and the kind of subordination that Rosélie experienced at the hands of Stephen. Mireille Rosello suggests that \textit{Histoire de la femme cannibale} shows us how a story can present cannibal characters ‘without necessarily defining exactly what cannibalistic practices are involved’.\textsuperscript{473} Stephen’s cannibalism is not physical, but

\textsuperscript{469} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{470} Ibid 80.

\textsuperscript{471} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{472} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{473} Rosello, “Post-Cannibalism in Maryse Condé’s \textit{Histoire de la femme cannibale},” \textit{Feasting on Words: Maryse Condé, Cannibalism, and the Caribbean Text}, eds. Vera Broichhagen, Kathryn Lachman and
cultural, and it becomes visible in his relationship with Rosélie. In her union with Stephen the implications of Rosélie’s blackness intensify. She becomes acutely aware of the subordination she has experienced as a black woman at the hands of her white husband. Thus, central to the story is Rosélie’s struggle for self-identity, which has been consumed or ‘cannibalised’ by her relationship with Stephen.

The invocation of literary cannibalism raises numerous questions, the foremost being who is consuming whom? What is the nature of this literary cannibalism? Does it point only to subordination and exploitation? Does it also mean self empowerment for the cannibalised? Through an examination of the complex notions of the trope of cannibalism, this chapter attempts to show that the literary representation of cannibalism in *Histoire de la femme cannibale* serves not only as a metaphor of cultural domination and subjugation but also of resistance and liberation.

5.2.1 Subjugation through cannibalism

The term *cannibal* was born in the context of European imperialism. Its origins can be found in the word *Carib*, which refers to a fierce West Indian tribe who literally devoured their enemies. 474 The Arawaks, an ethnic group that Columbus encountered in the Caribbean, told him that their enemies, the *Caribs*, eat the flesh of enemies they have killed in battle. Columbus’ interpreter, who was inexperienced in the Arawak language, mispronounced ‘Carib’ as ‘Canib’- which eventually evolved into the word ‘Cannibal’. 475 In Western discourse, cannibalism marks ‘a line of demarcation between the thinkable and the unthinkable, between self and other, between human and


474 Until Columbus’ first journey to the Caribbean islands, only the term ‘anthropophagist’ was used. See, for example, Peter Hulme, *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean, 1492-1797* (London: Methuen, 1986) 16, 17.

Cannibalism is an act of savagery which involves the consumption of one human being by another. In other words, cannibalism implies ‘the incorporation of Other into the Self’.\textsuperscript{477}

According to William Arens, the term cannibalism was traditionally used as a discursive marker to make a distinction between ‘civilised’ and ‘savage’, and a trope to interpret cultural differences.\textsuperscript{478} Maggie Kilgour explains this notion by stating that: “‘we’ are civilised and eat nicely, “they” are barbaric and eat savagely: “we” eat normally, “they,” perversely”.\textsuperscript{479} Peter Hulme has defined cannibalism as ‘the image of ferocious consumption of human flesh frequently used to mark the boundary between one community and its others - a term that has gained its entire meaning from within the discourse of European colonialism’.\textsuperscript{480} Robert Stam suggests that cannibalism ‘has often been the “name of the other”, the ultimate marker of difference in a coded opposition of light/dark, rational/irrational, civilized/savage’.\textsuperscript{481}

Peter Hulme, however, argues that cannibalism is ‘merely a product of the European imagination, it was never practised anywhere [...]’.\textsuperscript{482} European colonisers employed the trope of the cannibal to dehumanise colonial subjects. Cannibal became a label which discursively positioned the colonised as ‘savage’ and served to justify their oppression.\textsuperscript{483} Maggie Kilgour suggests that cannibalism has been traditionally used as

\textsuperscript{476} Fulton 126.


\textsuperscript{478} Arens 78.

\textsuperscript{479} Maggie Kilgour, “The function of cannibalism at the present time,” \textit{Cannibalism and the Colonial World}, eds. Francis Barker, Peter Hulme and Margaret Iversen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 239.

\textsuperscript{480} Kilgour 86.

\textsuperscript{481} Ibid 125.

\textsuperscript{482} Peter Hulme, introduction, \textit{Cannibalism and the Colonial World}, eds. Francis Barker, Peter Hulme and Margaret Iversen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 3.

\textsuperscript{483} Ibid.
‘a satirical topos’ to discipline those that posed a threat to social order.\textsuperscript{484} In postcolonial studies, cannibalism has been used in a literary sense as a metaphor for both cultural and sexual domination; and as ‘a form of cultural criticism’.\textsuperscript{485} Both of these are central to my analysis of \textit{Histoire de la femme cannibale}.

Vera Broichhagen, Kathryn Lachman and Nicole Simek theorise Condé’s depiction of cannibalism as ‘an indigenous Caribbean literary praxis of anti-colonial and anti-patriarchal political resistance’\textsuperscript{486} Although it is evident that cannibalism was used as a powerful method of control over the dominated, cannibalism cannot be simply related to one race. Before moving on to illustrate the division between cannibal and other, it is important to examine the juxtaposition of the white fear of the primitive other as cannibal with the African myth of the white cannibal.

During the Atlantic slave trade, the trope of cannibalism aided Europeans to establish their dominance over Africans. In the 18\textsuperscript{th} and 19\textsuperscript{th} century Caribbean, the English and French colonisers accused the indigenous Caribs of cannibalism to prevent the African slaves from fleeing and joining the Caribs. In a 1990 interview Carib Chief Irvinse Auguiste from Dominica commented: ‘...when they first brought in black slaves, the English told them we Caribs ate Black people, so that the maroons\textsuperscript{487} would not seek to join us when they ran away and would fight us when they did. Like that they kept us divided a long time’\textsuperscript{488} By calling the Caribs cannibals the colonisers established their power over slaves and slavery in the area.

\textsuperscript{484} Kilgour, “‘The function,’” 239.

\textsuperscript{485} Ibid 242.

\textsuperscript{486} Broichhagen, Lachman and Simek, eds. \textit{Feasting on Words: Maryse Condé, Cannibalism and the Caribbean Text} 948.

\textsuperscript{487} Maroon is a brave slave who fled their oppressive existence during the colonial period.

Similarly, Africans also harboured suspicions of the cannibalistic colonisers. During the Middle Passage African slaves starved themselves in an attempt to escape the horrors of slavery. So as not to lose their valuable cargo, slavers would force their captives to eat. Force feeding was strictly upheld and any wastage of food was a punishable offence.\(^{489}\) Africans misinterpreted this, believing that the slavers were attempting to fatten them up in order for them to be eaten. Furthermore, when those Africans who were taken as slaves failed to ever return, those they left behind in Africa believed that they had been eaten by the whites.

In *Black Legacy: America’s Hidden Heritage* William D. Piersen describes light-skinned cannibals who stole black men for their meal.\(^{490}\) According to Piersen, the Africans’ fear of being eaten was intensified as they reached the land. For instance, Piersen writes that, fearing that once they reach shore they would be slaughtered, over one hundred slaves jumped overboard from the *Prince of Orange* at St Christopher in San Domingo in 1737.\(^{491}\) Alan Rice writes that on long journeys, in cases of food shortages, the African slaves expected to be sacrificed.\(^{492}\)

In its general sense cannibalising literally means to devour human flesh. However, the term cannibal and the act of cannibalising can also take on numerous metaphorical and symbolic meanings. For instance, in business, cannibalising means to ‘steal sales from another’.\(^{493}\) In films such as *The Cook*,\(^{494}\) cannibalising means the limitless

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\(^{491}\) Piersen 10-11.


\(^{494}\) Peter Greenaway’s 1989 film *The Cook, the Thief, his Wife and her Lover*, deals with consumerism allegorically via cannibalism. The thief is offered the roasted remains of his wife’s lover and ordered to eat them. After tasting a piece, he is shot by his wife. He dies uttering his final word ‘cannibal’. See
appetite for food, cruelty and domination. Maryse Condé has defined literary cannibalism as ‘a rewriting and magical appropriation of the literature of the other’.\textsuperscript{495} In fact, Condé’s \textit{La migration des cœurs} (1995) has been considered as a cannibalising rewriting of Emily Brontë’s \textit{Wuthering Heights} (1847). Kathryn Lachman identifies Condé’s rewriting of \textit{Wuthering Heights} as ‘an intimate act of possession through which she incorporates Brontë’s novel, breaks it apart, rejects elements, translates it into her language, transposes it to the French Caribbean, and creates a newly hybrid product’.\textsuperscript{496} Richard Philcox, Maryse Condé’s husband and the translator of many of her novels writes ‘[g]iven Maryse’s attitude toward the translated text, I do not hesitate to \textit{cannibalize} (emphasis added) it. Once her text is translated, it carries for her another music and another language that she does not recognize’.\textsuperscript{497}

In \textit{Histoire de la femme cannibale}, Condé, through the relationship between Rosélie and Stephen, uses the notion of cannibalism as a literary device to investigate a white man’s dominance over a black woman. This representation leads us to reconsider the notion of cannibalism. In the literal sense, the colonised are identified as cannibal; and the colonisers use the trope of cannibalism to justify the violence they execute against them. In its metaphorical sense, however, it is the coloniser who \textit{becomes} the cannibal

\begin{itemize}
\item for more information, Crystal Bartlovich, ‘Consumerism, or the cultural logic of late cannibalism,’ \textit{Cannibalism and the Colonial World}, eds., Francis Barker, Peter Hulme and Margaret Iversen (London: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 204-211.
\end{itemize}

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in his attempt to dehumanise the colonised. Cannibalism is thus a trope with which
Stephen turns Rosélie’s identity into a ‘demonised other’.  

Pro-slavery apologist William Gilmore Simms in a lecture entitled ‘The Morals of
Slavery’ stated that ‘the negro comes from a continent where he [she] was a cannibal
destined...to eat his fellow or to be eaten by him’. Within the French colonial
system, the allocation of the label of cannibal was based on race. The protagonist
Rosélie is labelled as a cannibal merely because of her black skin. However, the
cannibalising of Rosélie is an act executed by white Stephen. It is at the juncture of
seeing oneself as a cannibal, and being cannibalised by the white other, that Condé
uses Rosélie and Stephen’s relationship to illustrate the horrors of slavery and racism.

Through Rosélie Condé portrays the racist representation of Africans as cannibals. It is
through her relationship with Stephen, and in the midst of the white community in
which they lived, that Rosélie becomes acutely aware of her blackness. Under the
‘white gaze’ Rosélie begins to perceive her blackness negatively, to the point at which
she comes to define herself as a ‘black cannibal’ and internalises a sense of inferiority.
Debbie Barnard suggests that whilst in the novel Rosélie is not directly labelled as a
cannibal, she still sees herself as a cannibal through the eyes of others. With this
comes a feeling of guilt that she may be tarnishing, through association, Stephen’s
status. When she is with Stephen’s students, she feels she is diminishing the
reputation of their English-speaking professor: ‘Elle avait eu l’impression de nuire à
l’image de ce professeur bien-aimé, qui parlait l’anglais avec un accent inimitable et
affichait sur toute sa personne le raffinement du Vieux Monde’ (107). In her
imagination she pictures one of Stephen’s disapproving students asking: ‘Quel lien
malsain l’unissait à cette descendante des cannibales?’ (107). Rosélie has internalised
the trope of the cannibal and so envisions herself as being destructive to Stephen.

498 Kilgour 240.
500 Barnard 327.
501 Ibid.
Stephen’s act of cannibalising of Rosélie is presented by Condé through numerous instances that highlight the distinctions based on race. This occurs when Rosélie is mistaken for a maid, or is treated with condescension by Stephen’s colleagues from the University, Lisa and Richard during their four day holiday in Death Valley. Despite Stephen’s outward rejection of their attitude towards Rosélie, it is obvious they are unable to look beyond her race, and cannot ‘se comporter avec elle comme avec un autre être humain’ (124). Although Stephen is aware of Rosélie’s suffering, his decision to ignore it is a sign of his complicity in Rosélie’s subordination. Thus, Stephen consolidates his colleagues’ cannibalisation of Rosélie.

Stephen similarly disregards Rosélie’s unhappiness caused by the racism exhibited by Stephen’s family. During their visit to Stephen’s mother in an aged care institution she begs him never to have a child with Rosélie because ‘[j]amais au grand jamais elle ne pourrait serrer un petit-fils métis dans ses bras’ (55). When Rosélie sees this as a refusal of her humanity, and suggests that she feels consigned to the status of a ‘[l]épreuse et pestiférée’ (55) Stephen accuses her of fabricating his mother’s insults, stating that: ‘Que de bruit pour rien! Comment peux-tu accorder de l’attention aux bavardages d’une vieille femme de soixant-quinze ans, un peu pompette par-dessus le marché ? Quoi que tu penses, ma mère t’aime beaucoup!’ (55). Stephen’s attempts to pacify Rosélie hint at the manipulative nature of his relationship with her. She eventually becomes what Dawn Fulton - reflecting a transcontinental experience of racial exclusion - terms an ‘invisible woman’.\textsuperscript{502} In other words, and in a metaphorical sense, Rosélie’s humanity is denied or ‘cannibalised’ by Stephen, his family and friends.

Debbie Barnard identifies Stephen’s attempt to subordinate Rosélie as a form of ‘cannibalism of her identity’.\textsuperscript{503} Instead of helping her to cultivate a sense of independence and self-worth, and to develop as a painter, Stephen is only concerned with using his relationship with Rosélie to hide his homosexuality, and thereby protect

\textsuperscript{502} Fulton 127.

\textsuperscript{503} Barnard 333.
his reputation in the university. The trope of cannibal is again evoked when Stephen says to Rosélie:

Si je te perds, mon existence redeviendra ce qu’elle était avant toi: une désolation. Je n’avais rien à moi. Je vivais au travers d’autres hommes. Comme un Indien Tupinamba, je dévorais leur foie, leur rate, leur cœur. Mais ces âcres festins me laissaient plus morose encore. Repu, je réalisais mon indignité. Tu m’as tout donné. (161)

Here Condé intimates that Stephen’s homosexuality is being secreted through his relationship with Rosélie. He uses Rosélie as ‘bait’ to fool a society that condemns same sex relationships. The respectability and status he enjoys as a professor is partly dependent on maintaining the façade of a happily married man. Whilst the image of cannibal is projected on Rosélie, Stephen’s admission that he preyed on other men illustrates the link between his domination of Rosélie, and Europeans’ use of the trope of cannibal to signify power and control.504

The following shows that Rosélie was both financially and emotionally dependent on Stephen. As Condé writes ‘[d]ès la rencontre au Saigon, les rôles avaient été distribués et n’avaient plus varié. Il était le Maître-nageur. Elle était la Naufragée. Il était le Chirurgien. Elle était l’Opérée du cœur’ (278). Stephen was the dominant partner in their relationship. For instance, it was he who decided they should settle in Cape Town, a city where Rosélie, as a black woman, would be exposed to racial exclusion inherent in the political system of apartheid.505 Stephen’s decision to move to Cape Town forced her to enter a hostile world where the social and political system served to reinforce Stephen’s power. The following quote illustrates the nature of their relationship:


504 ibid 330.

505 ibid 328.
This attests to Rosélie’s helplessness and the blind faith she had in Stephen. She refused to accept any criticism of Stephen and also the dominant position that he had in their relationship. The image of Rosélie as a ‘bébé prématuré qui ne quitte jamais sa couveuse’ hints at this view. Stephen’s control over Rosélie was disguised as a form of protection.\(^{506}\)

Before he died, Rosélie had always held Stephen in high regard, despite the contrasting opinions of her friends who claimed that he was an authoritative and manipulative man.\(^{507}\) For instance, Rosélie’s maid Dido proclaims ‘C’était un égoïste, un despote. Il t’empêchait d’être toi-même’ (159); Mrs Hillster, an old lady who was one of Stephen’s friends, affirms that: ‘Stephen était trop autoritaire. Il faisait des gens ce qui lui plaisait; il les manipulait. Surtout vous’ (150-151). After his death these criticisms regarding Stephen lead Rosélie to rethink the nature of her relationship. Reflecting on these criticisms, she begins to doubt herself; she wonders how the opinions of their close friends could be so different from her own.\(^{508}\) These remarks, and eventually the discovery of the truth behind Stephen’s murder, compel her to confront the deception she had lived with for so long. In this process she learns that she alone had been oblivious to Stephen’s true identity. Dido declares, for instance, that: ‘Je pensais: elle ne peut pas ne pas savoir. Alors, elle accepte ? Est-ce qu’on peut accepter pareille chose?’ (280). The pain that Rosélie finds most difficult is not the fact that Stephen was gay, but the realisation that she had lived with him for so long in ignorance.

Rosélie’s interrogation of Stephen’s murder opens the way for a discussion of memory. Although Rosélie believes that she alone was not aware of Stephen’s true nature, her self-interrogation regarding Stephen proves that the answers were already buried in her memory. Dawn Fulton, for instance, writes that when Rosélie attempted to go back over what she knew about Stephen’s academic life and his friends, the name

\(^{506}\) Barnard 329. Debbie Barnard also discusses this aspect of Rosélie’s relationship with Stephen.

\(^{507}\) Fulton 137.

\(^{508}\) Ibid.
Archie, who Stephen was particularly interested in, ‘surgit’ (231) in her mind: ‘Son nom était demeuré tapi dans les replis de sa mémoire, prêt au moindre appel à resurgir au grand jour’ (231). Fulton further suggests that Rosélie’s innate walk to Archie’s workplace proves that it is her memory of what Stephen had told her before his death that leads her to Archie: ‘Rosélie prit sans s’en apercevoir la direction du Three Penny Opera. A croire que son corps obéissait à des ordres donnés à son insu par son cerveau’ (273). In fact, her arising memory draws us back to the notion of rememory, the information which was buried in her body, brain and memory which she recovers only after Stephen’s murder. This is further proved when Condé writes ‘En ce qui concernait Stephen, au fin fond d’elle-même, dans cette part de soi où jamais la lumière de la vérité ne s’aventure, elle devait s’avouer qu’elle avait toujours su qui il était...Simplement, elle avait choisi d’ignorer l’évidence’ (279). This is further confirmed when Rosélie admits that:


Voilà! C’était dit. (280-281)

As Fulton suggests, the truth that Rosélie was hesitant to confront was not only Stephen’s betrayal but also her own knowledge of this reality. The answers she had for her own questions reflect a knowledge which was already in her possession waiting to be resurrected.

With the discovery of the mystery behind Stephen’s murder, his double life is exposed and his reputation is destroyed. Rosélie realises the twenty years she spent with Stephen are ‘years of disincorporation’. She realises that she has seen the world


510 Ibid.

511 Ibid.

512 Barnard 330.
through Stephen which prevented her from maintaining direct contact with anybody except her servant Dido. Rosélie comes to an understanding of the exploitation and cannibalism of her identity. This understanding helps Rosélie to accept her cultural difference. She turns the trope of cannibalism to ‘a term of subversion, self-empowerment and, most importantly, incorporation [...]’. 513

5.2.2 From demonised other to idealised other: Resistance to and liberation from cannibalism

Whilst Arens examines the role of the cannibal in relation to cultural difference, 514 Peter Hulme investigates it in the context of modern Western identity. 515 Hulme argues that the cannibal, as an embodied representation of the act of consumption, stands as a reference point to signal the boundary of humanity. If one man eats another, it attests to a distinction between eater and eaten. Simultaneously, this difference disappears through the act of consumption. On the one hand Kilgour argues that cannibalism demarcates the qualitative difference between races - the opposition between ‘eater’ and ‘eaten’ – and on the other she proposes that cannibalism also demarcates the ‘dissolution of that difference through the act of incorporation which makes the two one’. 516

Condé, in an interview entitled ‘Maryse Condé: Mordre en retour’, responding to questions on *Histoire de la femme cannibale* says ‘prendre ce qu’il y a de bon et d’important dans l’autre et ainsi, l’intégrer. Le faire sien. L’améliorer’. 517 Condé mentions this as a kind of philosophy she adopts in establishing a creative independence in writing. This quote suggests an integration of the potency of the

513 Ibid 327.
514 Arens 14-16.
other into self in order to improve it and make it one’s own. The quote is equally relevant when applied to the trope of cannibalism. In cultural studies, the trope of the cannibal ‘is best understood as a symbol, as a tool [and] as a weapon’ as it is used to signal or to indicate the appropriation of identity rather than simply being a label to identify as the antithesis of European. Dean MacCannelle affirms this contention when he identifies cannibalism as ‘a way of relating to difference’.

Cannibalism in the political-economic register is the production of social totalities by the literal incorporation of otherness. It deals with human difference in the most direct way, not merely by doing away with it, but by taking it in completely, metabolizing it, transforming it into shit, and eliminating it.

Rosélie’s first decision after the death of Stephen is to paint Fiéla, the cannibal woman who is suspected to have killed her husband and consumed his flesh. Rosélie entitles her painting ‘the cannibal woman’. The painting is the materialisation of an image that is imprinted in Rosélie’s mind, the image of a cannibal. Dawn Fulton believes that ‘the title of Rosélie’s painting supplants an image that already exists in her mind; it is a point of departure masquerading as an endpoint, an invention disguised as discovery’. In other words, through the act of painting she brings into prominence the individuality of the artist which translates into an awareness and acceptance of her blackness. Nicole Simek on the other hand considers Rosélie’s painting as ‘an act of possession’:

She digests Fiéla, producing an artistic figure, an imagined construct. ... To represent - in the sense of portraying another, but also in the broader sense of using language, of appropriating “a given code that [one] has not created,” as Condé puts it - is to cannibalize.


520 MacCannelle 66.

521 Fulton, “A Question,” 100.

522 Simek, “Eating Well,” 120.
Just as Stephen devoured Rosélie to sustain his life, Rosélie in turn now digests Fiéla to sustain hers.

After Stephen’s murder, and in an attempt to overcome the submissive position she was forced to adopt in her relationship with him, Rosélie attempts to establish a sense of her own identity through identification with Fiéla. Fiéla’s alleged murder of her husband Adriaan and Stephen’s murder occur roughly the same time. There are two implications for Rosélie when she begins to take interest in Fiéla’s life. First, she draws parallels between Fiéla’s *literal cannibalism* and her own *cultural cannibalism*. Secondly, through Fiéla Rosélie tries to come to an understanding of Stephen’s murder and untangle the mystery behind his death. It is clear that Rosélie’s attempt to understand the circumstances surrounding Stephen’s death, and to understand her position within the marriage, is part of a project of reclaiming a self identity which might from that point empower her.

In an attempt to appropriate her cannibal identity, Rosélie examines the event of literal cannibalism. In seeing Fiéla’s photo which appeared on the front page of newspapers, Rosélie becomes fascinated by Adriaan’s murder:

> Une femme était accusée d’avoir tué son mari, disparu depuis plusieurs semaines. Au dire de son beau-fils, soupçonnant la nature de la viande rangée dans des sacs en plastique sur les rayons du Frigidaire, elle l’aurait découpé en petits morceaux et congelé. (87)

Rosélie associates herself with Fiéla through her physical resemblance, declaring that: ‘[e]lle a mon âge. Elle n’est pas belle. Elle pourrait être moi’ (88). She then envisions a similarity between Fiéla and herself in terms of their rejection by society. Fiéla is despised because of the nature of the alleged murder, and Rosélie for her blackness. Rosélie realises that both she and Fiéla are pariahs albeit for different reasons. Although they have never met, Rosélie identifies with Fiéla through subjugation and exclusion.

Rosélie believes that Fiéla’s narrative is the key to unlocking Stephen’s hidden life. Through Fiéla, she feels she can understand the relationship she had with her husband and perhaps even the reasons for his murder. Rosélie becomes intrigued by the secrecies shrouding Fiéla and Stephen’s lives. Fiéla’s alleged act of cannibalism,
Stephen’s hidden homosexual life, and his unexplained murder are all left to Rosélie to resolve and by doing so establish an identity. Rosélie has no idea as to why Fiéla may have killed her husband, nor the reasons for Stephen’s murder. Fiéla’s court case presents a timely opportunity to engage with the complexities of Fiéla’s life and, by extension, the life of Stephen.

As the story progresses Rosélie discovers that Stephen’s murder was not a random act by a stranger. The killer was in fact Archie Kronje, one of Stephen’s students with whom he had a sexual relationship. Archie was trying to blackmail Stephen, and when he arrived for their meeting without the required sum of money a violent confrontation ensued, ending in Stephen’s death. When the truth about Stephen’s murder and the secret surrounding his sexuality is finally revealed, it compels Rosélie to reconsider their entire relationship. She wonders how she could have remained unaware of Stephen’s real identity. What is even more painful for Rosélie than Stephen’s death is the realization of her own naivety and the extent to which she had been deceived during their twenty year relationship.

Dawn Fulton makes a link between Stephen’s homosexuality and Fiéla’s cannibalism, arguing that both provoke ‘intense social anxiety’. Caleb Crain also suggests there is an association between cannibalism and homosexuality in terms of their ability to create difference. Condé’s exploration of the themes of cannibalism and homosexuality reveals two of society’s most ‘unspeakable’ taboos. Cannibalism and homosexuality both create an ‘other’ which is deviant. They both speak to the boundary of what it is considered to be human.

With the unravelling of Stephen’s life, Rosélie was forced to acknowledge that she had been manipulated by Stephen and denied the opportunity to establish relationships with others for fear she would learn of his infidelity. Apart from Dido Rosélie’s

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523 Ibid 136.


525 Ibid.
imagined friendship with Fiéla is the first relationship she develops with another person. It is only through Fiéla that she begins to harness a sense of self empowerment. This empowerment derives from her incorporation of Fiéla. Rosélie compares Fiéla to ‘une autre [elle]-même’. The following quote suggests how this incorporation has made them one:

Fiéla, tu t’es installée dans mes pensées, mes rêves. Pas gênante pour un sou. Discrète comme une autre moi-même. Tu te caches derrière mes actions, invisible, pareille à la doublure de soie d’un vêtement. Tu as dû être comme moi, une enfant solitaire, une adolescente taciturne. (97)

This simile is made explicit when Rosélie further identifies Fiéla as her ‘doublure de soie,’ a silk lining which is inside a garment. Fiéla inhabits Rosélie and is invisible just like a silk lining. Mireille Rosello suggests that ‘soie’ (silk) in French sounds like ‘soi’ (self). These homonyms allude to ‘une autre moi-même’. Rosello further suggests that the word ‘doublure’ is also used for a ‘body double’. According to Rosello, this comparison affirms the inextricably interwoven relationship between Rosélie and Fiéla: ‘[this] comparison seriously complicates the relationship between what is inside and what is outside, who the real performer is (the name on the poster) and who is doing the acting, who is the real body and who the shadow’. This assertion is evident when Rosélie, standing before her painting of Fiéla, asks:

Fiéla, est-ce toi? Est-ce moi? Nos deux figures se confondent. (311)

As Maggie Kilgour suggests, Rosélie’s incorporation of Fiéla dissolves the difference between ‘eater’ and ‘eaten’. Rosélie’s first attempt at painting after Stephen’s death produces a work she calls Cannibal woman (311). When Stephen was still alive she was unable to name her own paintings; it was a task which had always to be done in

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526 Rosello, “Post-cannibalism,” 47.
527 Ibid.
528 Ibid.
529 Ibid.
530 Kilgour, From Communion 7.
consultation with Stephen. Being able to name her painting for the first time allows Rosélie a sense of relief and freedom. The painting seals their incorporation. The power she gains from Fiéla and the release from Stephen’s oppression allow her to no longer identify herself as the marginalised other because of the blackness of the skin but as simply another human being. Instead of seeing herself as the demonised other, an object to be feared, Rosélie begins to see herself as the idealised other of the European. This empowerment also provides her with the courage to overcome her fear of her white neighbours, and enables her to make the decision to stay in Cape Town:

[e]lle ne quitterait pas Le Cap. Souffrance vaut titre. Cette ville, elle l’avait gagnée. Elle l’avait faite sienne en un mouvement inverse de ses ancêtres dépossédés d’Afrique, qui avaient vu surgir, tel un mirage à l’avant des caravelles de Colomb, les îlots où ils feraient germer la canne et le tabac de leur renaissance. (315)

The metaphor of slavery and the reference to Rosélie’s ancestors in the above quote defines Rosélie as a symbol of those African slaves who ‘feraient germer la canne et le tabac de leur renaissance’. By deciding to stay in Cape Town, Rosélie fulfils the wish of her ancestors to remain in Africa. Nicole Simmek suggests that Rosélie’s transformation from ‘dispossession, servitude, and forced migration to ownership, freedom and choice’ proves that Africa is not ‘her own’ but she has ‘made’ it so.533 Thus, Rosélie’s acceptance of cannibalism and decision to stay in Cape Town depicts a resistance to slavery.

531 Kilgour, “The function,” 244.
532 Ibid.
533 Simmek, “Eating Well,” 118.
5.3 L’Âme prêtée aux oiseaux

Pineau’s *L’Âme prêtée aux oiseaux* is set in Guadeloupe, France and America. The novel focuses on two main interracial relationships; Jenny and George Mac Dowell and Lila and Henry. In this section I use Frantz Fanon’s seminal Antillean text *Peau noire, masques blancs*, which examines the continuing effects of French colonisation in the post departmentalisation Caribbean, in the analysis of these two interracial relationships. Of most significance are Fanon’s discussions concerning issues of black consciousness, the inferiority complex of black people in relation to the white other, and concepts of modernity and tradition.

*Peau noire, masques blancs* is an examination of constructions of blackness and whiteness in racialized Caribbean society. It also takes into account how Caribbean men and women perceive their acceptance or rejection in French society. Fanon points out that there are resonances between the interracial union and the hierarchical relationship between coloniser and colonised. Fanon’s work also presents the notion of the inferiority complex which he argues stems from being black in metropolitan France, and from the effort needed to integrate into an often unwelcoming French society. Through an examination of white privilege, Fanon describes the black Caribbean’s desire to ‘become white’; a phenomenon which Fanon identifies as the lactification complex. *Peau noire, masques blancs* contains two chapters on interracial marriage; the first is entitled ‘La femme de couleur et le Blanc’ and the other is entitled ‘L’homme de couleur et la Blanche’. I will refer to these two chapters in particular in my analysis of the interracial relationships in *L’Âme prêtée aux oiseaux*.

Frantz Fanon has variously been described as ‘Africa’s philosopher king,’ ‘a Sartrean, a Marxist, a Hegelian, a Lacanian, a negritudist, a socialist, a Pan-Africanist [and] a founder of postcolonialism’. Nevertheless, Fanon’s ideas on black consciousness have been challenged by many critics. For instance, Homi Bhabha believes that the title *Peau noire, masques blancs* points to a ‘grotesque mimicry or doubling that

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535 Gibson 11.
threatens to split the soul and whole undifferentiated skin of the ego’. Christopher Miller further argues that Fanon is a political authoritarian who has no concern for ethnic differences. In addition, Marie-Aimée Helie Lucas argues that Fanon disregards the extent of change that takes place in gender relations; whilst Marvet Hatem contends that Fanon’s ideas are conservative and as a consequence sustain tradition.

However, critics such as Lewis R. Gordon, Peter Geismar and Nigel C. Gibson do not consider Fanon to be ‘a glorifier of violence,’ but as someone who has ‘recognised the psychological and symbolic importance of the anticolonial violence in the context of the exponential imbalance of colonial violence...’. Geismar believes that relegating Fanon’s ideas of black consciousness and racism to symptoms of depression, or simply as a figment of his imagination, detracts from Fanon’s real purpose. Gibson further argues that Fanon’s work is not simply an examination of the division between black and white, but rather provides a means to understand the ‘social relations and theories of the time’. I employ Fanon’s theories of European racism and African decolonisation to investigate Pineau’s presentation of interracial relationships. I will examine the colonial dichotomies of master-slave and coloniser-colonised as they manifest in the relationship between George (the white master at the Hamilton’s


540 Gibson, Fanon: The Postcolonial Imagination 1-2.


542 Gibson 16.
Gardens plantation in the British West Indies) and his cook Jenny, and their son Henry and his French partner Lila.

5.3.1 Racial Gaze: Coloured woman with white man

As the title indicates, Fanon’s work is a study of racial identity in the colonial and postcolonial eras in the Caribbean. Fanon investigates the condition of black people living in postcolonial Caribbean society and advocates the need for them to liberate their still colonised minds in order to psychologically escape the stranglehold of colonialism. Fanon points out that:

... en faisant appel à l’humanité, au sentiment de la dignité, à l’amour, à la charité, il nous serait facile de prouver ou de faire admettre que le Noir est l’égal du Blanc. Mais notre but est tout autre: ce que nous voulons, c’est aider le Noir à se libérer de l’arsenal complexuel qui a germé au sein de la situation coloniale.  

My study also adopts a sociological and psychological approach to examine how black identity has been shaped by the trauma of colonisation. Like Fanon, I acknowledge that the exclusionary and disciplining effects of colonisation transcend the abolition of slavery and still permeate the Caribbean society generating dysfunctionality. It is at the intersection of oppression and resistance in the black experience that I examine the relationship between woman of colour and white man in *L’Âme prêtée aux oiseaux*.

*L’Âme prêtée aux oiseaux* is set in 1998 when the colonial system of slavery had been officially abolished in the Caribbean for over 150 years. Pineau tells the stories of Africans whose bodies and psyches remain enslaved by colonial practices. Paradoxically Pineau’s depiction of Jenny as a consenting partner in her sexual relationship with George, contradicts the image of slave women who were often the victims of rape. Jenny’s assent disrupts the common recognition of the relationship between black women and white men through rape. George and Jenny’s love for each other is the antithesis of the relationship between a white master and a black slave framed through sexual violence. Jenny’s desire for George reflects Fanon’s assertion that ‘[femme de couleur] penseront «à une nuit merveilleuse, à un amant merveilleux,

543 Fanon, *Peau noire* 44.
un Blanc’. Furthermore, Françoise Lionnet also suggests that this willingness implies a rejection of black men. Clarisse Zimra goes even further to argue that this constitutes ‘a conspiracy against the black man’ and by extension, a betrayal of the entire black race.

Peggy, the elderly cook at Hamilton’s Gardens warns Jenny of the impossibility of a successful relationship between ‘black with white’. This again hints at the psychology of black people who are unable to accept a genuine relationship between a white man and a black woman. The colonial history of slavery has conditioned them to think of rape as being the only possible form of sexual relationship between a white man and a black woman. Peggy believes that a successful union can exist only between partners of the same race: ‘Les Nègres avec les Nègres, les Blancs avec les Blancs et la terre continuera de tourner rond...’ (43). Peggy recognises that the colonisers consider the colonised as their property, to use and dispose of them at will: ‘Ils savent qu’ordonner, ces gens-là...Ils veulent la sueur de ton front et aussi ton front pour qu’ils y marquent que tu es leur propriété...’ (33). Jenny’s pregnancy and the prospect of having a mulatto child brings with it the spectre of disgrace within the black community. As a result Peggy convinces Michael, the ostler of Hamilton’s Gardens to marry Jenny. Peggy’s attempt to hide the identity of Henry’s biological father illustrates the way that the black community condemns mulatto children as ‘batards des blancs’.

Whilst Fanon emphasises the need of the black man to emancipate his mind from the experience of slavery, he himself dismisses the possibility of a genuine relationship between a white man and a black woman. For instance, Fanon writes:

[l]e Blanc étant le maître, et plus simplement le mâle, peut se payer le luxe de coucher avec beaucoup de femmes. ...Aux colonies en effet, sans qu’il y ait mariage ou

544 Fanon, Peau noire 59.


In fact, Fanon is convinced that the number of métis attests to the sexual privileges that the white men had over black women. However, Fanon’s view is disputed by the literary critic of Continental and Caribbean literature Clarisse Zimra who argues that ‘relations between coloured women and men of any colour remain those between masters and slaves’ (emphasis added).\(^{548}\)

Despite either of these contentions, Pineau’s story revolves around the romantic relationship between George and Jenny. Jenny and George’s first sexual encounter becomes the fulfilment of their desire for each other: ‘Ils avaient surtout besoin d’être l’un dans l’autre. Au plus profond. Envie de mélanger leurs salives, leurs bras, leurs jambes, leurs sangs...’ (39). However, George’s comment made after their love-making hints at the validity of Fanon’s argument that one day coloured women will also come to the recognition that ‘white men do not marry black women,’\(^{549}\) concerning the fleeting nature of interracial relationships: ‘Oh! Comme s’il était arrivé à destination’ (40). Conscious of the racist attitude towards interracial marriage, George does not have the courage to marry Jenny. Instead, and whilst Jenny is pregnant with George’s son, he marries Kathleen, a white woman of his own status. Peggy summarises the attitude of white men towards black women when she says: ‘Tu crois qu’il t’aime, George Mac Dowell. Tu crois qu’un Mac Dowell peut s’écarter de son rang pour une petite Nègresse. T’es rien d’autre qu’un de ses vices’ (48). Peggy points out that white men are concerned with social status, and will rarely be prepared to relinquish it for a black woman. George, the son of a rich planter, is also conscious of his position in plantation society, believing he should be seen as ‘un homme irascible, tributaire de cet autre lui-même qu’il devait incarner sous le regard des Blancs de l’île’ (126).

\(^{547}\) Fanon, *Peau noire* 37.

\(^{548}\) Zimra, “*Patterns,*” 105.

\(^{549}\) Ibid 36.
One aspect of Pineau’s representation of the relationship between Jenny and George reflects Fanon’s depiction of relations of power between white men and coloured women. However, through the depiction of a love relationship between a white man and a black woman, Pineau deconstructs Fanon’s argument that sexual relationships between black women and white men were always defined through an unequal relationship of power. By portraying African Caribbeans whose minds are still conditioned by the conceptualisation of a strict boundary between coloniser and colonised, self and other, which inscribes the colonised into the discourse of colonialism, Pineau shows how modern day black society is governed by what Fanon has called ‘the colonial mind’.

5.3.2 Coloured man with white woman

Pineau’s depiction of Jenny and George’s illegitimate son Henry’s relationship with Lila in L’Âme prêtée aux oiseaux in some ways echoes Fanon’s ideas about black men’s relationships with white women. In ‘L’homme de couleur et la Blanche’ and ‘Le Nègre et la psychopathologie’, Fanon discusses the psychosexuality of white women and the power relationship that exists between white women and black men. Fanon asserts that the power relationship between black men and white women is immensely different from that of black women and white men. Fanon argues that the black man’s sexual supremacy is surpassed by the white woman’s racial supremacy.

In contemporary times, one could argue that the dominance of whiteness has given way to a greater acceptance of blackness. However, Caribbean Francophone writers have persisted to include the theme of white dominance in their novels. Fanon’s analysis is limited to a discussion of the motivation of black women who desire white men. Pineau, however, extends Fanon’s analysis by depicting the love of a black man for a white woman. If, as Fanon indicates, the woman of colour desires the achievement of white power through her white lover, does the black man similarly attempt to access power by being with a white woman?

L’Âme prêtée aux oiseaux is the story of Henry, a young métis man who struggles to come to peace with his racial identity. Henry serves in the French army during World
War II. The day after the liberation of France Henry meets an elegant Parisian woman named Lila. Fanon claims that, whilst the relationship between white men and black women is characterised by sexual violence, the relationship between a white woman and black man is characterised by mutual consent to participate in the sexual act. When a white woman enters into a relationship with a black man there is often an overtly romantic aspect to that relationship. As Fanon writes ‘une Blanche qui accepte un Noir, cela prend automatiquement un aspect romantique. Il y a don et non pas viol’.  
This is clear when Henry says ‘Lila était la première à lui avoir donné son corps sans paiement’ (124).

Joel Kovel, in *White Racism: A Psychohistory* (1970) suggests that ‘a mountain of evidence has been accumulated to document the basically sexualized nature of racist psychology’. Fanon’s representation of the sexualized and ‘primitive’ black man has been questioned by Irene L. Gendzier on the basis that this insinuates a form of inferiority. Thus, ‘sexuality in racism is not an isolated phenomenon but is most intimately connected with issues of power and dominance’. Roger Bastide also contends that Fanon writes from a ‘psychopathological standpoint’.

In the chapter entitled ‘L’Homme de couleur et la Blanche,’ Fanon discusses the black man’s desire to access white privilege through a white woman. He desires to make love to a white woman: ‘[...] le souci le plus constant de[s] [Antillais] qui arrivaient en France était de coucher avec une Blanche’ (78) because it proves to the black man that he is worthy of white love: ‘En m’aimant [la Blanche] me prouve que je suis digne d’un amour blanc. On m’aime comme un blanc. [Donc] Je suis un Blanc’ (71). The black man accepts whiteness as *beautiful* and blackness as ugliness. Fanon further declares in ‘Le Nègre et la psychopathologie’ that the black Caribbean person associates blackness

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550 Fanon, Peau noire 37.
553 Kovel 68.
554 Cited in Kovel 68.
with ugliness: ‘[d]ans l’inconscient collectif, noir = laid, péché, ténèbres, immoral [...]’. If the black Caribbean can experience ‘la pureté de [sa] conscience et la blancheur de [son] âme’, he then convinces himself that he is not a Negro. Although he is externally black, internally he is white. Thus, Fanon associates the blackness with the body and whiteness with the mind. According to Fanon, if whiteness is more psychological than physical, that means that whiteness can be achieved by anyone through the acceptance by the white other.

After the first sexual encounter between Henry and Lila he utters ‘God! une Parisienne! Une petite brune au nom de fleur, ça c’est le chic!...Une petite poupée blanche avec de grands yeux bleus, pareils à ceux de son père, George Mac Dowell’ (124). This indicates Henry’s acceptance of whiteness as beautiful. The union with Lila not only reminds him of his affair with a white Parisian woman, but also of the fact that he was fathered by a white man. Henry’s acceptance by Lila gives him access to the white world; something denied him by his father. In an analysis of the psychology of colonial subjects, Fanon underlines two types of responses by the woman of colour to the white European: ‘D’abord il y a la négresse et la mulâtresse. La première n’a qu’une possibilité et un souci : blanchir. La deuxième non seulement veut blanchir, mais éviter de régresser.’

Fanon’s assertion of black woman’s desire to whiten the skin is equally applicable to black men. Pineau, through Henry gives us an image of a modern Caribbean man who is still colonised in mind in his desire to achieve white values. Henry’s proposal of marriage to Lila constitutes an attempt to enter into the white world. Furthermore, according to Fanon, the happiness he feels when Lila becomes pregnant stems from his desire to provide evidence of his acceptance in white society, which was once denied by his father George. This proves that the black man, wishes to be desired by the white other and has children with the white other in an attempt to experience a...
form of ‘inner whiteness’. It also shows that as a mulatto man, Henry desires ‘not only to turn white but also to avoid slipping back’.

Fanon’s suggestion of the dominance of the black man as sexually powerful and the dominance of white woman because of her skin colour is also visible in the relationship between Henry and Lila. Henry and Lila meet in a pub in Paris and their relationship starts at a point when they both are drunk. The day after their first sexual encounter, Lila regrets the fact that she has had sex with a Negro, and fully expects to hear nothing more from him: ‘[e]lle s’était glissée dans son lit avec l’espoir qu’il se lève et disparaîsse de sa vie’ (120). However, Lila likes being made love to by Henry and continues to use him to fulfil her sexual desires. Pineau alternatively presents Lila’s hatred towards Black and Henry’s appreciation of White. Through the white other, the black man, as much as the black woman searches for a self-image between inner whiteness and external blackness. Their desire for the white other automatically marks them as negrophobic. Furthermore, Lila’s hatred towards Henry when she becomes pregnant to him points to Fanon’s explanations of the psychosexuality of white women. As Fanon suggests, Henry’s potential position of dominance by sex is not equalized but outweighed by Lila’s position of dominance due to her race. Fanon only says that the ‘white men do not marry black women’. However, it is also applicable to white women who desire black men for their sexual potentiality and not for marriage. From Lila’s viewpoint, being married to a black man was something that she never before imagined: ‘Elle n’arrivait pas à trouver une solution à cette question de mariage. Malgré les illusions que nourissait Henry sur la fin des tristes histoires entre Noirs et Blancs, Lila ne s’imaginait pas avec un Noir’ (135). Lila sets an example of white women who feel uncomfortable with the presence of Black:

parce que au bout d’un moment, nous les Françaises, on a été dégrisées. Les Noirs sont redevenus des Noirs, aux yeux des Blancs. Et l’épopée des sauveurs a été remisée dans l’oubli. On continuait à manger dehors et à traîner dans les bars. Mais quand Henry s’habillait pas en uniforme, on avait droit à des réflexions désagréables sur les Blanches qui paraissaient avec des négros. J’étais mal à l’aise. Je refusais qu’il me tienne par le bras et m’embrasse dans la rue. (148)

In this way Henry feels the pain of rejection both by Lila and by France: ‘lorsque ni Paris ni Lila ne voulaient plus de lui...’ (22). With his unsuccessful attempt to achieve
whiteness, he begins to understand and accept his black identity and moves to the United States with James-Lee.

5.4 Theorising métis identity

Pineau paves the way for a discussion of métissage through the presentation of two mulatto children in L’Âme prêtée aux oiseaux. They are Henry and his son James-Lee. Henry is the illegitimate child born to black mother Jenny and the white father George. Mulatto Henry also has an illegitimate child named James-Lee with his French partner Lila. According to the colour gradation which existed in the Caribbean, James-Lee is a câpre born to a white mother and a mulatto father. However, in the following analysis I use the general term mulatto to refer to both mulatto Henry and his câpre son James-Lee.

Métissage is an inevitable phenomenon in the mixing of different cultures and races, during colonisation. The postcolonial critic Françoise Vergès defines métissage as ‘a term that spoke of the cultural and social matrix of diversity born of colonization and assimilation into the colonial project. Métissage was a site of dispute for the term contained at heart an ambiguity and ambivalence...’. The identity of métis is ambiguous. He is neither white nor black. His position is slightly better than a slave. Cécile Accilien aligns with Vergès in that she uses the term métissage to refer to the blending of different races, nationalities, religions and cultures. Françoise Lionnet makes a distinct remark regarding the complex identity of métis when she writes:

In English ... there is no real equivalent for the word métis and we could infer that for all English-speaking peoples the very concept of race is different from that of the French, Spanish or Portuguese speakers. In deed, in the United States, even an “octoroon” is technically supposed to be a “nonwhite,” and those who “look” white but have (some) black “blood” were said to be able to “pass” for white. What does this tell us about the social construction of “race” within different linguistic contexts? That language, in


559 Accilien 114.
effect, can create reality, since certain categories, such as créole and métis, are not part of any visible racial difference for the average English speaker.  

During colonisation, the métis or métisse was considered solid proof of colonial desire and dominance. They were born out of violence experienced by the black woman at the hands of the white colonial master. Métissage is ‘lié à la rencontre coloniale et à la découverte du corps de l’Autre. Les enjeux sont d’une acuité particulière lorsqu’il s’agit de la rencontre Afrique/Europe’. In Mythologie du métissage Roger Toumson suggests that métissage was created to maintain boundaries in the colonial plantation economy of the Caribbean:

C’est au sein d’une structure familiale racialisée, dans le cadre de la société esclavagiste d’habitation et de plantation que le Métis fait son apparition. Né d’une faute charnelle, sous le signe d’une fatalité généalogique, le Métis est prédestiné à réincarner l’archétype du réprouvé primordial.

As the white other refuses to marry the black other, the children born of mixed race unions evoke a sense of bâtardise, of illegitimacy. The black man and the woman who desire the white other is automatically labelled as negrophobic and is criticised in Caribbean society.

Métissage remains a dominant and a recurrent theme in the postcolonial Caribbean literature. Postcolonial Caribbean literature depicts métis as a complex character as a result of his hybrid origin. Lionnet explains métissage as ‘a model of intertextuality and hybridisation in which the warp and wool of the social fabric, the racial elements of a given group, and the traditions of literary history are interwoven, or juxtaposed,

60 Lionnet, Autobiographical Voices 14.


and mirror each other’. Postcolonial Caribbean literature illustrates the character of *métis* as both positive and negative. Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant make the following statement regarding *métis* children as inspiration of literature:


On the other hand, Robert Knox suggests that the *métis* were ‘‘monstruous’’ because they violated the law of species and lived in an unstable, confused, contradictory identity, they seemed incapable of sustaining their autonomous existence beyond two or three generations whilst in modern times ‘‘all the crossed races [are considered] more robust’’. However, *L’Âme prêtée aux oiseaux* reveals the ambiguity and alienation of *métis* perceived by both white and black; black who considered *métis* as ‘batârds des blancs’ and white parents who could not accept their illegitimate children.

In *Woman-Nation-State*, a study of women and nationalism, Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias observe that women are allowed to take part in national processes in two primary ways; their choice of the partner and the ability to produce children. Their responsibility is to make children for the community and not to have sex outside their community. When a black woman breaches this rule, the child born from that relationship marks the boundary between two groups of people; black and white/African and European. The mulato child becomes the symbol of difference. Thus, Fanon does not regard the black man who has sex with a white woman as violating the

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564 Lionnet 74.
565 Chamoiseau and Confiant 22-23.
566 Cited in Accilien 50.
567 Ibid 36.
568 Ibid 9.
569 Ibid.
boundary, but on the contrary, he considers the black woman who has sex with a
white man to be violating this taboo.

In *L’Âme prêtée aux oiseaux*, Peggy advises Jenny to hide the identity of Henry’s father
because she knows that Jenny has violated the rule of the black community. In fact,
Henry is made to believe that he is the son of Michael, the ostler who killed himself.
The following quotation reflects a society which does not approve of mixed race
relationships:

> [Peggy] souhaitait pas que tu l’apprennes. Elle répétait sans cesse: ‘Les Blancs avec les
Blancs. Les Nègres avec les Nègres et la terre continuera de tourner rond.’ Elle jurait que
c’était contre la nature de s’aimer entre gens de couleurs et de conditions différentes. Et
que c’était mieux pour toi d’avoir un père mort plutôt qu’un père blanc. (134)

As black workers at Hamilton’s Gardens, both women are aware of the dangers of
exposing the relationship between Jenny and George and the resulting child. To
illustrate this Peggy relates the story of two lovers formerly of Hamilton’s Gardens,
Nanny and Percy, who were punished by George’s father, James Mac Dowell, for being
in love. Representing the colonial master, he sells Percy as a slave to one of his distant
relatives, whilst keeping Nanny as his sex slave. When Percy and Nanny try to escape,
James Mac Dowell sentences both of them to death. Percy is hanged, whilst Nanny is
poisoned. This represents the colonial power executed over the slaves in plantations.
The colonial masters had the right to manipulate or to punish them as they saw fit.
This was another reason for Jenny to hide the identity of Henry’s father.

At the age of fifteen Henry realises that he has been fathered by his mother’s white
master George. Henry expresses his anger by acting like ‘un chien fou’ (136). He
destroy the plantation aviary and releases its birds. The release of birds signals
metaphorically the confinement of the black servants at Hamilton’s Gardens. The black
servants are deprived of their rights to free themselves from the authority of their
white masters. In Henry’s mind the birds symbolise the existence of Nanny, Percy,
Jenny, Michael and all the other black servants who were victims of white colonial
supremacy:

> Henry était resté longtemps à les observer, partagé entre l’espoir d’entendre l’un d’eux
avouer qu’il cachait bien sous ses plumes une âme prêtée par Dieu, et l’impérieuse
tentation de les libérer pour rendre justice à Nanny et Percy, Jenny et Michael et les Nègres réduits en esclavage qui n’avaient pas eu le droit d’être autre chose que des choses entre les mains des Blancs à Hamilton’s Gardens. (140)

Through Henry’s eyes, the reader also comes to an understanding of the position held by George vis à vis his illegitimate child. Even when Henry is told of the identity of his biological father, he still experiences neglect due to the illegitimacy of his birth: ‘Il est vrai que Henry ne relevait jamais un signe de reconnaissance chez George’ (131). Henry ends up hating his mother for having lied to him about his father, and George for not being able to accept him as his son: ‘[…] plein de fureur contre son père George Mac Dowell et sa manman Jenny. Empli d’horreur à l’idée de ce père blanc surgi au jour de l’enterrement d’ Auntie Peggy’ (212). Later, when Henry reveals his story to Lila, his words are full of sarcasm and hatred: ‘Henry avait ri amer. «Ah! Ah! Ah! Le maître de Hamilton’s Gardens! Pas libre de reconnaître son fils. Pas libre de dire au sir James Henry: Oh! Dad! J’ai un fils qui dort là-bas avec la cuisinière. Faut qu’il vienne à notre table pour chaque repas…»’ (134). This attests to the awkward position that George maintained in the presence of Henry.

This pattern is repeated when Henry’s son, James-Lee is rejected by Lila, his white mother because of his skin colour:

Négro! Sale Négro! Tu es content! hurlait-elle. Tu as eu ce que tu voulais, hein! Ben moi j’en veux pas de ce marmot! Tu te le garderas pour toi… Et sitôt que c’est fini, tu disparais de ma vie! Je veux plus te voir, t’es sourd ou quoi ! Tu pars, toi et ton gosse ! Allez! Du balai! (211)

Lila, who never imagined she would ever make love to a black man, could not possibly accept her child. It is 1946, ‘année noire’(210), a society constructed of ‘blackness’ and ‘whiteness’. Lila knew that she could not bring up a mulatto child in such a rigidly hierarchical and racialized society. The terrifying power of the white gaze, including that of her parents, made Lila aware that she would only be humiliated for marrying a Negro and having a mulatto son. Lila’s conversation with Sybille demonstrates the reasons why she had to give up her mulatto child and his Negro father:

Elle avait parlé des problèmes que susciterait la naissance d’un enfant métis dans ce monde où les Noirs et les Blancs s’étaient toujours haïs. Elle avait ri et sangloté dans le même temps et l’avait giflé pour qu’il se pose dans la réalité des choses. Elle avait prétendu la déception de ses parents de la Sarthe qui, selon elle, n’auraient jamais
accepté de tendre la main à leur beau-fils nègre. N’auraient jamais serré dans leurs bras cet enfant café au lait qu’elle aurait eu honte de présenter comme sorti de sa chair. (210)

Consequently, she remains in her room until she delivers what she calls the ‘créature monstrueuse’ (211). However, Lila’s initial inclination was to terminate her pregnancy. One can assume Lila’s thought to end her pregnancy was an effort to protect herself as well as the unborn child from the racist society. She may not have wanted the child to be marked by the black features which would lead him to suffer in a similar manner to his father.

Both George and Lila set examples of white parents who consider a union with the black other and having illegitimate mulatto children as humiliation. Henry and James-Lee portray the complexity of métissage in the Caribbbean; its historical context, the racial issues that surrounds the Caribbean history and their unsuccessful attempt to assimilate to Frenchness. Pineau’s portrayal of Henry and James-Lee affirms Roger Toumson’s precision that ‘les traits distinctifs qui structurent la subjectivité métisse: mixité, dualité, duplicité sont représentés dans la littérature antillaise de la première moitié du XIXe siècle’. 570

5.5 Conclusion

The trans-Atlantic slave trade that flourished between the sixteenth and the nineteenth centuries had a profound impact not only on the relationships between black and black but also between black and white. Slavery conditioned the attitudes of both white enslaver and black enslaved which ultimately shaped their relationship with each other. The Caribbean novel attests to the racial traumas of the past that haunt the modern day relationships between black and white. Talcott Parsons mentions:

the primary historic origin of the modern color problem lies in the relation of Europeans to African slavery, as that became established along the whole Atlantic coast of the Americas from the Southern North American Colonies to Southern Brazil, very much including the Caribbean area. 571

570 Toumson 94.

It is accurate to stress that there is a preoccupation of colour in both novels. The characters of both Condé and Pineau have been oppressed by virtue of their skin colour. Both Condé and Pineau believe that the skin colour creates a distinction between the dominant and the dominated, and exploiter and exploited. Condé, for example, writes ‘La blancheur du maître recouvre sa force et sa puissance. Donc, il semble qu’il est fort et puissant parce qu’il est Blanc. Se rapprocher de sa couleur, c’est déjà s’approprier son pouvoir’.\(^{572}\) It is for this reason that the black other prefers the whiteness of the white person. However, white gaze inspires both fear and desire in the black other. For instance, Rosélie, Jenny and Henry fear to see themselves negatively reflected in the eyes of the white other. Although a Black may think he or she can acquire whiteness by being with the white other, the reality is that their blackness becomes intensified. With the white gaze, the black other realises that ‘le Noir n’a plus à être Noir, mais à l’être en face du Blanc...Le Noir n’a pas de résistance ontologique aux yeux du Blanc’.\(^ {573}\) According to Fanon, the black Antillean becomes conscious of how s/he has been traditionally designated as black:

Je promenai sur moi un regard objectif, découvris ma noirceur, mes caractères ethniques-et me défoncèrent le tympan l’anthropophagie, l’arriération mentale, le fétichisme, les tares raciales, les négriers, et surtout, et surtout: ‘Y a bon banania’...Mon corps me revenait étalé, disjoint, rétamé, tout endeuillé dans ce jour blanc d’hiver.\(^ {574}\)

These characters are also resigned to accept and reconcile with their blackness. For instance, Rosélie appropriates her cannibal identity which was used to show differences between colonisers and the colonised. Instead of seeing her blackness as a fact to fear and trying to rely on Stephen to hide it, she grows to be a painter. When Henry realises that he is not accepted by Lila because of his black skin, he accepts his blackness and reconciles with it by getting married to Lana, a black woman he meets in the United States. Both Henry and Rosélies’s assertion of themselves as black eventually leads them towards liberation. I suggest that this individual liberation of Henry and Rosélie, is symbolic of the collective liberation of a large number of the Caribbean


\(^{573}\) Fanon, *Peau noire* 88-89.

\(^{574}\) Ibid 90-91.
population from their efforts to seek recognition and belonging to the white world. It is only then that an adequate and true self-liberation can be foreseen in the context of the Caribbean. As Pineau suggests the trauma of past slavery runs through generations. Even today, they ‘are haunted by that violence because [their] ancestors were denied their humanity, subjects and objects of commerce, exiled, deported, raped, assassinated, and that was only 150 years ago’.  

575 Veldwachter 183.
Conclusion

Condé and Pineau, in their novels demonstrate that slavery has created a fractured sense of both individual and collective identity in the French Caribbean. Although slavery was abolished in 1848, the Francophone Caribbean literature since then has continued to make reference to its destructive legacies. The slave system generated traumatic effects which impacted on the family. Adulterous men, incestuous fathers, problematic relationships between mothers and daughters, difficulties faced within interracial marriages, all find their antecedents in slavery and have contributed to the dysfunctional family. This thesis contends that contemporary dysfunctional family patterns in French Caribbean society date back to their collective experience of slavery.

The overarching argument of this thesis is that Maryse Condé and Gisèle Pineau capture in their novels the way in which trauma stemming from slavery plays out in the family unit and, in particular, in women across generations. Colonialism has been the catalyst for the prevalence of the dysfunctional family in the Caribbean. Focusing on theories of trauma by psychoanalysts such as Sigmund Freud and Cathy Caruth, the thesis examined the way that Condé’s and Pineau’s protagonists dealt with history, violence, familial relationships and the ambivalence surrounding their own authentic sense of self identity. The way in which dysfunctionality was transmitted to subsequent generations within the one family attests to the transgenerational nature of trauma. The protagonists revisit the initial site of trauma, and excavate the memories of elders, particularly grandmothers, to facilitate an acquisition of knowledge of their past. This knowledge is seminal in reconstructing a coherent narrative of their traumatic past which enables the protagonists to claim a sense of self identity and belonging. In so doing, they come to the recognition that they are no longer victims but survivors of trauma. Their awareness of the events which have conditioned their life circumstances provides a resolution which interrupts the cycle of dysfunctionality.
In this study I have presented an analysis of ten novels, all of which illustrate the unique experiences of different generations of postcolonial women in the Caribbean. I have shown that these women share common experiences in ethnically diverse and patriarchal Caribbean societies. By examining these novels, I have demonstrated themes that include exile, alienation, displacement, racism, migration and métissage, themes that are intrinsic to postcolonial Caribbean society and the Caribbean diaspora. Pineau exposes men’s power over women in executing physical, psychological, sexual and emotional abuse; regardless of whether these men are black or white, coloniser or colonised. Although Condé primarily depicts women as victims, she also portrays female sexuality as a destructive force with the capacity to manipulate and even exploit men. However, both authors draw their stories to a conclusion when the protagonist is ultimately able to observe and understand the qualities of their own existence and relate these to past experiences. Through apperception, both Condé and Pineau empower their protagonists to reconcile with the past which has, until that point, been a source of personal pain. I agree with Arlene Keizer, who refers to this kind of novel as a ‘contemporary narrative of slavery’.  

As novels of memory and survival they provide fertile material to examine trauma as a transgenerational phenomenon. The different generations that Condé and Pineau present in their novels all reflect symptoms of either physical, psychological or cultural trauma or a combination of these. For instance, Nina in Condé’s Desirada, is raped and finds herself unable to love the child who is conceived from this sexual assault. This emotional void, the lack of communication and affection between Nina and her daughter continue to haunt the life of the daughter, turning her into an almost completely silent wife and mother in later life. Claude, in La Vie Scélérâte, is a victim of cultural trauma which is defined by her feelings of identity loss.

This study has also examined issues pertaining to the diversity of maternal figures in the Caribbean. For instance, through an analysis of L’Exil selon Julia and L’Espérance-

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Conclusion

I have shown Pineau’s depiction of different mother figures, including biological, foster, adopted, positive, negative, at home and overseas mothers and their experience of patriarchal oppression which has conditioned their relationships with their daughters. The mother figures which appear in both Condé’s and Pineau’s work challenge the stereotype of the submissive, subordinated woman in that they are represented as empowered figures that refuse to conform to the expectations of postcolonial, patriarchal societies.

In relation to Condé’s *Moi, Tituba* and Pineau’s *Chair Piment* Loichot suggests that their novels linger on ‘the violence of family construction, genealogy, and sexuality’. However, the families depicted in their novels escape the plantation power over them. Both authors present their protagonists as ‘active observers, interpreters, and participants of cultural globalisation’. Furthermore, the beginnings and endings of Condé’s and Pineau’s narratives are precarious. On a structural level, they present complicated genealogical patterns that contribute to this sense of precariousness. This instability of narrative seems to reflect the characters’ fractured sense of self. The inability to remember or make sense of their past is the source of their fragile identity. As a result, the characters have an unsatisfactory relationship to themselves and to others.

However, Condé’s and Pineau’s characters are consistently imbued with hope and optimism. The hopefulness of the characters is promising, it expresses why readers - despite the overwhelmingly painful traumas the novels depict - do not turn away in horror but reach for more. For instance, *L’Espérance-macadam*, in the characters of Eliette and Angela, illustrates the possibility of hope to rebuild one’s life which has been devastated by sexual violence. Pineau emphasises the possibility of rebirth and regeneration when she says that ‘[w]hat gave me comfort in the idea that I could

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577 Loichot 198.

578 Ibid.

579 McCusker, *Patrick Chamoiseau* 22.
incorporate the violence of nature into my story was that some time later nature
reclaimed her rights, the leaves grew on the tree branches once more, people planted
again, cleaned up .... It is impossible to make the internal wound disappear, but we can
stand up again’. Throughout the journey of forgetting repressed trauma, to its
retrieval, Eliette not only reconstitutes herself but provides hope for another survivor
of incest. The journey that the protagonists undertake to retrieve their trauma can be
physical or emotional. For instance, Mina in Chair Piment enacts a physical return to
her site of trauma in Guadeloupe; whilst Condé in Victoire, les saveurs et les mots
writes the life story of her grandmother. In both cases, it is an attempt to rebuild their
life. The cultivation of hope in these characters insinuates hope for the Caribbean
people to constitute a collective identity which has been long veiled by the painful
legacies of slavery, and become empowered.

Memory plays a significant role in facilitating this kind of reconciliation with the past.
The memories of their grandmothers, mothers and others around the protagonists
help them to come to an understanding of the ‘not knowing’ in their life. It is memory
which makes sense of their trauma caused by separation from home, rape and incest,
the emotional gulf between mother and daughter - traumas imposed by four centuries
of slavery and colonisation. For instance, the narratives of Reynalda, Ludovic and Nina
in Desirada, narratives of Hakim and Dr Pinceau in Célanire cou-coupé, and narratives
of Nana Salibour and other women in the village in Chair Piment are all examples of
reclaimed memory which in turn assists the protagonists in their search for truth. The
diversity of these narratives, the contradictions and also dissimulation illustrates the
multiplicity of truths which are evident in their stories. These multiple truths give rise
to multiple identities, all of which are equally acceptable within the context of their
varied experiences.

Theories of memory including Marianne Hirsch’s ‘postmemory’ and Nicola King’s
‘rememory’ have been used to investigate these narratives. I have shown how memory
assists in the process of reconstructing the past. For instance, rememory assists Mina

580 Veldwachter 181.
in *Chair Piment* to retrieve the memory of the fire that caused her sister’s death. For Claude in *La Vie Scélérate*, her family members’ memories, particularly those of her grandfather, serve as postmemory allowing her to trace her family lineage. Reading the novels of these two authors as texts of memory, I have demonstrated that remembering the self is not an attempt to fashion a new identity, but a restoration of an authentic cultural identity by piecing together the events of the past. According to Linda Grant:

> The self isn’t a little person inside the brain, it’s a work-in-progress, ‘a perpetually re-created neurobiological state, so continuously and consistently reconstructed that the owner never knows its being remade’. Memory ... is a fabrication, a new reconstruction of the original. And yet out of these unstable foundations we still construct an identity. It’s a miracle. ⁵⁸¹

Even though I have examined the role that memory plays in accessing the past, I have also argued that memory oscillates between remembering and forgetting, and knowing and not knowing, in its attempt to create a stable link between the past and the present. I have turned to psychoanalytic theories of trauma and memory to describe this knowing and not knowing of the self presented in literature. I have argued, through the theories of Sigmund Freud and Cathy Caruth, it is at the intersection of knowing and not knowing that literature and psychoanalysis meet. Condé and Pineau portray Traumatic Disorders - Post Traumatic Disorders and Multiple Personality Disorders - through the characters in their novels. It is evident from my analysis that recent work in the field of postcolonial literature attempts to integrate themes of trauma and memory. I have argued that contemporary critics have used psychoanalytic theories to understand the effects of traumatic events which occurred during colonisation and which have had reverberations in subsequent generations in a postcolonial context.

Compared to many French Caribbean writers such as Patrick Chamoiseau, Edouard Glissant and Raphaël Confiant who are interested in the Caribbean slave past, Condé and Pineau are more interested in the present. Condé is distinctive in her interest in the future rather than the past. Condé affirms that ‘I occupy a place apart in French

Caribbean literature. That means I refuse to explain everything by the past'.\textsuperscript{582} She accepts the overtime change in individuals and societies and the importance to look forward to the future.\textsuperscript{583} Gisèle Pineau occupies a place between Condé’s unwavering gaze for the future and other writers’ captivation in the past. Quite similar to Condé, Pineau also admits that the relationships between men and women and the societies are subjected to change. Yet she frequently refers to the time of slavery as an explanation for the trauma experienced by her characters. For instance, in \textit{L’Espérance-macadam} Pineau refuses to denounce Rosan as a child rapist. Instead, she depicts him as a victim of a complicated childhood and a painful history. ‘Behind Rosan, Angela’s father, there is a whole history. He is responsible for this history, but he is also its victim’.\textsuperscript{584} Pineau is not obsessed by the past but she is not prepared to leave it behind either. Her novels can be perceived in a psychological point of view as dealing openly with past trauma but remaining forever conditioned by it. Although Condé and Pineau dwell heavily on slavery in their writing they accept the need to move beyond slavery. Their stories display the role of memory ‘in making sense of one’s past, carving a place for oneself in the present and unlocking the possibilities of the future’.\textsuperscript{585}

Although Condé’s and Pineau’s work has been the focus of many contemporary literary critics, little recent scholarship has been undertaken on representations of transgenerational trauma. Drawing attention to the problematic place of women, I have made comparisons between representations of transgenerational trauma in the works of Condé and Pineau. My analysis calls for a further appraisal of the profound psychological scars arising from the period of slavery that continue to affect the contemporary family in the French Caribbean. Whilst integrating the study of

\textsuperscript{582} Maryse Condé, interview by Bonnie Thomas, Guadeloupe, 27 June 2001.

\textsuperscript{583} Thomas 155.

\textsuperscript{584} Cited in Thomas 158.

\textsuperscript{585} Thomas 159.
Caribbean Francophone literature into the larger academic understanding of postcolonial societies, this study uses an interdisciplinary approach taking into consideration history, literature and psychology. The intention of this analysis has been to introduce the fragile complexities that surround the relationship between trauma and memory that prevail in the postcolonial Caribbean society. I would also suggest that, if discussions of trauma and memory are so varied in this relatively small field of postcolonial studies, then expanding our views to include other cultures, traditions and political contexts can only increase our understanding of the multifaceted nature of this field of research.
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