UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

# Physicians of the World: Postcolonial Women Writers Theorize Human Rights, Healing, and the World

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in French and Francophone Studies

by

Coralie Seizilles de Mazancourt

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Doctor of Philosophy in French and Francophone Studies

University of California, Los Angeles, 2019

Professor Françoise Lionnet, Chair

"Physicians of the World: Postcolonial Women Writers Theorize Human Rights, Healing, and the World" is an analysis of ideas of the world produced *within* literary writings by postcolonial women authors who set their stories in Haiti, Mauritius, and Saint Helena. This dissertation seeks to carve out a space for an alternative postcolonial optic by engaging with literary critics' growing interest in an expanded notion of the world within literary studies. I argue that Yanick Lahens, Evelyne Trouillot, Edwidge Danticat, Shenaz Patel, and Yvette Christiansë are "physicians of the world" who theorize the world's discontents resulting from the legacy of colonialism. The dissertation develops a hermeneutics of care; a mode of interpretation which teases out the

aesthetic, formal, affective, and epistemological qualities of the texts that participate in discussing the ethics of representation and in articulating human rights. This interpretive framework allows me to show that these authors develop concrete notions of the "world" as an expanding community of ideas and beings with shared values. These writers posit that islands are "island worlds," sites wherein a multiplicity of worlds interact, and sites that serve as a prism by means of which to challenge globalization. The authors overcome writer's block, immigrant guilt, and repressed memories; by focusing on their writings' engagement with both personal and collective national trauma I am able to articulate an approach to literature as a critical site of healing processes. I explore postcolonial healings: the solidarities, communities, and social bonds that repair the fabric of human community and put under tension the "Francophone" label. The authors share sensibilities outside of the framework of a common language, thus providing a context in which I define important forms of multilingual transcolonial agencies, namely, the material and textual practices they choose in order to resist various modes of colonization across time and space.

The dissertation of Coralie Seizilles de Mazancourt is approved.

Lia N. Brozgal

Jennifer A. Sharpe

Sara E. Melzer

Françoise Lionnet, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2019

To my parents, Nathalie and Philippe de Mazancourt

In memoriam, Dominique Bonleu

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**Acknowledgements**

Françoise Lionnet, Lia Brozgal, Sara Melzer, and Jenny Sharpe: for your mentorship and for being my academic muses.

Françoise Lionnet: for your passion, relational thinking, creativity, and immense generosity.

Lia Brozgal: for your kindness, wit, thoroughness, support, and much valued guidance.

Sara Melzer: for your warmth and for your nurturing and process driven approach to writing.

Jenny Sharpe: for your stimulating and formative class and for reading.

Martin Munro: for your expertise and encouragement and for your feedback.

Nanar Khamo, Katy Chaffee, Natalia Konstantinovskaia, Patricia Wiley, Tzu-Chin Chen, Shanti Liverpool, Anne Le, Lizzie Collins, Thea Fronsman-Cecil, Rebecca Glasberg, Gina Lorenz, and Louise Brown: for your friendship and for being my academic sisters.

Nanar: for working together, for the literary communion, and for the joy.

Katy: for infusing brightness and critical theory into my daily life.

UCLA, The French & Francophone Studies Department and Graduate Division at UCLA, Florida State University, the University of Toronto: for your support.

Kerry Allen, Dominic Thomas, Erin Brown, Amy Mulherin, and Mia Power: for your help.

The cities of Tallahassee and Los Angeles: for your hospitality.

Nathalie, Philippe, Emilien, et Stephen de Mazancourt, Claude et Daniel Bonleu, Jacques et Geneviève de Mazancourt : pour tout – bien avant, pendant, et après la thèse.

Jess & Jones DePrest: for your positivity, for being my second family.

Kevin & Lilly Arnold: for your love.

Thank you.

## Vita/Biographical Sketch

### EDUCATION

| | |
|---|---|
| Expected June 2019 | Ph.D., French and Francophone Studies, UCLA<br>Dissertation "Physicians of the World: Postcolonial Women Writers Theorize Human Rights, Healing, and The World" advised by Distinguished Professor Françoise Lionnet |
| March 2016 | C. Phil., French and Francophone Studies, UCLA |
| Summer 2015 | Seminars with Galin Tihanov and Djelal Kadir, dir. David Damrosch, Institute for World Literature, Lisbon |
| May 2012 | M.A., French and Francophone Studies, Florida State University, Tallahassee, Florida |
| May 2010 | *Licence de Lettres Modernes* (Bachelor of Arts, French major), Université de Cergy-Pontoise, Val d'Oise, France |
| June 2006 | Bilingual OIB (French Baccalaureate with the International Option), Lycée International, St. Germain-en-Laye, France |

### ACADEMIC EMPLOYMENT

UCLA
Teaching Fellow in French (Winter 2016-Spring 2018), Teaching Assistant in French (Fall 2013 – Fall 2015)

FSU
Teaching Assistant in French, (Fall 2010-Spring 2012)

### PUBLICATION

"*La littérature "beure" ou le mystère de la littérarité*" ("'*Beur*' literature or the mystery of literariness*"*). *Expressions Maghrébines*, vol. 11, no 1, 2012.

### WORK IN PROGRESS

"Healing the Memory of the Dictatorship in Evelyne Trouillot's *La mémoire aux abois*", paper proposal accepted to be part of a special issue on "The Care (Re)Turn in Contemporary French and Francophone Cultural Productions" in *Etudes Francophones*.

## PRESENTATIONS

"Pour un cinéma dans le monde", Round Table on "cinéma-monde" organized by Michael Gott and Denis Provencher, Contemporary French Civilization, Tucson, August 29-31, 2019

"Healing the Memory of the Dictatorship in Evelyne Trouillot's *La mémoire aux abois*", Graduate Center for Literary Research Interdisciplinary Conference, University of California, Santa Barbara, May 4, 2019

"The Island Worlds of Shenaz Patel and Yanick Lahens", ACLA, Georgetown University, March 7-10, 2019

"Transcolonial Agencies in Yvette Christiansë's *Castaway* and Shenaz Patel's *Le silence des Chagos*", SFPS Postgraduate Conference, UCLA, May 3-4, 2018

"Demanding Justice in Shenaz Patel's *The Silence of the Chagossians*", Going Global Conference, International Institute, UCLA, April 20, 2018

"Lindsey Collen's *Mutiny*: a Utopian Dystopia", Carolina Conference for Romance Studies, Chapel Hill, April 5-7, 2018

"The Ungraspable Other in Yvette Christiansë's *Castaway*", Graduate and Post Graduate Conference, Rutgers University, March 24, 2018

"Physicians of the World: Theorizations of the World, Human Rights and Healing by Postcolonial Women Authors", Departments of French & Francophone, German, and Italian Studies Graduate Student Workshop, UCLA, January 25, 2018

"The Closed Eyelid: Plotting Human Rights in Shenaz Patel's *Le silence des Chagos*", Pacific Ancient and Modern Languages Association; Chaminade University of Honolulu, November 10-12, 2017

"Le droit de savoir: Affective Knowledge in Shenaz Patel's *Le silence des Chagos*", French and Francophone Studies Graduate Student Conference, UCLA, October 12-13, 2017

"Shenaz Patel's *Le silence des Chagos*: from the 'Unworld' to 'World-Forming'", "Africa and the New Networks of Cultural Mobility", University of Toronto, October 5-7, 2017

## LANGUAGES

Native French speaker
Native fluency in English
Proficient in Spanish
Reading knowledge of German

# Introduction

> The immigrant artist shares will all other artists the desire to interpret and possibly remake his or her own world. - Edwidge Danticat

In the epigraph above, a quote from the collection of essays *Create Dangerously*, the writer Edwidge Danticat turns our attention toward the world-building potential of literature. The conceit of this dissertation is that writers – and more specifically five postcolonial women writers – produce ideas of the world in their literary texts. This work situates itself at the intersection of the fields of World Literature, postcolonial studies, and Francophone literature. I assemble an original corpus of works by five postcolonial women authors who set their stories on the islands of Haiti, Mauritius, and Saint Helena. I argue that these women - Yanick Lahens, Evelyne Trouillot, Edwidge Danticat, Shenaz Patel, and Yvette Christiansë - are "physicians of the world" who seek to understand the world's discontents resulting from the legacies of slavery and colonialism as well as current neoliberal logics. Their ultimate and perhaps utopian goal is to heal the wounds of colonialism.

In the past decades, literary critics have become increasingly pulled toward the notion of the "world". In their analysis of globalization and its effects on our imagined constructions of the world, critics have renewed their interest in the concept of *Weltliteratur* which became commonly used when Johann Wolfgang von Goethe embraced in in the 1820s. Goethe practiced literature on a world scale: as a reader of several languages and as a writer, he considered that literature was able to cross genres, cultures, and political borders.[1] In *What is World Literature?*, David

[1] David Damrosch points that Goethe's admiration both for Greek tragedy and for classical Sanskrit theater helped make *Faust* one of the major works of world literature. Damrosch also recounts that Goethe's ideas of world literature have been passed down mostly his secretary and disciple Johann Peter Eckermann who first published a posthumous

Damrosch – who institutionalized the field of World literature in the early 2000s - describes world literature as writing that gains in translation, an elliptical refraction of national literatures, and a mode of reading characterized by detached engagement with worlds beyond our time and space.[2] This definition provides a useful paradigm for reading literature beyond traditional borders and fixed canons. However, the field of World literature poses several problems.[3] The very name "world literature" implies an englobing gesture which must be constantly questioned, just as claims to universalism need to be continuously critiqued: both purport to be inclusive but at times exclude difference.[4] Djelal Kadir suggests that the practitioners of world literature are oft insufficiently wary of the pitfall of "worlding" in the sense of bounding one's object of study in one's grasp. For Kadir the transitive impulse of the action "to world" is proprietary: its reach constructs, defines, and appropriates its objects.[5] Franco Moretti's readings could be said to "world" in the sense of "to appropriate". While Damrosch favors close readings, Franco Moretti's approach to "distant reading" allows for the identification of broad and small patterns but is marked by a totalizing tendency.[6] In a similar vein to Kadir's critique, Shu-mei Shih warns against what she terms "technologies of recognition", practices which push aside problems posed by studying the "non-

portrait of his master in 1837 under the title *Gespräche mit Goethe in den letzten Jahren seines Lebens*. See Damrosch, *Word Literature in Theory*, p. 15.

[2] See Damrosch, *What is World Literature?* p. 281.

[3] Amongst the opponents of World Literature, Emily Apter in *Against World Literature* claims that the field ignores the politics of the "Untranslatable", words that are resistant to substitution and are continually mistranslated. Within the field, Pheng Cheah in "World Against Globe: Toward a Normative Conception of World Literature" criticizes the neglect of conceptualizations of time and the overemphasis on space which according to him reproduces market metaphors. Another common objection is that World Literature as a field is redundant, that it does not offer anything new to Comparative literature which is already a thorn in the side of national literatures.

[4] In their critiques of the manifesto "Pour une littérature-monde en français", Jacqueline Dutton and Françoise Lionnet call for redefining universalism in a way that is inclusive of differences. See Dutton, "Francophonie and Universality: The Ideological Challenges of Littérature-monde" and see Lionnet, "Universalisms and Francophonies".

[5] See Kadir "To World, to Globalize: World Literature's Crossroads".

[6] See Moretti, "Conjectures on World Literature".

West" rather than working through them.[7] Shih and Lionnet offer ways to think outside the Euro-centric bounds through the concept of "minor transnationalism" which concentrates on productive peripheral relations without necessary mediation through the center.[8] In going against the center-periphery model, "minor transnationalism" allows for discussions previously hindered by disciplinary boundaries, such as exchanges between Francophone and Sinophone studies. Despite the risks inherent to the field, World literature provided a discursive home as I defined the parameters of this dissertation.

My own approach to world literature as a mode of reading involves analyzing ideas of the world conceived *within* the texts. Instead of "world literature" or "comparative literature", Simon Gikandi proposed in the introduction to the October 2016 PMLA that we study "literature in the world", the location of literature in the world and the relationship between literature and the world.[9] Though I share Gikandi's interest in the nature, meaning, and role of literature in the world, I adopt the reverse angle, that of "the world in literature". This line of enquiry allows me to foreground the production of epistemologies in the literary works. I focus on the ideas of the world brought forth by five postcolonial women authors. Christiansë, Patel, Lahens, Danticat, and Trouillot develop concrete notions of the "world" as a community of ideas and beings with shared values, as opposed to the Mercatorian "globe", a space that lends itself to cartography and colonial conquest. By establishing a dialogue between their ideas and works of philosophers - such as Jean-Luc Nancy who conceives of the world as immanent, and Pheng Cheah for whom the world is a

[7] See Shih, "Global Literature and the Technologies of Recognition".

[8] See Lionnet and Shih, *Minor Transnationalism*. Additionally, Lionnet has drawn from World Literature to propose the concept of "world-forming", which tends to the elastic forms novels develop to allow characters to relate to each other. See Lionnet, "World Literature, Postcolonial Studies, and Coolie Odysseys: J.M.G. Le Clézio and Amitav Ghosh's Indian Ocean novels".

[9] See Gikandi, "Introduction: Another Way in the World".

sense of belonging - I show that the writers set forth revolutionary understandings of time and space[10]. Christiansë's poetic images blur our notions of time and destabilize the Greenwich mean time coordinates; they undo the colonial ordering of categories. Danticat distends temporality and bridges spatial divides by stressing her belonging to a community of readers that meet across time and space. The writers break away from the confines of the present; they recuperate the past and imagine better futures in the form of utopias.

The overarching concept of this thesis is "physicians of the world": I consider Christiansë, Patel, Lahens, Danticat, and Trouillot as writers who produce a diagnosis of the world and who aim to remedy some of its ills. I adopt and adapt this concept from Gilles Deleuze's essay "Literature and Life".[11] Deleuze explains that literature is a becoming and puts emphasis on its perceptiveness as well as its capacity to transform. He advances that the writer is a "physician of himself and of the world" (3). For Deleuze: "The world is a set of symptoms whose illness merges with man" (3). I apply this idea in the field of postcolonial studies; the authors in my corpus reflect on the illnesses and discontents of the world that stem from the legacies of colonialism. Deleuze adds: "The ultimate aim of literature is to set free, in the delirium, this creation of a health or this invention of a people, that is, a possibility of life" (4). I show that the aim of the authors in my corpus is to heal the wounds of colonialism and to allow for a possibility of life. The expression "physicians of the world" hence encapsulates two main threads of the dissertation: the diagnosis of the world that the authors offer, and ways in which they propose healings and solidarities in their writings. Though the word "diagnosis" most often appears in medical terminology, its

[10] See Nancy, *The Creation of the World or Globalization* and Cheah, *What is a World? On Postcolonial Literature as World Literature*.

[11] See Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*.

etymology (*διά*: "through", and *γνωσις*: "knowledge") speaks to the general process of understanding that is key to any critical analysis. I am interested in the "diagnosis" of the world because the term suggests a dual orientation toward analyzing and healing.

I seek to carve out an alternative postcolonial optic by exploring forms of healings rather than focusing on violent interactions between colonizer and colonized.[12] I consider healing as a process. I do not read cures or catharses in the stories, for that would be to negate the multiply evolving manifestations of violence. I develop a hermeneutics of care; a mode of interpretation in which I tease out the aesthetic, formal, affective, and epistemological qualities of writings that contribute to a discussion of the ethics of representation and that articulate important perspectives on human rights. Rather than adopting a hermeneutics of suspicion with regard to the texts,[13] I treat them as phenomena in which I partake as a reader.[14] Additionally, the hermeneutics of care is suited for emphasizing the ethics of care at work in my corpus. One of the limits of postcolonial studies has been its overly narrow focused exploration of the conflictual relationship between colonizer and colonized. I am however more interested in what I term "postcolonial healings": the

[12] In a distancing effort, the category of post-postcolonialism has been set forth as a tool to read cultural productions which emerge from postcolonies but do not demonstrate these concerns, such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's 2013 novel *Americanah* set partly in Nigeria. British colonialism is not a main component of the story and the protagonist's quest involves claiming self-fulfillment rather than agency. Post-postcolonialism does not apply to my readings because the ghosts of slavery loom large in my project.

[13] See Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading; or, You're so Paranoid, You Probably Think This Introduction is about You". Eve Sedgwick recounts how Paul Ricoeur introduced the category of the "hermeneutic of suspicion" and suggests that paranoid inquiry has come to seem to correspond entirely with critical enquiry. For Sedgwick, room also needs to be made for "reparative" motives, which are about pleasure and ameliorative.

[14] In developing a hermeneutics of care, I draw from Rita Felski's work. In *Uses of Literature*, Felski shows how the hermeneutics of suspicion prevail as a mode of reading and suggests orientations that depart from suspicion, such as enchantment. In *The Limits of Critique*, Felski draws from Bruno Latour's actor network theory and Yves Citton's actualizing approach to literature to propose that we consider the texts as phenomena in which the readers participate. Michel Foucault's work on care also bears mentioning: Foucault reimplemented the ancient notion of caring for oneself and considered whether the care of the self might remain viable in modern ethics. See Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol.3: The Care of the Self*.

solidarities, communities, and social bonds that repair the fabric of human community. I anticipate that this dissertation could contribute to the field of medical humanities; my focus on healings invites scholars and students of medical humanities to turn to literary works as sources for psychic healings.[15]

It is by prioritizing receptiveness instead of critical distance that the hermeneutics of care attends to the qualities of the texts that participate in building empathy and articulating human rights. We generally consider forging empathy as one of the primary functions of literature. As Lynn Hunt shows, developing empathy allows for recognizing the autonomy of others.[16] Yet the value and status literary critics attribute to empathy vary greatly. Lynn Hunt considers that the sentimental revolution led to the origins of human rights. For Hunt, readers of Rousseau's *La nouvelle Héloïse* learned to identify with people from different socioeconomic backgrounds. The literary revolution and the actual revolution interacted in that literature promoted empathy toward others and hence forged the grounds for the emergence of ideas of human rights. By contradistinction, Robert Darnton does not consider empathy in his discussion of how literature participated in the revolution of 1789.[17] Darnton views the literary revolution of 1789 as a counterpart to the actual revolution. The literary revolution was a reconceptualization of reality through language: he reads Rousseau rewriting Molière as a core of this reconfiguration.[18] Hunt and Darnton's divergent takes on the literary revolution suggest that the human rights turn in

[15] The field of medical humanities, which has emerged recently, aims to provide medical practitioners with more well-rounded training. In that literature allows for building empathy, it could be an integral component of medical humanities if we consider that doctors need to develop empathy to better communicate with patients.

[16] See Hunt, *Inventing Human Rights: A History*.

[17] See Darnton, "The Literary Revolution of 1789".

[18] For Darnton, Whereas Voltaire's rewritings of Molière paid tribute to how his plays embodied good taste, Rousseau deemed that cultivating refined taste reinforced power dynamics that needed to be undone. See Darnton, *ibid*.

literary studies has led critics to prioritize the lens of empathy and autonomy in their reassessments of literary history.[19] However, when we are suspicious of the novel, of its political unconscious and ideological undercurrents, or when we focus on its rhetoric of irony, we limit the possibilities of developing empathy for its characters.[20] A mindset of mistrust stands in the way of receptiveness to the characters' subjectivities and experiences. In opposition to the hermeneutics of suspicion, the hermeneutics of care enables me to define empathy as receptiveness to affects, that is, to affects as intensities that are related to emotions but that escape categorization. For example, in *Le silence des Chagos*, a novel which traces the displacement of the Chagossians, Patel develops images to respond to the representational challenges posed by trauma. In attempting to access their affects and experiences, the novel participates in the Chagossians' struggle for justice. It is necessary though to distinguish empathy from identification, especially in the context of trauma studies.[21] Identification can lead to over-identification, to taking on the pain of others and inheriting their trauma. Empathy, by contrast, allows for preserving one's own autonomy. My reading of Trouillot's dictatorship novel *La mémoire aux abois* makes a case for this distinction: I show that the protagonist must distance herself from her mother's subjectivity to heal her postmemory of the Duvalier years.[22]

By using the expression "physicians of the world," I gesture toward the role of writers as public figures, even though I focus on the work performed by literary language rather than

[19] See Gikandi, "Editor's Column: In the House of Criticism". Gikandi describes the turn to human rights as one of the most important developments in literary studies in recent years. He notes that literary critics while debating semiotics in the 1980s and 1990s seemed oblivious to massive human rights violations in Rwanda and Srebrenica. Gikandi finds this lack of engagement especially surprising given that language and poetics played a role in inciting genocide.

[20] See Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, and Fish, "'Les Misérables' and Irony".

[21] See Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction*.

[22] See Hirsch, "The Generation of Postmemory".

examining the public trajectories of the authors I have chosen. These authors are all contemporary postcolonial women authors, public intellectual figures, and cultural mediators. Several of them are educators who provide their communities with tools for self and cultural expression. Danticat is regularly asked to comment on news of events occurring in Haiti, Christiansë is a college professor, Lahens leads workshops for Haitian youth, Trouillot co-founded a cultural center in Haiti, Patel is a journalist and participated in the making of a documentary on the Chagossians. These women are engaged public figures committed to increasing awareness of uneven power dynamics and to changing local practices.

My corpus is limited to women writers because I am interested in representations of womanhood and because I find that women's voices in postcolonial studies remain understudied. My use of the term "physician" plays with unconscious gender expectations. The term is still primarily associated with masculinity in the social imagination of most cultures. The blind spot in postcolonial studies is jarring given that, as Elleke Boehmer points out, gender inequalities subtend and inform most colonial and neocolonial situations.[23] The overlap between postcolonial studies and feminist studies needs to be further stressed. In my reading of Patel's treatment of the Chagossian women's protests, I draw from the fruitful relationship between scholarship and activism which undergirds feminism.[24] I also draw from feminism in setting forth nurture as one of the main foci of the dissertation; feminism emphasizes that women constitute the political and

[23] See Boehmer, "Edward Said and (the Postcolonial Occlusion of) Gender" in *Edward Said and the literary, social, and political world*.

[24] For example, as Cathy Cohen explains, in the case of the Black Lives Matter movement, there is a productive relationship between feminist scholarship and activism in exploring alternative forms of organizing and leadership. Additionally, feminism encourages activists to reflect on desired outcomes; this gesture motivates Janet Halley's call for a robust debate about whether it is advisable to put the weight of the state and punishment behind affirmative consent. See Cohen and Jackson, "A Conversation with Cathy Cohen on Black Lives Matter, Feminism, and Contemporary Activism" in *Signs*, and see Halley, "The Move to Affirmative Consent" in *Signs*.

that the public and private realms of human life are linked.[25] Though it would be essentializing to consider women as inherently nurturing and though many men are nurturers, women still perform more of the nurturing work in contemporary societies. In *Create Dangerously*, Danticat points, through intertextual links, to the process whereby she continues to nurture her texts even after having birthed them. Christiansë expresses longing for her nurturing grandmother. These pieces forge bonds of friendship and affiliation among characters who create community in the face of adversity. Nurture is an especially fruitful angle for analyzing resistance to oppression understood as a nexus of forces produced by the intersectionality of both race and gender.[26]

By setting their stories on islands, the writers destabilize hegemonic maps of knowledge. I consider that these authors implicitly propose epistemologies of the islands as "island worlds". The legacies of colonialism are multifarious and intersect multiply in the islands featured in these books. In reading maps of the world that show islands we can decipher palimpsests of colonialism and migratory flux. Furthermore, the uneven relations between islands and continents are indicative of larger world scale dynamics. Pascale de Souza stresses that the contributions of island cultures to postcolonial debate have received little attention from scholars.[27] Notwithstanding the notable exceptions of works by Edouard Glissant and Elizabeth DeLoughrey,[28] I find that the islands themselves are rarely the object of theoretical considerations. "Island worlds" become sites

[25] See Andrade, *The Nation Writ Small: African Fictions and Feminisms, 1958-1988.*

[26] See Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, "Mapping the margins: intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color" in *Critical Race Theory: the Key Writings That Formed the Movement*. Crenshaw is a legal scholar and civil rights advocate, she uses intersectionality as a prism to think through how racism and sexism interact and shape Black women's lives; the discrimination they face cannot be captured wholly by examining race and gender separately.

[27] See de Souza, "Francophone Island Cultures: Comparing Discourses of Identity in 'Is-land' Literatures" in *Postcolonial Thought in the French-speaking World.*

[28] See DeLoughrey, *Routes and Roots: Navigating Caribbean and Pacific Island Literatures* and Glissant, *Le discours antillais, Poétique de la relation, Traité du Tout-monde*.

that serve as a prism by means of which to challenge globalization and neo-liberal and neo-colonial logics. The concept of island world stands in stark opposition to how the colonial imaginary conceived of islands as *terra nullius* that belonged to no one and that offered a *tabula rasa* from which to erect colonies.[29] Patel in *Le silence des Chagos* points to how the colonial imaginary justified the expulsion of the Chagossians from Diego Garcia, their native island: the island as *terra nullius* was deemed to be inhabited only by birds, Tarzans, and Fridays. The texts produce affiliated but varied epistemologies of "island worlds". In *Castaway* I read the "island world" in the poems' insistence that the island is part of the world rather than part of the globe. Indeed, *Castaway* offers poetic images of scales and measurement that destabilize conceptions of the globe and show how the island has been subjected to colonial cartography. Trouillot's novel critiques the world's indifference toward the legacies of the Duvalier dictatorship. The "island world" in the context of *La mémoire aux abois* challenges how the world ignores, insularizes, and alienates islands and their histories. The shared island of Hispaniola makes Lahens more aware of the specificities of the legacies of French colonialism. Because of Haiti's debt to France, it was significantly more impoverished than the Dominican Republic.[30] Out of this transcolonial contrast it appears that the island can be seen as a privileged site for locally and historically grounded comparison.

Within these island worlds, the texts build what I term multilingual transcolonial agencies: the material and textual practices that resist multifarious forms of colonization across time and

[29] See Silvia U. Baage's dissertation, "Rewriting the French Colonial Topos of the Island in the Works of Marie Ferranti, Jean-François Samlong, and Chantal Spitz".

[30] After independence, French slave owners demanded compensation. In 1825 Charles X demanded Haiti pay an "independence debt" of 150 million gold francs, ten times the nation's annual revenue. The original sum was reduced but Haiti still paid 90 million gold francs (about 17 billion euros today) to France. It was still paying off this debt in 1947. See https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/aug/15/france-haiti-independence-debt.

space. I borrow the term transcolonial from Françoise Lionnet.[31] The critical purchase of the term is such that it enables analysis of the modalities and impacts of colonization across time and space rather than considering them in a restrictedly local context. The qualification "multilingual" stresses that the choice of language can be a political claim. For instance, the inclusion of Creole without translation in *Le silence des Chagos* increases the visibility of a language that is minoritized. The corpus forges practices of "agency" that are not defined solely as acting against power. In *Le silence des Chagos,* one of the main characters, Charlesia, recounts how Chagossian women's political protest against deportation and their occupation of the Parliament in Port-Louis. They exerted their agency by being present and occupying space rather than by acting. Their protest destabilizes the standard meaning of agency; having agency refers primarily to the capacity to engage in dynamic action rather than seemingly passive protest. I am especially interested in resistance to transcolonized imaginaries. Christiansë, Danticat, and Lahens exert the agency of their authorly personas from within and against the framework of colonized imaginaries. Their texts resist legacies of colonialism that play out in the politics of representation; they work against the burden of representation, the violence of representation, and the cliché of resilience. They articulate practices of "agency" that can take subtle forms. In *Castaway,* to guarantee her grandmother's status as the Ungraspable Other, Christiansë dramatizes ways in which her grandmother's voice escapes her pen. This is a form of resistance to the violence of representation (e.g. ventriloquizing the Other) that does not involve taking physical action. In *Create*

[31] See Lionnet, "Transcolonialismes : échos et dissonances de Jane Austen à Marie-Thérèse Humbert et d'Emily Brontë à Maryse Condé" in *Ecritures féminines et dialogues critiques. Subjectivité, genre et ironie*, and Lionnet "Transnationalism, Postcolonialism or Transcolonialism? Reflections on Los Angeles, Geography, and the Uses of Theory". In Lionnet's reading of Condé and Humbert, the transcolonial approach allows for examining intertextual references across anglophone and francophone contexts as well as processes of translation and textual practices that encourage interpretations across many levels. In her reflections on LA, the transcolonial approach allows for examining effects of different colonial histories in the geography of LA.

*Dangerously*, Danticat refers to the addendum of her first novel *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, in which she addressed the protagonist Sophie and claimed that her body had been asked to occupy a space larger than her flesh. This metaphor asserts the singularity of Sophie's experience and offers resistance to the burden of representation which confines creativity for immigrant and minority artists by expecting them to be the voice that speaks for and represents an entire community. By staging uncertainties and metaphors of relatedness, Christiansë and Danticat set forth subtle forms of agency. Lahens's stance is one of firm dismissal of stereotypes: she points out that the cliché of resilience exoticizes Haitians; for her, it is important to claim the right to *live* rather than merely survive.

Paying heed to these ideas allows me to challenge the category of the "Francophone" (without entirely doing away with it) on two main grounds. Firstly, my corpus stems out of geopolitical environments that have been shaped not only by French colonialism but also by other European colonial powers and U.S. imperialism. Over a century after it obtained its independence from France in 1804, Haiti was occupied by the U.S. from 1915 to 1934. Mauritius was successively colonized by the Dutch (1598-1710), the French (1710-1810), and the British (1810-1968). I treat the island of St. Helena as "tangentially Francophone". St. Helena was "discovered" by the Portuguese and is Britain's second oldest colony. It was never colonized by France. However, it is known for being Napoleon's place of exile; the symbolic history of the island gravitates around this figure of French Empire. Secondly, the authors share sensibilities outside of the framework of a shared language. As Guadeloupian novelist Maryse Condé points out, the mere fact of speaking a common language does not forge bonds.[32] Polynesian writer Chantal Spitz

[32] See Condé and Dawn Fulton, "'Respecter l'étrangeté de l'autre': entretien avec Maryse Condé". Condé states: "What amuses me is the word Francophone, because it encompasses people who have nothing in common, apart from the fact that they speak French. None of these linguistic groups has anything to do with the others. The mere fact of

shares Condé's sentiment and discards "francophonie" as a sham.[33] At the same time, common concerns do arise out of having been colonized by the same country. French colonialism imposed a totalizing form of universalism that molds the Francophone category. Attempts to break away from the confines of this category are not always astute. The 2007 *Manifeste pour une littérature-monde en français* notoriously rearticulated old paradigms and displaced the center in the four corners of the globe rather than dismantling the center periphery model.[34] Lionnet in her critique of the manifesto proposes that "francophonies" in the plural might allow for a more inclusive form of universalism, one that is molded after creolization and takes into account the ways in which different peoples inflect the French language.[35] The universalism of "francophonies" recognizes differences rather than erasing them. My concept of "multilingual transcolonial agencies" also gestures toward a more inclusive form of universalism.

The chapters are organized geographically: the first chapter centers on St. Helena, the second on Mauritius, and the third on Haiti. This structure allows me to tend to cultural, national, and geographic specificities while adopting a relational model of memories of the slave trade in the Atlantic and Indian Oceans that works against the parceling of Francophone studies in discrete areas. The dissertation takes as premise that the world began to be transformed by slave trading and emphasizes the resonances of the trade. Valérie Magdelaine-Andrianjafitrimo warns against applying Paul Gilroy's Black Atlantic model to the Indian Ocean because it does not account for

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speaking French in the Ivory Coast and speaking French in Guadeloupe doesn't create a connection. I'm convinced that what people call "Francophone literature" is going to disappear, or at least undergo profound changes. Many people from the Francophone Caribbean live elsewhere, in America and in all the countries of the world. They already write in English, Spanish, and German. The label "Francophone" is extremely fragile".

[33] See Spitz, "Entretien avec Chantal Spitz" on the "île en île" website. Spitz states: La francophonie est une vaste imposture ; c'est un réseau tramé autour du monde pour marier des peuples qui n'ont rien à voir les uns avec les autres ; ce mot m'énerve". http://ile-en-ile.org/entretien-avec-chantal-spitz/

[34] See Michel et Lebris et al., "Manifeste pour une littérature-monde en français".

[35] See Lionnet, "Universalisms and Francophonies".

other kinds of migration such as those of the coolies and Chinese workers.[36] I do not aim to superimpose Black Atlantic history on Indian, Chinese, and Chagossian imaginaries. However, I have found that memorializations of the experience of the abyss of the slave ship recur frequently in the corpus, notably through echoes of the screams of slaves that ricochet off boats in *Le silence des Chagos* and erupt out of the pages of *Castaway*. Each book produces its own variant of what Edouard Glissant theorizes as the knowledge of Relation: the knowledge that connects the descendants of slaves, people who carry with them the memory of the experience of the abyss of the sea.[37] While the texts reflect on the long histories of the Atlantic and Indian Ocean and point to shared experiences, they are also anchored in specific locales on which they shed light. Whereas Mauritius has built its own brand of multicultural democracy,[38] Haiti has been subjected to dictatorships, brutal military regimes, and coups. As for St. Helena, it is part of the British Commonwealth. These vastly different histories of governance account for marked differences in daily life and social relations. Political, economic, and cultural specificities are woven into the fabric of the texts. The coconut provided sustenance to the Chagossians, its image is a leitmotiv in *Le silence des Chagos*. In *Create Dangerously*, the smell of local coffee wafts into the sentences and gives the reader a sense of the experience of being in Haiti. *Le silence des Chagos* foregrounds that the exclusion of the Chagossians was an integral component of the building of the nation in Mauritius and *La mémoire aux abois* offers political and historical analysis of the dictatorship.

[36] See Magdeleine-Andrianjafitrimo, "Ethnicisation ou créolisation ? Le paradigme de la traite dans quelques romans francophones mauriciens et réunionnais contemporains" and Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic : Modernity and Double Consciousness*.

[37] See Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, p.8.

[38] See Lionnet, "Mauritius in/and global culture: politics, literature, visual arts".

Given my interest in how these "physicians of the world" mobilize and renew forms to generate ideas, genre is a main axis of my analysis. In the epic poem *Castaway*, the absence of conventional plot situates the playing field within language itself: poetic language battles against colonial discourse. Borrowing from Lionnet, I examine *Le silence des Chagos* as a documentary fiction: a novel that documents the experience of the Chagossians with the utmost historical accuracy while taking creative license in attempting to access their experiences. The "récit" in *Failles* through the juxtaposition of different types of writing enables Lahens to overcome writer's block and move forward after the catastrophe. In *Create Dangerously*, essays allow for staging the "I", for exploring and articulating the authorial persona in relation to the Haitian collective. In *La mémoire aux abois*, the novel offers a gendered counter-history of the dictatorship by exploring the subjectivity of two women. Whether these wordsmiths invent new genres or adopt traditional ones, they modify and inflect their structures; in their writings, minoritized perspectives and experiences provide the foundational scaffolding of the generic form.

The outcome of my close readings is that these authors use literary language as a tool to foster ethical relationships with others, participate in the struggle for human rights, and provide healing potentials. In the first chapter, "The Diagnosis of the World in Yvette Christiansë's *Castaway*", I examine ethical gestures made by this epic poem set on the island of St. Helena, port of call of the slave trade, land of Napoleon's exile, and birthplace of the poet's grandmother. The poet seeks to unsettle Napoleon's domination in the imaginary of St. Helena and to carve out a space for her grandmother. There is no discursive place in formal history for her grandmother's voice. I rely on Christiansë's academic publications in order to formulate a critical framework that drives my own analysis. Christiansë has probed the opposition between language and discourse in the work of Toni Morrison; I argue that *Castaway* expands poetic language in order to undermine

colonial discourse. The similes in *Castaway* underline the interpretive possibilities of poetic language and its role in forging *relationality,* an ethical movement toward the Other that guarantees her status as ungraspable. This long poem also suggests that colonial thought conflates the "world" and the "globe": it establishes, by means of linguistic and cultural subversions, the notion of the "world" as a community of beings and ideas with shared values. Finally, by bringing forth contradictory notions of time, the poems other the present moment of the poet. The othered present becomes the site for a redemptive historiography that engages with the castaways of history, the slaves who underwent the Middle Passage.

The second chapter, "Demanding a Just World in Shenaz Patel's *Le silence des Chagos*", takes as its premise that literature performs the sociocultural work of human rights discourse.[39] *Le silence des Chagos* is a documentary fiction that deals with a little-known episode of history, the displacement of the Chagossians from their native island of Diego Garcia, a coral atoll in the middle of the Indian Ocean. The Chagossians were deported to Mauritius between 1968 and 1973 and continue to struggle to reclaim their island. I argue that the novel participates in their demands for justice by imagining their affective and cognitive experiences. Patel creates innovative images that respond to the representational challenges posed by affect.[40] By commenting on its own plot, the novel foregrounds the right of the Chagossians to self-determination, the right to write the course of their lives. The characters interrogate the violent logics of dispossession that undo human rights. I show that the opposition of the worlds of Diego Garcia and Mauritius stresses the lack of mutual exposure of the two worlds. I adopt a phenomenological perspective to examine how *Le silence des Chagos* conveys the experiences of alienation of the Chagossians in Mauritius. I

[39] See Slaughter, *ibid.*

[40] See Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism*. Jameson asserts that affect escapes categorization and is difficult to represent.

conclude that by rethinking conceptions of agency, the novel reopens conditions for the human and possibilities for a just world.

The third chapter, "Healing the World in *Failles* by Yanick Lahens, *Create Dangerously* by Edwidge Danticat, and *La mémoire aux abois* by Evelyne Trouillot", analyzes reflections on writing as healing practice from the viewpoint of three Haitian writers. *Failles* (*Fault Lines*) is a personal essay written in the wake of the 2010 earthquake. *Create Dangerously* is a collection of essays that deal with dictatorship, torture, and the earthquake. *La mémoire aux abois* (*Memory at Bay*) treats the relationship between two women, a nurse and her patient who is the widow of dictator François Duvalier. I examine how these three Haitian women seek to overcome writer's block, immigrant guilt and repressed memories in their writing. The focus on their writings' engagement with personal and collective national trauma allows me to articulate an approach to literature as a site of healing processes. I argue that the formal and aesthetic qualities of these works constitute sites within which the authors and characters negotiate the ethics of bearing witness to traumatic events and that these negotiations beget multifarious healings.

As indicated in the title, three main themes structure the dissertation: the world, human rights, and healing. I designed the order of the chapters so as to focus first on the diagnosis of the world, second on the promotion of human rights, and third on healing processes. In *Castaway* I read the rendering of the experience of the abyss of the Middle Passage as a diagnosis: the Middle Passage is set forth as the wound of the modern world. I show that *Le silence des Chagos* calls the world to take the responsibility for the negation of the Chagossians' human rights and I argue that *Failles*, *Create Dangerously*, and *La mémoire aux abois* invite the world to take part in the processes of healing from collective Haitian trauma. I have since come to consider diagnosis,

promoting human rights, and healing as three intertwined uses of literature.[41] The entry point into these interconnected uses is the now familiar postcolonial debate around the violence of representation that is wrestled out within the long poem *Castaway*.

## CHAPTER ONE: THE DIAGNOSIS OF THE WORLD IN YVETTE CHRISTIANSË'S *CASTAWAY*

> *We were, in short, colored male Americans, a not easily categorizable quantity that annoyed most of our countrymen, black and white, male and female alike, since America is nothing if not about categories*.
> - Hilton Als

> *Calling the speaker identitarian then serves as an efficient excuse not to listen to her, in which case the listener can resume his role as speaker. And then we can scamper off to yet another conference with a keynote by Jacques Rancière, Alain Badiou, Slavoj Zizek, at which we can meditate on Self and Other, grapple with radical difference, exalt the decisiveness of the Two, and shame the unsophisticated identitarians, all at the feet of yet another great white man pontificating from the podium, just as we've done for centuries*.
> - Maggie Nelson

[41] Similarly to Rita Felski, I understand "uses" as extending beyond the ideological realm and as a testament to the network of interactions between texts, readers, and sociological contexts that produce meaning. See Felski, *Uses of Literature*.

St. Helena, a remote island off the coast of Africa in the South Atlantic Ocean, is known for having been Napoleon Bonaparte's final place of exile. It is less known for having been a port of call of the slave trade and even less for being the birthplace of Margaret Delphine Blandford, the poet Yvette Christiansë's grandmother. *Castaway*, Christiansë's book of poetry published in 1999, is set on this island. One of the aims of the text is to undermine Napoleon's domination in the history of St. Helena and to carve space for Margaret Delphine. The poems also give voice to a wide array of characters, some of them based on historical figures, that are connected to the island. These characters include the island's first exile Fernão Lopez, explorers, unknown slaves, and the poet who refers to herself as the Dutiful Granddaughter.[42] Shifts in perspective participate in creating an atmosphere where slipperiness of meaning prevails. Though the poems are centered on St. Helena, they reach out to the world. For example, they feature South Africa where the poet grew up.[43] The poems are full of conceptual possibilities; they interrogate the potential and limits of language, they cast light on the polysemy of the term "world" and on the multifaceted aspects of the notion of "time". *Castaway* is professedly composed of different books or sources of poems, fictional and fanciful titles on the upper left-hand corner of the pages indicate the imagined source,

[42] A footnote in *Castaway* provides background on the historical figure Fernão Lopez: Lopez traveled to Goa in the early 1500s with Alfonso D'Albuquerque, Portuguese general and colonizer of the region. D'Albuquerque left Lopez in charge of a group of Portuguese to settle and rule the local population. Lopez and others instead converted to Islam and sided with Muslim resistance to the Portuguese. D'Albuquerque punished them by severing their right hands, the thumb of their left hand, their tongues, ears, and noses. Lopez remained in India for some years until he was to be returned to Portugal. He left his ship at the then uninhabited island of St. Helena, becoming its first exile and a figure of curiosity and myth.

[43] Christiansë was born and raised in South Africa. Her family moved to Australia to escape apartheid when she was in her late teens. She now lives in New York where she is Professor of English and Africana Studies at Barnard College. The poems of *Castaway* partly reflect her personal trajectory; they are marked by deeply global dimensions. The text is centered on Saint Helena, a port of call of the slave trade, and hinges upon the remembrance of slavery in the United States as well as South African apartheid and slavery. Christiansë's body of work is diverse, it includes a novel, poetry, academic articles and a book on Toni Morrison entitled *Toni Morrison: An Ethical Poetics*. This wide range allows Christiansë to produce ideas in different sites of writing.

such as "from *The Emperor's Book of Bad Days*" or "from *A Compendium of Travelers' Tales, Their Fantastic Encounters and Curious Sightings*". "*Chronicles of the Hull*" are poems that relate the experience of the Middle Passage. These different books appear to be fragmented but they forge connections out of displacement. They allow Christiansë to set forth a "diagnosis" of the world: she offers her understanding of the world.[44]

Christiansë's diagnosis of the world inscribes her as a "physician of the world": like the other authors in the corpus of this dissertation, she produces theories of the world.[45] Though *Castaway* shows that the "world" is a shifting concept, the main idea of the world produced by *Castaway* is that of a community of ideas and beings with shared values. Examining Christiansë's diagnosis of the world implies situating her work in relationship to the field of World literature. No theory does justice to Christiansë's writing of the world but several critical paradigms provide useful insights for reading her work. David Damrosch defines world literature as a mode of reading characterized by detached engagement with worlds beyond our space and time;[46] Christiansë's text certainly invites for this mode of reading. Damrosch, though, does not define the world as a concept. Christiansë's world, the community of ideas and beings, most resembles that theorized by Pheng Cheah. However, for Cheah, literature can effect change in the world through storytelling,[47] whereas the poems of *Castaway* engage with the reader on a more abstract level. The poems explore the capacities and limitations of language. The relationship Christiansë posits between literature and the world is more akin to that envisioned by Simon Gikandi, that of

[44] The etymology of "diagnosis" (*διά:* "through" and *γνωσις:* "knowledge") denotes a process of understanding.
[45] I have adapted the concept "physicians of the world" from Gilles Deleuze who in *Essays Critical and Clinical* considers literature as an enterprise of health of the world.

[46] See Damrosch, *What is World Literature?*
[47] Cheah's book *What is a World?* examines conceptions of time in philosophy and in postcolonial literature. In the literary portion of his book, Cheah focuses exclusively on novels.

literature in the world.[48] Gikandi beckons us to interrogate how literature exists in the world. *Castaway* claims itself as representative of literature and shows that literature leads nuanced explorations of its relationship to the world.

In this chapter I build from Christiansë's academic works to formulate the critical framework that drives my analysis. Christiansë shows how Toni Morrison's oeuvre poses the question of when the limits of language become the limits of one form of language, such as racist discourse.[49] According to Christiansë, the question of how to 'convert' one discourse in order to accommodate another is a question that raises the most profound ethical challenge, in a Levinasian sense. For French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, ethics means responsibility toward the Other,[50] and I will draw here on his approach to ethics and alterity. The critic Roland Barthes also develops an ethical project, set forth in *Le Neutre: cours au Collège de France (1977-1978)* which places immense trust in the medium of literature. Literature for Barthes is a pedagogy of nuances. I rely on Barthes's trust in literature in order to approach Christiansë's poetry as a source of concepts that will help frame my own analyses of her work.

I begin this chapter by examining ethical gestures made by the text. I focus on the work performed by similes so as to underline the interpretive possibilities of poetic language and the role played by poetic language in forging opacity and relationality. I look at ways in which the text avoids the pitfalls of the violence of representation. I then go on to interrogate shifting conceptions

[48] See Gikandi, "Introduction: Another Way in the World".

[49] See Christiansë, *Toni Morrison: An Ethical Poetics*. It is noteworthy that a South African born writer now based in the United States devoted an entire book of literary criticism to Toni Morrison's oeuvre and by extent (or in part) to African American cultural life. The central space occupied by African American literature in American literature classes has yielded productive insights for studying the legacy of slavery in literature. I draw from some of these insights in the third section of the chapter.

[50] See Levinas, "La trace de l'autre".

of the "world" and subversions of the worlds of geographers. This allows me to show how a notion of the world as a community of beings and ideas is contracted in Christiansë's poetry. Finally, I explore the literary haunting produced by the text. I examine contradictory notions of time brought forth in *Castaway* in order to demonstrate that the text others the present and sings incompleteness in the representation of the Middle Passage.

**Ethical Gestures in Castaway: Naming and Language, Opacity, and the Violence of Representation**

In the opening poems of *Castaway* conflicts over naming are brought out, in which the main contenders are the poet's grandmother, the island, and Napoleon; these conflicts are representative of a wider conflict between forms of language. More specifically, the text plays out a conflict between poetic language and colonial and imperial discourse.[51] Christiansë in *Toni Morrison* relies on the Foucauldian sense of discourse in order to show how colonial discourse is naturalized as language.[52] Language is the method of human communication. Discourse is a system of thoughts that construct the subjects and the worlds of which they speak. Colonial discourse is a set of assumptions that limit colonial subjects. Christiansë explains that in colonialism, colonial discourse takes on a universal guise and appears to its speakers as language rather than discourse.[53] *Castaway* undoes this deceit; colonial discourse is destabilized and imperial discourse is undermined from within. They are both overtaken by poetic language which the text expands.

[51] This staged conflict goes against Roland Barthes' claim that « jouissance » stems from the peaceful cohabitation of different types of discourse within a text. In *Le plaisir du texte*, Barthes writes: "(…) le sujet accède à la jouissance par la cohabitation des langages, qui travaillent côte à côte : le texte de plaisir, c'est Babel heureuse" (10).
[52] See Christiansë, *Toni Morrison: An Ethical Poetics*, p.8.

[53] See Christiansë, *ibid*.

*Castaway* critiques the violence of naming, an integral component of colonial discourse. The poet's grandmother has been subjected to the violence of colonial naming: "*They* named her/ second side of the road,/ back door black" (9). The unspecified referent of the italicized pronoun "*They*" emphasizes the exterior imposition. Work in postcolonial studies has demonstrated that a large part of the violence of colonial discourse operates through either depriving people of a name or through imposing a name.[54] In *Toni Morrison*, Christiansë shows that stripping someone of a name deprives her of anchorage in a community.[55] Anchorage in a community is the equivalent of a metaphorical address.[56] Moreover, the grandmother's literal address "second side of the road" and "back door black" embodies a restriction that defines her. This passage hence features interplay between the grandmother's literal address and the imposed metaphorical address of her name. This interplay accentuates the critique of the violence of colonial naming.

The poet's grandmother's nickname further destabilizes the violence of colonial naming:

> Marguerite Delphine, but never called,
> except with "Finnie". Fin. For the
> fin of a sleek dark fish
> that finds a current and slips (8)

The slipping movement of the fish echoes the slippage from the name to the nickname and this slippage destabilizes colonial language's stranglehold.

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[54] Academics works that examine the colonial politics of naming include *The Postcolonial Studies Reader* edited B. Ashcroft and *Colonial Culture in France since the Revolution* edited by Pascal Blanchard, Sandrine Lemaire, Nicolas Bancel and Dominic Thomas.

[55] Christiansë has extensively studied the politics of naming. She has examined not only naming under slavery through her work on Toni Morrison but also apartheid's language of naming. In her essay "Passing Away: The Unspeakable (Losses) of Postapartheid South Africa", Christiansë shows that apartheid presented itself as a muscular capitalism which was bound to the formation and maintenance of whiteness. Within such a schema, she argues, apartheid's language of naming could indeed operate like money in a Marxist as well as a Foucauldian frame.

[56] Christiansë draws from Thomas Hobbes' demonstration that a name provides a metaphorical address.

Naming dynamics also undercut the imperial discourse that is embodied in *Castaway* by Napoleon. In the first poem "The Name of the Island", Napoleon's naming of the island as "the worst place" (1), stands in direct opposition with the title of the second poem "The Island Sings Its Name". The poem "The Name of the Island" undoes Napoleon's authority in general as well as his authority to name the island. Napoleon's magnitude is firstly diminished by the island itself. The island is inhospitable to Napoleon. The pugnacious elements battle him and each other; they enfeeble him. The ocean is quarrelsome, it "squabbl[es]" (1) and throws salt onto the rocks, the wind and the sand. Beyond being merely quarrelsome, the ocean has the potential to unleash great violence; it is compared to a "father whipping a child" (2). Irritating sounds convey an atmosphere of unease. The rock "grates, screeches" (2). Double consonant verbs such as "squabbled" (1), "whipped" (1), "twitter and nibble" (2) and "clogging" (2) yield a harsh tone. Light is scarce under "a full dark sky" (2); the mood is ominous. Napoleon stands at the window waiting "for the smallest remnant of brightness" (2), which brings to the reader's mind an implicit contrast with the luster of his former prominence. Days accumulate; "one day" is followed by "another day" and "still another day" (3). The accumulation of days gives a sense of the longevity of time during exile. The rock and the house mirror Napoleon's ageing back at him; they are like "thinning, graying hair/ on a sick man's head" (3). It is as if the island and the elements conspired to precipitate Napoleon's ageing and illness. The elements also pervade his subconscious. The wind becomes a participant in his nightmares. Indeed, the wind's intrusion into his body parallels an Englishman's invasion: "the dream of an Englishman/ thrusting a finger into his diaphragm/ and separating his organs" (4). But this striking image is swept from under his feet; the island does not hold up his nightmares: "Most days, the wind/ is just the wind and the island/ does not even support

nightmares" (4). In these concluding lines of the poem, the restrictive adverb "just" and the double negative "not even" undermine Napoleon's endeavors to bestow illustriousness on his exile.

The poem also stresses Napoleon's loss of agency. This poem, similarly to other poems centered on Napoleon's perspective, adopts third person narrative. We do not hear Napoleon's voice directly; this reduces his ascendancy over the reader. Napoleon has lost the prestige and power of his army. He can no longer ride his horse triumphantly, nor can he raise himself to the status of a divine figure:

> No more the ride like a god
>
> through the troops, no more
>
> the grand gilt pose on the rampant
>
> white stallion. (3)

The repetition of the locution "no more" and the absence of verbs in these lines highlights Napoleon's lack of agency. Verbs express actions; they are the primary conveyor of agency in sentences. What is left for him to do is to contemplate his life: "The tragedy of existence: that a man can never/ see the top of his own head or the back of his own head, or the side of his face" (2). The term "tragedy" summons up the elevated rank of characters in ancient Greek drama and seventeenth century French classical dramaturgy. The contrast between the nobility suggested by the term and the banal nature of Napoleon's contemplation has a humorous effect. This effect is intensified by the colon as this punctuation mark typically indicates definition or exact equivalence.

The poem further undercuts Napoleon's authority by putting his name under tension. Napoleon was born Napoleone di Buonaparte but adopted the name Bonaparte (which had been his family name before his father changed it to Buonaparte to forge ties with Tuscany). In late years of his rule, British propaganda used the foreign sounding "Buonaparte" to cast aspersion on his legitimacy as a French ruler. On St. Helena the British insisted for him to be called "Buonaparte".[57] In one stanza he is "Bonaparte-now-Buonaparte". In another he is "Bonaparte-not-Buonaparte". Hyphens divide and connect these two sets of two names. The difference between "now" and "not" resides in one single letter and suggests an easy slippage from one to the other.

Undermining Napoleon's authority gives more ground to play out the struggle between poetic language and imperial discourse. Napoleon's authority lies in the name Bonaparte. For this reason he repeats it ceaselessly: "And says his name over and/ over as if it is a limb he must massage or/ lose to the butcher's field knife" (2). The simile that compares his name to a limb is a locus where the struggle between poetic language and imperial discourse occurs. Christiansë in *Toni Morrison* shows that similes are not mere ornamentation. Similes are a way of representing what is difficult to conceive; they offer interpretive possibilities to the reader.[58] Because of the interpretive possibilities they offer, similes form part of the strength of poetic language. On the other hand, Christiansë also shows in *Toni Morrison* that similes can have a contaminating effect. The name, by being compared to a limb, is at risk of acquiring the limb's attributes. The limb could

[57] See Rodenberg, "Bonaparte or Buonaparte?". http://www.mrodenberg.com/2012/09/13/bonaparte-or-buonaparte/

[58] Christiansë furthers her explanation of the work conducted by similes through a distinction between simile and metaphor. Both metaphor and simile make a gesture of "likening" in the realm of language, but simile knows itself to be speculative whereas metaphor is more binding: "metaphor asserts the truth of its identity and effaces the magic or the violence of the copula in the simple gesture of saying "it is", rather than the speculative "as if" which is what the simile enacts".

be lost to a butcher's knife, it is vulnerable. In the case of Napoleon's name that is like a limb, the contamination becomes a weapon deployed by poetic language to amputate Napoleon. Henceforth, the simile works in different directions to assert poetic language and overthrow Napoleon's attempts at naming the island the worst place, attempts which are illustrative of imperial discourse's aims. The conflict over naming is also explored in abstract terms through the elements:

> other tugging – when a scent
> rises from the air and defies
> the anchorage of a name, an
> explanation. (11)

The intangibility of the scent signifies that the defying of the anchorage of a name is hard to grasp. Likewise, the ash and steam of the name of the star appear elusively:

> One [star] fell close – its fierce
> whispering quarrel with the water
> as it cast its name like knives in every
> direction. The ash and steam of its name. (10)

In this instance the name is compared to a knife, which suggests that asserting one's name is a forceful act. The star can be read as a figure that is representative of poetic language. Abstraction elevates thought and thus also increases interpretive possibilities.

In *Castaway* flocks of birds "rise and swerve" (11) and this rising and swerving movement can be applied to describe *Castaway's* poetic language. Indeed, the interpretive possibilities offered by simile and the abstractions create a proliferation, an expansion of language. A comparison with the work of M. Nourbese Philip on language in her book of poems *Zong!* allows

for better analyzing the possibilities of language as suggested by *Castaway*. *Zong!* disarticulates grammar in order to allow the story of the Zong massacre to tell itself. In 1781 the captain of the slave ship Zong decided to throw about 150 Africans overboard in order for the ship's owners to collect insurance. Philip's poems draw from the words of the legal decision concerning this insurance claim. In the Notanda that follows the book of poems, she evokes her wariness of language. For Philip, law and poetry both aim to achieve precise expression. Because of what she views as a strong kinship between the language of poetry and the language of law, Philip cuts herself from the comfort of her language and works against imposed meaning.[59] By contrast, *Castaway* expands language rather than breaking it or making it stutter.[60] Poetic language in *Castaway* not only overtakes imperial and colonial language, it also reaches out toward the Other.

In the poem "The Island Sings Its Name", the poet establishes *relationality* between her grandmother and herself.[61] Indeed, she enacts a movement toward the Other, her grandmother. This movement is characterized by receptiveness to difference. The first condition for such a

[59] Jenny Sharpe in her essay on this book of poetry pushes Philip's analysis of her work further and argues that through the repetition of syllables that prolong their utterance, language is being slowed down to its breaking point. For Sharpe, *Zong!* goes beyond questioning the ability of language to communicate ineffability and forges an affective language that speaks and writes the memory held by silence. See Sharpe, "The Archive and Affective Memory in M. Nourbese Philip's *Zong!*".

[60] In the essay "He stuttered" in *Essays Critical and Clinical* Gilles Deleuze demonstrates that great writers make language stutter and confront silence. However, this essay also shows how writers can make language grow. Deleuze's conception of language is that of a system in equilibrium, which involves exclusive disjunctions (we do not utter words at the same time, we must choose between them) and progressive connections for the sentence to move forward. Making language stutter for Deleuze is tied to the art of creating inclusive disjunctions. According to Deleuze, Samuel Beckett takes this practice of inclusive disjunctions to its highest point by adding particle upon particle in the middle of the sentence. Deleuze asserts: "Creative stuttering is what makes language grow from the middle, like grass; it is what makes language a rhizome instead of a tree…" (111). The growth of language in *Castaway* is not situated at the level of syntax but of figures of speech, the effect is not that of a rhizome but of a proliferation.

[61] My understanding of relationality is informed by the writings of Edouard Glissant and Emmanuel Levinas. For Glissant, relationality is receptiveness to difference and respect of the Other's opacity. For Levinas, relationality is a movement toward the Other that guarantees her status as ungraspable. See Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, and Levinas, "La trace de l'autre".

movement to occur is to for the poet to stress that her grandmother cannot be grasped. The poet describes her grandmother's voice in the following way:

> My grandmother's voice is
>
> wrapped in distance and tissue papers
>
> rustling like the leaves
>
> of a favourite tree. (5)

We cannot hear the grandmother's voice because it is wrapped. The contrast between the silence and the sound of the rustling leaves emphasizes this absence. The absence is further underscored by the contrast between the abstract notion of wrapping in distance and the more tangible notion of wrapping in tissue papers. Shared features between the grandmother and her voice emerge if we read the voice as a synecdoche, that is, as representative of the grandmother. Similarly to her voice, the grandmother is opaque;[62] she cannot be reduced to transparency.

The image of the grandmother's voice wrapped in distance and tissue papers calls to mind the opening image of *Castaway*, for the island is also enveloped: "My grandmother's island is/ wrapped in its own ocean and a fog/ that whispers and sings to itself" (1). Though the ocean in effect surrounds the island, it also here suggests vastness and accentuates the inaccessibility. As for the fog, it blurs vision. The fog is not quite in the realm of the obscure but there is a kinship between the two. The fog's whispering and singing to itself indexes the fog's autonomy whilst also reflexively enacting the song of poetry. Through the blurriness that they evoke, the fog and the recurring image of "wrapping" mark resistance to gestures of reduction to transparency, of

[62] Glissant defines opacity as what cannot be reduced to the transparent, what cannot be reflected in one's own image. He explains that the opaque is not the obscure, though it can be. See Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, p.191.

enclosure and appropriation. The analogy between the wrapping of the voice and the wrapping of the island interconnects the opacity of the grandmother and of the island.

Having established that she cannot grasp her grandmother's voice, the poet foregrounds her desire to engage with her late grandmother. The repetition of "I want" throughout the poem, either at the head of stanzas or at the end of lines, forges a sense of will which indicates a desire to seek out her grandmother. An affectionate register predominates in the poem; its first occurrence is in the adjective "favourite" (5) that qualifies the tree. The poet wants to "slip into the bough" (6) of her grandmother's arm. The relationality between the poet and her grandmother is characterized by nurture.[63] Indeed, the poet recalls that her grandmother taught her elementary words and suggests that she withdrew them by passing away. She thus highlights the grandmother's transmission and legacy as well as the loss generated by the end of her life. The grandmother's last days are implicitly associated with a house that "slumps heavy on its foundations" (6); the grandmother had provided the foundations of her granddaughter's life. The poet states "And I want/ you to smile at me, as if/you are… always" (6), thusly nurturing the memory of her nurturer.

The poet's movement toward her grandmother is marked by openness to her difference and singularity. The grandmother's singularity is primarily located in her longing for the sea: "Not any sea,/ but that green sea" (7). The correlative conjunction "not…but" emphasizes the singularity. The sea also has specific attributes; it has a color and is vigorous, for it "hurl[s] down" (7). The grandmother's longing is lyricized through its recurring association with the wind. The wind is air

[63] Françoise Lionnet establishes a rapprochement between Glissant's theorization of relationality and Simone de Beauvoir's concept of nurture. She explains: "Relationality thus describes a dynamic similar to the one underscored by Beauvoir in her understanding of "nurture", since it enables and sustains the other in his or her difference" (116). See Lionnet, "Consciousness and Relationality: Sartre, Lévi-Strauss, Beauvoir, and Glissant".

in natural motion. The grandmother's longing by transposition is in her nature, "in her blood" (7). The longing takes on a life of its own:

Longing, as persistently

as the wind at a door, a loose key hole,

the old leaden kind, and door latch

made for the ball of a thumb. (7)

The comparison with the wind is hence pushed further with the associations between the door, the key hole, the door latch and the ball of a thumb. The slips from one visual image to another inscribe instability and reinforce that the grandmother cannot be seized.

The reader is invited to participate in the relationality between the grandmother and the granddaughter. The reader is not given the key as to the mystery of the grandmother's longing. Rather than yearning for the sea that surrounds her native island of St. Helena, Margaret Delphine wishes for the sea that washes the shores of Lorenço Marques:

Not any sea,

but that green sea

she knew hurled down

past the mud-plastered flats

of Lorenço Marques where the paraffin woman

charged a family this many escudoes

for one night under a rain-filled canvas; the white beaches

of the wedding cake hotel. (7)

The reader is told that not knowing why Finnie wanted this particular sea infuriated her granddaughters, which intensifies the mystery and beckons the reader's involvement. The reader needs to consult the "St. Helena – Time Line" at the end of the book in order to understand the connection with Lorenço Marques (now Maputo Bay, Mozambique). Despite its outwardly clear and chronological appearance, the timeline forefronts entanglements and does not quite lay out clearly the connections. The reader needs to put the entries in relation. Two notable entries offer crucial insights. The entry "before 1557" indicates that two kaffirs from Mozambique and a Javanese man swam ashore from a ship and soon multiplied. This entry registers migration from Mozambique to St. Helena. The entry "1964" recounts that Finnie toward the end of her life talks about her family, St. Helena, "And Lorenço Marques and the people who come from there" (117). Putting these entries in relation brings out that her longing bears the mark of entanglements of eastern Africa diaspora.[64] Indeed we can intimate that she knew this sea from people who had migrated from Lorenço Marques telling her about it. The precise description contains historical specificity. The escudo is a unit of currency that was used in Portugal and in Portuguese colonies such as Mozambique. The wedding cake hotel denotes the lavishness that the tourism industry is forced to promise. Hence the grandmother's longing for the green sea foregrounds connections that come out of dispersals and invites the reader to decipher these links.

In *Castaway* relationality is achieved in the relationship with the grandmother as well as in the textual and structural dynamics. As noted above, *Castaway* expands language through rising and

[64] Meg Samuelson examines these entanglements in her article "Yvette Christiansë's Oceanic Genealogies and the Colonial Archive: Castaways and Generations from Eastern Africa to the South Atlantic". Samuelson traces tropes of dispersal and continuity "as they spool out from the eastern African region and are reassembled in the South Atlantic before rounding the Cape again to reenter the Indian Ocean" (3).

swerving movements forged by the plethora of simile. These movements form what Edouard Glissant has dubbed "open circles", circles that open up rather than enclosing.[65] The fragmentation and dispersal that constitute the structure of the text also form open circles, for they highlight how the poems echo each other, which builds volume. These open circles stand out in opposition to closed circles that the text critiques. Closed circles pertain to the domain of geography, which imposes artificially closed circles and semi circles such as hemispheres, as well as closed units of time, as in the quote "and the day closed round on itself" (100). *Castaway*'s textual circularities are what enable the movement of putting into relation.[66] This movement is one that is cognizant of the violence of representation.

The grandmother's opacity and the poet's relationship to her, their *relationality*, allows Christiansë to achieve her intended goal: they are figures of resistance. Not voicing the grandmother forms part of the struggle against the violence of representation. The violence of representation in the context of postcolonial studies means to subject the Other to violence by representing her, by speaking for her rather than giving her room to generate her own truth.[67] The violence of representation also means suppressing differences by representing them as Otherness.[68]

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[65] In glissantian thought, relationality, the open circle, the imaginary and aesthetics (with aesthetics being the expression of the imaginary) are interlinked. Glissant asserts in *Poetics of Relation* that the imaginary works in a spiral, from one circularity to the next.

[66] Open circularities in *Castaway* constitute a fertile site for the poet to engage with her grandmother's singularity. In her novel *The Story of my Teeth*, acclaimed contemporary Mexican author Valeria Luiselli takes up the prevalence of various circularities in literature. She does this by focusing on ex/centricity: what is outside of the circle. She shows that many literary rhetorical figures are related to mathematical theory such as the elliptical, the parabolic and the hyperbolic. Her emphasis on excentricity or what is outside of the circle allows us to better apprehend the potential of Glissant's "open circle". With the open circle we can conceive that there is no dismissal of the other's difference as excentric.

[67] Even without speaking for the Other, many obstacles stand in the way of hearing the Other. in her canonical essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Gayatri Spivak examines the historical and ideological factors that obstruct the possibility of being heard for those who inhabit the periphery.

[68] Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse explain in *The Violence of Representation: Literature and the History of Violence* that literary criticism at times suppresses all manner of differences by representing them as Otherness.

Christiansë points to this violence of representation by linking voicing to plundering. In "The Island Sings Its Name", voices are bestowed on mornings:

> until mornings have other voices
>
> given you by new people and new places
>
> that can take so much
>
> and only so much of things. (5)

Mornings are personified in an unusual way; they have voices, but these voices are given to them by exterior agents and the impositions are subject to change. That mornings have voices brings to the reader's mind the absence of the grandmother's voice. The implied contrast brings out that the absence of the grandmother's voice is a form of resistance to the violence of representation.

Resisting does not equate, however, with avoiding the violence of representation.[69] Rather, the poet enacts a struggle against the violence of representation by staging her uncertainty. She represents herself as hesitant in spelling her grandmother's name: "I stumble over an "e" or an "r"" (5). She also represents herself as running after and attempting to catch her birth-year:

> I'm diving
>
> in, after to catch it, hold it
>
> by its high-tempered tail
>
> in the hope of hitting pay dirt – (5)

[69] Critics Pheng Cheah and Carine Mardorossian read absences in literary texts in terms of an ethical exigency to avoid the violence of representation. See Mardorossian, "Rape and the Violence of Representation in J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*" and see Cheah, *ibid*.

The stumbling and the diving movements as well as the animalization of the date dramatize the poet's uncertainty regarding her approach (as well as the lack of historical information at her disposal) and her quandaries in representing her grandmother. The staged uncertainty serves to emphasize the struggle.

In her reflections on *Castaway,*[70] Christiansë frames the grandmother's silence as an argument with history:

> *Castaway* began with what is by now a familiar gesture for writers and theorists of anti- and postcoloniality - namely, an argument with history. This argument was staged in personal terms in that I had wanted to bring to the fore a voice for which there is no discursive place in any formal history. It was, in short, my grandmother's voice… A voice still escaped my pen… My grandmother never speaks. She never materialized despite my listening, and what I hear is utterly untranslatable… as if to say, "This is not right, this prying, no matter how much your longing pays me respect." And so, obedient, I learned to listen to this absence and now consider it a resistance". (303)

Christiansë thereby emphasizes that her initial intention was to foreground a minoritized voice, a voice that has been excluded from formal history. In the "St. Helena - Time Line" Christiansë quotes Philip Gosse and T. H. Brooke, authors of authoritative history books about the island. These books focus on discoveries and major historical figures and occlude indigenous forms of knowledge. The above-noted dispersal of the timeline undermines the authority of these authors.

Given my focus on Christiansë's struggle with the violence of representation, it must be added that literature and literary criticism can play a role in enforcing the logics of exclusion that

[70] See Christiansë, "Selections from Castaway" in *Discipline and the Other Body: Correction, Corporeality, Colonialism,* edited by Steven Pierce and Anupama Rao.

are at play in formal history.[71] *Une tempête*, Aimé Césaire's rewrite of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, brings to the fore Caliban's perspective and thus casts light on how Shakespeare's play draws its narrative structure from colonialism and dehumanizes Caliban. As literature plays a crucial role in excluding voices from formal history, Christiansë's argument with history must also be seen as an argument with canonical literature. However, as we will see below, Christiansë's poetry draws a distinction between historical narratives and literary narratives.

In conjunction with emphasizing the absence of the grandmother's voice, the poet hints at how silence signifies in her text. Uncertainty resurfaces in the title of the poem "What the Girl Who Was a Cabin Boy Heard or Said – Which Is Not Clear". The poem is both ambiguous and assertive, especially in sentences that feature the pronoun "we": "We have decided. We have arrived at this/ berth and we have decided" (56). Assertive verbs carry these sentences forward. At the same time, the referent of the pronoun "we" is unspecified. The import of the last lines is elusive:

> We are waiting to be in a
>
> privacy so inviolate that fictions are
>
> raised to converse with us, that shadows
>
> are read and deciphered to fill the
>
> clever, the final, invincible silence. (56)

"Fictions" and "decipher" denote literariness and interpretation. "Shadows" and "the towel/ to cover our eyes" in the sentence that precedes this quote point to enigmas and the detective work

[71] Gayatri Spivak in her essay "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism" shows how literature has been a vehicle of imperialism.

that readers perform in reading literary texts. To solve an enigma one must recognize the ambiguity of language. The abstract terms of the poem enable the text to claim itself as representative of literature. In that regard, the combination of ambiguity and assertion in the pronoun "we" is representative of literature's strength. On the one hand, ambiguity of language allows for freedom of interpretation. On the other hand, literature is a site wherein readers can recognize the agency of characters.[72] In the context laid out by this poem, silence signifies. The triptych "the clever, the final, invincible" that qualifies the silence underscores its power. The text gives meaning to silence by engaging with it, by pointing at its edges. Given that the poem claims itself as representative of literature, it points to literature's ability to engage with silence. Moreover, extoling silence gives fuller meaning to the grandmother's silence.

Literary ambiguity also serves to oppose founding narratives of nationhood in South Africa. In the poem "Courtship", an unnamed man is associated with geographic and historical foundational elements of nationhood in South Africa, such as the "highveldt' and a "Voortrekker" (52). The highveldt is a portion of the South African plateau. Voortrekkers were Afrikaner emigrants. During the 1830s and 1840s, Voortrekkers left the Cape colony, which was founded by the Dutch but under British rule at the time. They moved into the interior of what is now South Africa. The nameless man in "Courtship" comes uninvited to woo the granddaughter. She manifests her wariness toward him: "I don't trust him, mamma, but/ he makes his hands gentle as/ they close around things" (52). These lines suggest that his courtship aims to entrap. In the final lines of the poem, the man offers "his life, as a story" to the granddaughter. This gift, combined with the man's anonymity and his association to elements integral to nationhood in South Africa, make of him an allegory of founding narratives in South Africa. These narratives assert patriarchy;

[72] Jonathan Culler emphasizes the interaction between ambiguity and agency in *The Literary in Theory*.

they celebrate the fortitude and physical endurance of settlers and occlude their reliance on slave labor.[73] The courtship comes to stand for narrative seduction. Narratives seek out the audience's attention; they seduce in their quest to ground authority.[74] However, in emphasizing her distrust the granddaughter defies founding historical narratives. She also reinforces literature's strength by suggesting an opposition between historical narratives and literary narratives. Whereas historical narratives seduce in order to exert authority, poetic and literary narratives seduce through the promise of interpretability. The poem "Courtship" courts the reader. The anonymous man is "like a Voortrekker" but the poem also states that it is "as if he were" the biblical David. With the conjunction "as if", language recedes and inscribes improbability. The man's identity is ambiguous. The poem promises to the reader that she will derive pleasure from solving its enigmas.

*Castaway* asserts literature's capacity to suggest distinctions. In the "Sunday School" poem, the poet remembers a story that her grandmother has passed on to her, about boys defiling a young woman with a Coke bottle (or a broom, she is not certain). The poet asks:

> Do you
>
> remember that story? It has been
>
> running between my legs like blood
>
> for years. (47)

[73] In "Passing Away: The Unspeakable (Losses) of Postapartheid South Africa", Christiansë highlights the legacy of patriarchy in South Africa. She indicates that Afrikaner history begins with the landing of a predominantly male population in the Cape in 1652. She recounts: "This population established in its midst a large hostel of slaves, among whom were women who served as prostitutes to white men every evening while male slaves ran errands that included carrying the sedans of the few white settler wives to and from their social engagements. This early history is also one in which Khoi women were indentured on Dutch farms run by single white men who clearly availed themselves of these women" (385).

[74] Ross Chambers highlights these power dynamics in his book *Story and Situation: Narrative Seduction and the Power of Fiction*.

"That story" stands in contrast with "their stories", the deriding stories told by the aggressors:

> Their stories
>
> of Coloured girls' bodies that
>
> fizz like new Coke, go flat as
>
> piss and taste the same. (47)

The contrast embodied in the distinction between the adjective "that" and the possessive pronoun "their" is emphasized through the work on similes. "That story" runs between the poet's legs like blood, it suggests a flow and a form of storytelling that is matrilineal, that carries the memory of trauma and that refuses to be erased. "Their stories", however, are scoffing stories of violation in which similes have a contaminating effect, as "Coloured girls' bodies" are inhumanely compared to "new Coke" and "piss." Drawing a distinction between "that story" and "their stories" is a way of illustrating literature's potential to be a teacher of nuance.[75] In *Castaway*, wrestling with the violence of representation is a way for the text to be present to the struggles inherent in writing, reading, and studying literature. Nevertheless, to establish nuance by means of the distinction between jeering stories of assault and the story of the memory of trauma is an assertion of literature's strength. Nuance also drives the text's examination of the polysemy of the term "world".

**The Worlds of *Castaway*: Globes, Subversions, and Songs**

[75] I am borrowing the expression "teacher of nuance" from Roland Barthes. Barthes in the *The Neutral* constructs the concept of "Diaphora" which in Greek means "difference" or "disagree" and which Barthes also translates by "nuance." He explains: "Make no mistake: this is not about more intellectual sophistication. What I am looking for, during the preparation of this course, is an introduction to living, a guide to life (ethical project): I want to live according to nuance. Now, there is a teacher of nuance, literature" (11). For Barthes, the category of the "Neutral" is (a form of) ethics, it is the other of choice, of paradigm, of conflict, and it allows him to be present to the struggles of his time.

The term "world" appears frequently in *Castaway* and its meaning varies. The meaning of the world for explorers, conquerors and geographers is generally conflated with that of a globe. The text shows, nevertheless, that the world is a shifting concept even amongst their conceptions. In one of its first occurrences, the world is a space to be conquered. The poet states that the island has outlived monarchs and their proclamations, as well as the rise and fall of borders. The island has also outlived conquering marches:

> the rustle around the world
>
> as young men nuzzle their cheeks
>
> into the blue-black hips
>
> of their slender barrels of steel (6)

Rustling sounds accompany this conquest; they signify the young men's displaced attachment to their arms. The soldiers embrace their barrels of steel as if they were "slender" women with "blue-black hips". Young men equipped with weapons upon which they have transferred their desire for women have gone around the world. The world is thus a delimited space that can be circled and conquered.

For the General D'Albuquerque, the addressee of Fernão Lopez's poems, the world is a site for consumption as well as a place to be ruled. A footnote explains Lopez's exile to the reader. The General D'Albuquerque punished Lopez because he had converted to Islam and sided with Moslem resistance to the Portuguese in Goa. Several of Lopez's body parts including his tongue, ears and nose were severed. *The Lost Diaries of Fernão Lopez, The Island's First Exile* are letters to the General D'Albuquerque on the pleasures of taste and touch, on desire, solitude, and

forgiveness. The poems in these letters are lamentations but they also express Lopez's attempts to forgive the General for the ruthless imposition of his world order. According to Lopez, the General is a voyager, a soldier, and a castigator. Lopez describes the General as a "voyager of the spicy world, soldier/ of steel, maker of punishments our God/ would admire" (14). The epithet "spicy" that qualifies the "world" suggests thrill and excitement and also calls to mind exoticism, for spices are consumed in faraway places where the General has traveled. The description "voyager of the spicy world" stands in implicit contrast with "soldier of steel" and "maker of punishments". The General is steadfast in his belief that the Christian God supports his empire and that those who do not comply deserve to be chastised. Due to the firmness of his principles, Lopez also describes the General as a "great/ hero and measure of the world" (13) and as the "most measurable man" (19). The General is a "measurable" man because he is a significant man. As such he imposes his "measure of the world", his world order, an order that is aligned with a Christian God. The General's "world" according to Lopez is thus a place to be enjoyed and measured according to his principles.

The worlds of geographers and explorers are Mercatorial spaces, and the geographers and explorers also subject the world to measurements, albeit of a different nature. Vasco de Gama and Bartholomew Diaz are portrayed as "measuring the world into/ scales in a trader's warehouse" (58). The "world" for these men is conflated with a "globe";[76] it is a space that lends itself to cartography and to precise quantifications and measurements. Measuring the world into scales in a trader's warehouse seems ludicrous; this aberration suggests that the text critiques the conflation of "world" and "globe".

[76] Pheng Cheah in his article "What is a World: Toward a Normative Approach to World Literature" makes an important distinction between the "world" and the "globe". The world is a community of ideas and beings whereas the globe is a Mercatorial space. Cheah asserts that the "world" and the "globe" are often conflated.

The poems centered on Napoleon's point of view show that even within the register of a single character, the meaning of the term "world" shifts ceaselessly. Napoleon is portrayed at the end of his life, exiled on an island which he abhors and where the sound of the wind oppresses him. He doubts that his legacy will be upheld and his thoughts are dark and spiteful. His first use of the term "world" assimilates it to an object. As he summons scribes in order to dictate historiography, Napoleon visualizes his empire in a bowl:

> An empire in
>
> a bowl, in a snuff box – and how the
>
> devil had been in his sneezes as they
>
> shook the world to its miserable core. (23)

In this image the world is closely associated with Napoleon's empire and both are objectified. Saint Helena remains to this day a very removed and inaccessible island. From so far away, Napoleon gains a different perspective on his empire. He imagines it as an object small enough to fit in a bowl or snuff box. Shaking the world to its core can be read figuratively. However, in this quote the proximity that links Napoleon's objectified "empire" to the "world" invites a literal reading of the qualities he ascribes to the world. The world is an object that can be shaken to its core, an object that used to belong to him but has slipped from his grasp and now seems small.

Napoleon also expresses his worldview, and by expressing his worldview he situates himself outside of the world. His exile to Saint Helena angers him:

> But the island… God! This…
>
> nowhere. Nowhere? Sending someone

of his stature to nowhere. Swines.

The world is made up of swines, bitches,

goats and floating turds. (25)

Napoleon's contempt for the island leads him to characterize it as "nowhere". On the island, Napoleon is nowhere. He is thus outside of the world. The combination of invectives "swines, bitches, goats and floating turds" has a humorous effect which underlines that Napoleon's worldview is marked by acrimony. From his vantage point outside of the world, Napoleon expresses a worldview that not only taints but also englobes and digests the world.[77]

The "world" in another instance of Napoleon's use of the term is formed by men who are fodder for his army. Napoleon's exile is a purgatory and the endless nightmare of a rushing sleigh swoops across his memories of battles. He recalls the long line of his army and wonders: "Had there been that many men in the world?" (28). The question encapsulates his state of mind, one of doubt and resentment. The question also inscribes the "world" as a sum of men, men fought against and men enlisted in his armies.

Finally, in the poem "The Emperor Considers the Fate of His Book", Napoleon's use of the term "world" seems to designate a community of ideas and beings. In this poem a paragraph in italics interrupts one of the lines and provides information on "The Book of Fate", an ancient Egyptian manuscript found in the year 1801 in one of the royal tombs in Upper Egypt. The book was used by Napoleon and was translated into English from a German translation by H. Kirchenhoffer. Napoleon stands out in *Castaway* as the character who is most creative with

[77] For Jean-Luc Nancy, there is no outside of the world; the world is where everyone can take place. Nancy explains in *The Creation of the World or Globalization* that to express a worldview is to situate oneself outside of the world and to digest the world.

invectives. He vilifies Kirchenhoffer and refers to him as a "slime-bellied panhandler of puny proportion" (32). Napoleon bemoans Kirchenhoffer's translation, which made the book more accessible to the world. Napoleon had intended for his interest in the book to remain private: "So, Kirchenhoffer/ gives to the world a fallen Emperor's secret/ passion" (32). In this sentence the world is a community that can receive a secret.

Though the conquerors, explorers and geographers have related understandings of the "world", Napoleon's uses of the term in his purgatory cast light on the shiftiness of the concept. His last usage points to the world as a community. However the values of this community are left out. Subversions enable the text to conceptualize worlds that are communities with shared values.

Several characters and voices in *Castaway* subvert the world order imposed by explorers and cartographers. These subversions hint at an understanding of the "world" as a community of ideas and beings who share humane values such as forgiveness. An epigraph on the first page of *Castaway* states: "*Nobody is only of themselves or the moment they inhabit*". Fernão Lopez, the pupil in the geography lesson, the Dutiful Granddaughter and the Girl Who Was a Cabin Boy suggest through their subversions that they are not only of themselves or the moment they inhabit and that they are connected to the whole world.[78]

The letters of Fernão Lopez subvert the General's world order on multiple levels. Lopez strongly opposes the Christian order; he rebelliously proclaims: "And who is here to chastise my false/ astronomy, my diabolical upheaval of God's universe?" (17). Lopez subverts measurements and fixed coordinates by putting the notions of "gravity", "anchorage" and "distance" under tension. In his imaginary these notions become odd or queer:the island begins a "strange

[78] The epigraph calls to mind Edouard Glissant's concept of the "Tout-Monde" according to which the totality of the world is present to us at any given moment. See Glissant, *Traité du Tout-Monde*.

migration" (17). Lopez also queers himself by disrupting gender norms; he compares himself to "a woman/ who mourns the loss of her breasts" (14). This comparison suggests that the loss of his body parts renders his imaginary sharper, more provocative and inspired. As such, it is well-suited for causing upheaval. Anchorage, gravity, and the measure of distances all fit in "the palm of [his] hand" (17); he thus establishes a major shift in perspective. Lopez personifies the island and views it as a fellow agent of sedition: "the island has shaken itself in rage/ against its anchorage" (19). The island in Lopez's view has agency to break against the enclosure imposed by fixed coordinates.

The poem "Geography Lesson" offers a playful critique of geography and the world of geographers. A little girl (that we can relate to the poet as a child because she grew up in South Africa) is asked by her instructor the Reverend Mother to name the four furthest points of Africa and the founder of South Africa. The pupil's subversive answers are expressed in a language of shiftiness, though ellipses and dashes that signify interruptions. The shiftiness is also marked by the elongation of names "Cape Guarda-foo-ee, Cape Verrde and…" (57). The little calls Jan van Riebeeck's mother, Monica of the Coast, "Monica/of the Coat" (58). Her confusion between "coast" and "coat" orients our attention toward the mother of the "founder" of the Dutch Cape Colony. The emphasis on Monica of the Coast suggests the need for a gendered geography and goes against narratives of exploration which typically only feature men. The pupil also challenges geographical mappings and conceptualizations by stating the following about the tip of the continent: "You could stretch a man into it/ like that man in the circles" (57). This disruption relates to the critique sketched throughout the text of the world of geographers, a world of closed circles, straight lines, and precise measurements.

These subversions put in effect a displacement of the world. The world for many characters is dis-placed; it is topsy-turvy. The Dutiful Granddaughter states "Up north it's south" (82), and henceforth provokes a sense of disorientation. She also destabilizes the rigidity of space-time coordinates by asserting "Time's space is a shroud packed with everything/ from the smallest stone to me" (82). In Greenwich Mean Time, time works in tandem with space to place Europe at the center of the world by imposing European standards of time. Here the shroud of time englobes all, including space and the poet.[79] Because time englobes everything, there is no center of the world, no point from which to fix the foot of a compass.[80] These disorientations participate in grounding a distinction between the "world" and the "globe". In fact, the concept of the "globe" loses its strength. The globe is broken. We witness the endless couplings of "man and woman like a garland/ circling the broken globe" (110). From this lens, the various circumvolutions mentioned in the text such as those of the "tired birds" (13) become senseless movements.

The displacement of the imposed meaning of the "world" carves space for another form of geo-graphy, another way of writing the earth. In this poetic geography, the characters sing their sensual and erotic relationships to the cosmos. The hull ploughs and dives "as only a woman/ who keeps herself delicious/ for the moon can" (93). Some of the poems are love poems to the sea and the moon; other poems feature tumultuous romantic relationships between the elements. In a poem from *The Book of Love*, the narrator asks:

But have you seen the sea

[79] Pheng Cheah in his book *What is a World: On Postcolonial Literature as World Literature* explains that space time coordinates impose European standards of time and place Europe at the center of the world.

[80] I draw the image of the compass from the article « To World, to Globalize: World Literature's Crossroads » by Djelal Kadir. According to Kadir, the agent who "worlds" positions herself at the center of the world. Kadir compares the center of the world to the fixed foot of a compass and emphasizes that the compass imposes a globalizing circumscription.

mirror all the hours of the day

and sink into its own face at night

when the jealous sky is off elsewhere? (98)

Such a question exhorts the reader to consider the poetry of the elements and implicitly invokes odes to nature that frequently accompany lyrical traditions. This other way of writing and singing the earth inscribes itself in a tradition of lyricism that dates back to ancient Greek literature and predates modern cartography. Furthermore, in the odes and aubades in *Castaway*, the poetic language that had overtaken colonial discourse in previous poems bows down to the elements. The narrator states that her shadow disobeys her and lingers "in that northerly direction/ where fog fowls language and will not allow [her] southerly invitation, [her] antipodean promises through" (88). "Antipodean" takes on a dual meaning in this sentence. The definition of antipodes is that of places diametrically opposite each other on the globe. However, the prefix "anti" can be read as suggesting that the narrator undoes the opposition between the poles. "Antipodean" also pressures the dominance of the "North". Amidst this disorder, fog gains momentum and hunts language. This image suggests that poetic language cannot rival with the elements. However, the alliteration "fog fowls" enables poetic language to assert its strength even as it reflects on its limitations.

The displacement of the imposed meaning of the "world" also allows for the emergence of a different meaning of the world; this meaning is that of the "whole world" hinted at by the epigraph. In the "Geography Lesson" poem, Hollywood dreams erupt and interrupt the enumeration of the African capes:

Hollywood dreams come through

long-dead stars, Brylcreamed hair,

who sang women into the fullness

of their undergarments. (57)

These lines avowedly express a critique of globalization. Hollywood is notorious for spreading ideals of beauty that are unrealistic and corrosive to women's self-image. The mention of "Brylcreamed hair" critiques Hollywood's promotion of artificial products. Nevertheless, despite their deleterious effects, Hollywood dreams connect people throughout the world by providing a shared frame of reference.

Fernão Lopez's exile paradoxically exacerbates his sense of being connected to other parts of the world. Lopez laments that had he a tongue he would "learn every story and song from every/ leaf" (13). Leaves are blown in to the island of Saint Helena and carry stories and songs from faraway places. Lopez calls forth "those places/ where a man can forget the body of Christ/ to savour instead the delight of dancing" (15). By invoking places where one can relish in dancing, Lopez breaks out of the moment he inhabits, that of imposed penance. Deprived of his tongue, Lopez composes musings inflected with synesthesia:

I have learnt

that words must be like fruit – each a taste,

each an ingredient for a palate in need of

refreshment: "ocean", an orange from Tangier (13)

Lopez associates the "ocean" with an "orange from Tangier" and hence connects the vast ocean that surrounds him with a specific city. The link between "distance and desire" (16) subtends all of Lopez's poems. On the one hand, the distance that separates him from the rest of the world

renders his desire more acute. On the other hand, Lopez collapses distance by composing poems that interconnect different parts of the world. Lopez's poetry of interconnected places also voices a quest for the ability to forgive. Some days the places he has lost "cut and sting" (19) Lopez. But on other days he "welcome[s] the buckshot that blows from the/ smallest blossom" (20) and "approache[es] something that is close to forgiveness" (20). Lopez thereupon seeks to forge a sense of belonging to a world formed by humane values. Displacing and disorienting the worlds of cartographers allow the rebellious characters to envision a "whole-world" that connects people and places. The text is also self-reflexive and ponders on the means it uses to sing the world into being.

*Castaway* offers a *mise-en-abyme* of how poetry can sing the world into being. The poem "Headwind" from *The Prayer Books of the Girl Who Was a Cabin Boy* suggests a parallel between "the great moment of a throat's opening" (108) and "the right opening" (108) formed by "the crook where two/ journeying mounds of soil meet short of merging but make a vacant place" (108). The vacant place formed by the mounds of soil reminds us that an opening is necessary for the world to create itself.[81] Likewise, the "throat's opening" is necessary for the song of poetry to erupt because the song comes out of the throat. This implied parallel sets the stage for showing how poetry sings the world into being. Indeed, from the "throat's opening" emerges the "Headwind", or the voice that calls the world into being.[82] The voice calls the world forth, calls the world into existence. There is no world without the voice. If the throat did not open there would be only nothingness.

[81] Jean-Luc Nancy in *The Creation of the World or Globalization* shows that the world is created from an opening.

[82] Other poems such as Wallace Stevens's "The Snow Man" achieve similar *mise-en-abyme*. German philosopher Martin Heidegger demonstrates in *Poetry, Language, Thought* how Rainer Maria Rilke's poetry sings the world into being.

The song of poetry in *Castaway* is a conceptual category that comprehends poetic language but also emphasizes the senses involved in producing and receiving songs. The song of poetry not only calls the world forth, it also sings love and foregrounds sensuality. The poem "Headwind" suggests that the song of poetry pertains to:

> a wish to be
>
> elsewhere, to speak freely, each word, each
>
> letter, the vowels that love the intricacies of
>
> a mouth (108)

The sounds of vowels lovingly entangle themselves with the mouth and this sensual relationship emerges as a condition for speaking freely. Additionally, what motivates the character called "The Girl Who Was a Cabin Boy" to open her throat is her desire to "feel the soft, the tender coil of an inner ear, perhaps/ hers as she receives my message of love" (108). These lines describe in intimate terms an intimate part of the body, the coil of an inner ear. The juxtaposition of the adjectives "soft" and "tender" inscribes an erotic relation to the ear. The poem thus emphasizes that the song of poetry seeks a receptive ear.

We can further assess the concept of the song of poetry by drawing a contrast with songs of conquest in *Castaway*. The two share features, they strive to seduce with sounds. However, rigidity bears its mark on songs of conquest; they lack vitality and the capacity for self-renewal. In the opening poem of *Castaway* we hear "an old marching tune through the mane/ of a stiff dead horse" (3). The image of a stiff dead horse conveys the lackluster sonority of the marching tune. The island has outlived

the litany of elegies flickering briefly

in living-rooms between one bracket

of Ads and another, one mouthful

and another. (6)

We can read "the litany of elegies" as a form of song of conquest because these lines are part of an evocation of the proclamations of monarchs and the rise of borders. Similarly to the marching tune, the elegies are dull. The alignment of mouthfuls with brackets of ads accentuates that the effects of elegies are limited; these songs do not resound beyond confined spaces. The implicit contrast with songs of conquest allows *Castaway* to put forward that the song of poetry rather than flickering briefly resonates forcefully.

While *Castaway* sings the world into being, the text also, conversely, produces a sense of being outside of the world. Passengers of the hull are represented as "falling over the edge/ of the world" (66), which leads the reader to wonder: what does it mean to fall over the edge of the world? The answer lies in the song of the hull, but before elucidating this answer it is necessary to probe what constitutes the song of the hull and how it relates to the song of poetry. The poem "The Enlightenment Sees Its Face in a Different Light" vocalizes the sounds of the hull: "to fart and crap, to sweat and howl, these/sounds that grow into the hull's own song" (67). "Howl" is a verb that denotes the sound it makes because the sound "h" stems from the flow of air coming from an open glottis and because the vowel sound "ow" marks elongation. The glottal, velar and uvular sounds in this quote all contribute to a sense of depth, either from the throat, or from the movement of the back of the tongue to the uvula or the palate. These sounds are said to grow, which confirms the claim I made in the first section that *Castaway* expands poetic language. The song of the hull

is a manifestation of the song of poetry that differs from odes to the earth and songs of love. The song of the hull is formed by sounds of profound discomfort that swell and fill out the hull.

For the poet Rita Dove, poetry conveys a sense of being in the world;[83] the opposite occurs in this poem. With the enjambment "falling over the edge/ of the world" (66), the rhythm of the song is interrupted. The world falls over the edge of the line in a movement that mimics slaves falling over the edge of the world. The enjambment thus underscores the harshness and alienation of falling off the edge of the world. The song of the hull conveys a sense of being outside of the world in that it highlights the violence of the exclusion of the slaves. The title of the poem suggests a common critique of the false profession of Enlightenment ideas that on the one hand promoted ideals of freedom and universalism and on the other hand justified slavery. There is no room for the slaves; they cannot take place in the world. The world of the Enlightenment is "immonde".[84] Indeed this world is an "un-world" because it has lost the capacity to "form a world".

As an "un-world", the world of the Enlightenment diverges from the world that is sung into being by poetry. The self-reflexivity of the songs of *Castaway* serves to constantly question the meanings and uses of the term "world" as well as to sing a more humane world. Time, an integral component of the world,[85] is also a concept teased out by *Castaway*.

**Literary Haunting: Othering the Present and Singing Incompleteness**

[83] Dove in her collection of essays *The Poet's World* reflects on the poetic elements that contribute to the song of her poetry inspired by jazz and which include shifting word patterns, syncopation through internal rime and enjambment, cadence, dropped lines and non sequiturs. Dove stresses that this song expresses a sense of being in the world. 2016 MacArthur Fellow poet Claudia Rankine titles her book of poetry and criticism on racism and imagination in contemporary America *Citizen: An American Lyric* to accentuate the song of poetry.

[84] I am borrowing the concept of the "*immonde*" from Jean-Luc Nancy. See Nancy, *ibid*.

[85] The etymology of the term "world" indicates its proximity to the term "time". The online etymology dictionary explains that "worold" in Old English means "human existence, the affairs of life" and "a long period of time".

Amongst the various books that compose *Castaway*, "*Chronicles of the Hull*" and other poems relate the experience of the Middle Passage, thus emphasizing that Saint Helena was a port of call of the slave trade; they produce a literary haunting. In these poems, "time" is a recurring concept. By examining its occurrences, I show that the text sets forth time as a concept containing contradictory aspects. In the poem "Memorial", time firstly appears as part of the idiom "time and again" and hence has a cyclical dimension. The narrator of the poem, a passenger of the hull, addresses M. Souza (described in italics above the poem as the great chief of the slave trade at Wydah) and urges him to "cast the bone of a wing which has perished/ time and again" (72). The wing repeatedly succumbs to M. Souza; time repeats and extends itself as the divide between the chief and the slaves intensifies. This divide is connected to the different types of cast-aways in the poem. The slaves are castaways but the poem also draws an opposition between what M. Souza can cast away and the "stench" of "public evacuation" (72) that the slaves cannot cast away. In another instance in the same poem, "time" is a noun and designates a bounded time period. Confined in the hull where bodily secretions fester, the narrator wants to remember "a time before night became this eternal shame of public/evacuation" (72). Time can be divided up into periods; the catastrophe of the Middle Passage marks a demarcating line for the slaves. Time is thus both cyclical and discontinuous within the same poem.

Additionally, the text presents the process of time going by from contrasting angles. The poem "Middle Passage" from *The Prayer Books of the Girl Who Was a Cabin Boy* conveys a sense of stillness. The anaphora "Nothing moves" (74) sets the tone. In this poem, time does not pass: "The day hangs/ flat. It will not pass./ Like disaster" (74). The day is stretched. This indicates that

time accumulates instead of passing.[86] Likening the day that hangs flat to disaster allows the text to suggest that the disaster of the Middle Passage also accumulates. The disaster of the Middle Passage repeats itself. The poem concludes by reiterating that time does not pass: "Nothing passes, not even yesterday's/ bright moon" (74). Repetition in the poem mimics the accumulation of time. A broken mirror achieves the same effect: "the mirror/ grows" (74). By contradistinction, time does pass in the poem "In the Wake" from *Letters from a Dutiful Granddaughter*. The first lines of a paragraph in italics that seems to offer introductory narration to the poem state: "*Days, weeks passed, and under easy sail,/ the ivory Pequod had slowly swept across/ four several cruising-grounds*" (81). The "ivory Pequod" is a clue as to the source of these words; they are a quote from *Moby Dick*. The quote is woven in and becomes part of the fabric of the text. The contrast with the slow leisurely time experienced by the whalers accentuates the stillness of time experienced by the slaves.

The contradictory aspects of time are most salient in the poem "In the Wake". In this poem the Granddaughter announces her mission to "make dead seas change into something rich and strange" (82) and thereby redeem the past. The title of this poem can refer to a metaphorical watch by the lost bodies of the slaves. It can also refer to the state of being awake; the abstract sentences stir the mind and awaken the readers to reconceive their relationship to the past. The poet elusively declares: "The slow sweep of years already" (83). The opposition between the adjective "slow" and the adverb "already" is bolstered by the absence of verbs in the sentence and brings out a contradiction in the conception of time. A similar contradiction appears again a few stanzas below:

[86] The notion that time does not pass but accumulates is one of the central arguments of Ian Baucom's work *Specters of the Atlantic*. In order to show that the massacre of the Zong repeats itself, Baucom relies on Walter Benjamin's concept of "now-time" wherein time extends, survives or repeats itself. Viewing time as not passing but accumulating allows Baucom to set forth texts such as *Omeros* by Derek Walcott, *Feeding the Ghosts* by Fred D'Aguiar, Morrison's *Beloved*, Glissant's *Poetics of Relation*, Philip's *Zong!* as exemplifying a black Atlantic philosophy of history which is not concerned with recapturing the past but rather with reconceiving the present.

"so quickly from long ago" (83). Further compounding these contradictions is the puzzling statement "The thing is. All this time" (83). The adjective "all" indicates a big quantity or amount of time. However the preceding sentence is interrupted after the verb "is" and suggests a disjuncture which carries over and introduces a disconnection within the notion of bountiful time. The poet's quest for the locality of years adds another layer to the mystery. The poet wants to "find the place that years come from" (81) and searches for "an unstaked locality south of years" (83). This elusive and shifting relationship between place and years foregrounds disjointedness.

The contradictory nature of time implies a specific relationship between the past and the present, or more precisely, a specific understanding of the present. The past is not separate from the present,[87] nor does the past necessarily repeat itself in the present.[88] Rather, when time contradicts itself and is disjointed, the present is othered. The discord within the present makes room for relation to others.[89] In the *Chronicles of the Hull*, the othered present is a site for engaging with memories of the slaves, the castaways of history. The present moment of the poet is an othered present. The othered present is also a privileged site for recognizing incompleteness in the representation of the past.

[87] According to Stephen Best, we need to recognize the alterity of the slave past. See Best, "On Failing to Make the Past Present".

[88] For Ian Baucom, the past is intensified in the present, the massacre of the Zong is intensified in our era of high finance capitalism. See Baucom, *ibid*.

[89] I am drawing here from Derrida's seminal analysis of the line "The time is out of joint" in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Time, Derrida explains, is the coordinating of presents (the present past, the present now, and the present future). With his famous statement, Hamlet introduces a disjunction in the coordination of the presents. - And when as Derrida puts it, the "being-with-oneself" or the "concord of time" is discorded, space is opened for the relation to others. Derrida asserts that by declaring "The time is out of joint", Hamlet is speaking in the space opened by the question of the relation to others that Levinas writes about. See Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, The Work of Mourning & the New International*.

*Castaway* sings incompleteness in its representation of the Middle Passage. The poet remembers the slaves as they remember what they left behind.[90] She declares "I'll be a good ship" (82), thus undergoing a becoming, the process through which a writer transforms in order to have access to the experience she is writing about.[91] The poet further proclaims: "I'll sing through things, make dead seas change/ into something rich and strange" (82). With these words she attributes a redemptive dimension to her text and suggests that the song of poetry can transform the past in our memory.[92] Notwithstanding this redemptive dimension, the poet also figures her limitations and describes herself as "a woman with birds stabbing the backs of her salt-sharp eyes" (84). This image invokes the memories of the hull, which do not stem from her own lived experience but which nevertheless make themselves present to her. The birds stabbing the backs of her eyes thus stand for the avowed fallibility of her representation. The implications of this image can be brought into sharper focus through a comparison with Arthur Rimbaud's notion of the poet as "*voyant*".[93] For Rimbaud, the poet is marginal and reveals the unknown to his audience, a "*long et raisonné dérèglement de tous les sens*" gives the poet lucidity and deepened understanding of the human condition. By contrast, the poet in *Castaway* while undergoing a becoming also foregrounds the incompleteness of her representation of the Middle Passage.

The poet's work points at the impossibility of giving shape to ghosts. Ghosts appear frequently in the "*Chronicles of the Hull*". One of them "in its infinite loss./Ask[s] for a shape"

[90] The "deep down there" (61) of the throat of the passengers of the hull calls to mind Edouard Glissant's concept of the abyss. In *Poetics of Relation*, Glissant describes the experience of the abyss in the boat, the ocean and the unknown of which the descendants of slaves share the memory, and this shared memory constitutes Relation. A notable difference however between *Castaway* and *Poetics of Relation* is that in Castaway the poet figures herself in her representation of the hull.

[91] This becoming is theorized by Gilles Deleuze in *Essays Critical and Clinical*.

[92] This stance differs from Sadiya Hartman's melancholy approach to the memory of slavery. See Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route*.

[93] See Rimbaud, "Lettre à Paul Demeny (dite Lettre du voyant)".

(83). This is a demand the poet takes to task. However, she purposely does not carry it through to completion. Rather, she points at the difficulty of this task through an imaged comparison: "A spider pulling stone together makes/ more noise than a spirit leaving a body" (64). Ghosts and spirits by definition are never fully present. This image (in which the infinitesimal amount of noise produced by a spider is higher than that emitted by a spirit) thus allows the reader's mind to grasp a difficult concept; it points at what simultaneously is and isn't present to us.[94]

In its engagement with ghosts, the text mobilizes the song of poetry to perform a literary haunting. The expansion of language examined above is achieved here through echoes amidst the poems. For example, the "sheeps' tongues" (81) cut by grass echo "the tongues of a thousand/ shrikes whose songs go dull in the cavern of your belly" (72). The play with language also expands poetic language. In the poem "A Dictionary of Survival", the poet plays with the letters of the alphabet:

> Remember R growls twice in remembrance –
>
> once for forward and again at the gate across backward,
>
> and D is for devils who keep P for punishment
>
> under their fingernails for special days. (71)

In this passage the creativity of the poet subverts the alphabet of the language that was imposed on the slaves. The passage hints at the loss that came with the cutting of ties, the punitive dimension of Christianity, and the constant interaction between remembering and forgetting. In the alphabet

[94] Derrida in his assessment of Karl Marx's legacy offers a very productive concept for engaging with representations of the Middle Passage and which M. Nourbese Philip takes up in the Notanda of *Zong!*. This concept is that of the "hauntology". Derrida defines "hauntology" in relation to "ontology". "Ontology" is the study of being, whereas "hauntology" is the study of what simultaneously is and isn't. The image of the spider making more noise than a spirit is thus a literary rendition of Derrida's "hauntology". See Derrida, *ibid*.

game of this poem, the narrator gives injunctions for survival: "O is for Obedience – begin by disobeying your lungs" (71). The shift from "obedience" to its antonym brings out the atrocity of the Middle Passage; the obedience inculcated in the slaves disregarded the primary needs of their bodies. The shifts between words associated to the same letters also emphasize the horror. The poem states that "the C of cattle" must not be confused with "the C of Christ who smiles/ at us all" (71), thus pointing at how slaves were constantly caught in a bind that simultaneously conferred and took away humanity from them. They were responsible for learning Christian principles which implied they were viewed as humans, but in order for their labor to be stolen from them they were viewed as cattle. Although the experience of the hull is a "nightmare" which "will not stop now or forever" (71), the creativity of language brings pleasure to the audience of the poem. This interplay between nightmare and pleasure produces the literary haunting. The poetic language of *Castaway* haunts not by calling absence into presence but by othering the present, by highlighting dissonance.[95]

To conclude, Christiansë makes ethical gestures throughout *Castaway* by guaranteeing the Other's status as ungraspable, by calling for an inclusive definition of the world, and by othering the present to foreground the others of history, the slaves. The text expands poetic language by staging a conflict over naming representative of a struggle between poetic language and colonial and imperial discourse. Poetic language uses simile as a weapon to overthrow colonial and imperial discourse. The increased interpretive possibilities enabled by poetic language convey the grandmother's opacity which in turn allows for the poet to establish a relational relationship with

[95] Rita Felski considers that literature has the capacity to haunt by turning absence into presence. In *Uses of Literature* Felski writes "Literature seems akin to sorcery in its power to turn absence into presence, to summon up spectral figures out of the void, to conjure images of hallucinatory intensity and vividness, to fashion entire worlds into which the reader is swallowed up" (63).

her grandmother. The text also foregrounds the ambiguity of language while also claiming itself as representative of literature's capacity to make distinctions between different types of narratives. *Castaway* shows that the world is a shifting concept and subverts the worlds of geographers to allow for a more humane world. *Castaway* also sings the world into being and sings a sense of being outside of the world. Finally, *Castaway* makes time contradict itself and hence others the present moment of the poet. Her present moment becomes a privileged site for singing incompleteness in her representation of the slave past. The "diagnosis" of the world in *Castaway* thus occurs in two senses of the term. In a medical sense, "diagnosis" is the process of determining by examination the nature and circumstances of a diseased condition. *Castaway* examines the nature and circumstances of the process of exclusion of the cast-aways of history, from the slaves to her grandmother. *Castaway* also diagnoses the world in the etymological sense of the term; it proposes knowledge of the world. More specifically, *Castaway* shows how literature provides tools to establish an ethical relationship with the Other and with the world. In the following chapter, "Demanding a Just World in Shenaz Patel's *Le silence des Chagos*", I will examine how *Le silence des Chagos* sets forth the normative dimension of literature, that is, its capacity to effect change and to enable the recognition of human rights.

## CHAPTER TWO: DEMANDING A JUST WORLD IN SHENAZ PATEL'S *LE SILENCE DES CHAGOS*

*What kind of bodies are moveable*
*and feasts. What color are visions.*

- Morgan Parker

The year is 1963, the British colony of Mauritius is five years away from becoming an independent nation. Charlesia, one of the protagonists of Shenaz Patel's 2005 novel *Le silence des Chagos*, leads a peaceful life in Diego Garcia, a small, island territory of Mauritius located in the Chagos Archipelago in the Indian Ocean. The Chagossians described in the novel are mostly self-sufficient. The administrator distributes tasks every day. Most people are assigned work in the coconut plantations; a large part of the harvest is exported to Mauritius. The coconuts provide sustenance and their shells serve as material to make tools, as well as toys for their children. The sweet fragrances of the juicy coconuts fill the air. Abundant fish make for an essential component of the diet of the Chagossians. Charlesia is at one with the green-blue sea of the coral atoll; the white foam licks her ankles while she catches fish. She occasionally hosts sega events during which the community comes together to dance.[96] After her husband falls ill in 1967, her family travels to

[96] Sega is a syncretic Indian Ocean musical genre that emerged on the colonial plantations of the 17th and 18th centuries through encounters between enslaved laborers with diverse ancestral origins. In Chagos, segas – singing, playing, and dancing to sega music - were an occasion for entire island communities to gather. See Jeffery and Rotter, "Safeguarding sega: transmission, inscription, and appropriation of Chagossian intangible cultural heritage".

Port-Louis and stays with relatives there to allow him to consult a doctor. Charlesia is told at the harbor in Port-Louis that she cannot return to Diego Garcia, that her island has been closed. "Do these fools think the island is a restaurant?" she wonders. The closure of the island is inconceivable. The empty sea marks an imprint on her retinae. She repeatedly returns to the port to await the ship. She attempts to will the ship into presence by summoning it with the fibers of her body. In Port-Louis, the mass of basalt of the mountains amplifies the sounds of traffic, rancid oils permeate the air, dust seeps into her pores, the rain hits the corrugated iron of the roof of her home. The remaining Chagossians are forcibly displaced to Mauritius and the Seychelles. They live in slums, struggle to find work, experience severe depression, many of them die of "lasagrin" (118) or sadness. Years pass; Charlesia keeps returning to the port. With her eyes she draws the ship that will bring her back home.

Charlesia's character in the novel is based on the real person Charlesia Alexis, an activist and singer born in 1934 in Diego Garcia, and who passed away in 2012 in Crawley, United Kingdom. Charlesia and her people, a population of about 2000 Chagossians, were held in the dark about the British and U.S. collusion to oust them from their native land. The U.S. wanted to secure a military base that would offer a favorable climate and a strategic place in the middle of the Indian Ocean.[97] A central concern for the U.S. was that the local population could be easily removed

[97] The historical context I recount here is drawn from the work of anthropologist David Vine who conducted fieldwork in Mauritius and has written extensively on the Chagossians. In his book *Island of Shame: The Secret History if the U.S. Military Base on Diego Garcia*, which is as much about the Chagossian people as about the military base, Vine explains that Navy planner Stuart Barber after having gathered and examined charts of islands in the Indian Ocean found that Diego Garcia was a good fit for what he called the "Strategic Island Concept". Concerned that traditional base sites located in populous mainland areas were vulnerable to local non-Western opposition, he decided that island naval bases would allow for maintaining military dominance during the era of decolonization and of the Cold War. He noted that the small v-shaped island was removed from potential conflict zones, had enough land to build a large airstrip, and was a great natural harbor in its protected lagoon. In his view, Diego Garcia's population was small and hence insignificant. The British agreed to handle the removal because their influence was waning in the Indian Ocean and they were interested in forging an alliance with the U.S. to strengthen economic partnerships.

without provoking international rebuke. The British agreed to handle the removal of the Chagossians and to pressure Mauritius into handing over Diego Garcia in exchange for its independence. They created the British Indian Ocean Territory, or BIOT, in 1966 to enable the transfer. This plot was kept secret from the Chagossians and from the world because the removal went against UN regulations that guaranteed the right to self-determination. The Americans and the British claimed that the Chagossians were only seasonal workers when, in fact, the Chagossian people had inhabited the island for almost two hundred years. Initially imported as slaves from Africa and later joined by indentured laborers mainly from India but also from Europe and China, the Chagossians had forged a distinct culture and spoke their own Creole.[98] The expulsions were conducted between 1968 and 1973. The first tactic did not involve physical force but power: Chagossians who had traveled to Mauritius to visit relatives or to see doctors were told that they could not return. The remaining Chagossians were forcibly expelled. They had witnessed their dogs being gassed and burned in the coprah oven; they feared that the same treatment would be inflicted upon them. In Mauritius their abject poverty and the anguish of displacement have led to high rates of alcoholism, drug addiction, and suicide.[99] Though they have been offered infinitesimal compensation and have not been allowed to return home, the Chagossians keep struggling for their rights through protests and legal battles.[100] Scholars and journalists who study

[98] David Vine writes in his essay "From the Birth of the Ilois to the 'Footprint of Freedom': a History of Chagos and the Chagossians" in *Eviction from the Chagos Islands* that enslaved people from Africa, brought to Diego Garcia by Franco Mauritians, became the first settlers in Chagos in 1783. More enslaved Africans followed forced to work on the expanding plantations in Chagos. After the abolition of slavery, they were later joined by indentured laborers from India, as well as by a few with European and Chinese ancestry. Overly nearly two hundred years, the diverse mixture of peoples, religions and traditions merged to create a distinct society in Chagos.

[99] See Jeffery and Vine, "Sorrow, Sadness and Impoverishment: The Lives of Chagossians in Mauritius" in *Eviction from the Chagos Islands*.

[100] These legal battles have mostly involved facing walls. Journalist John Pilger's documentary "Stealing a Nation" critiques what he terms as the UK's disregard for its own institutions. A UK court ruling in favor of the Chagossians was overturned by royal decree in 2004. Further working against them, as Lionnet points out in *The Known and the Uncertain,* is the pretext of ecology. In April 2010, five years after the publication of Patel's text, the Foreign and

the displacement of the Chagossians have critiqued U.S. and British power and have examined the Chagossian collective identity and their self-conception as a people.[101] They delve into the effects of the displacement and assess how the Chagossians respond to the denial of their existence as a people, as well as the significance of their efforts to reclaim their island. Patel's text intervenes in these discussions from a literary angle.[102] More specifically, her novel engages with the following questions: How was the shock of not being able to return to their home experienced by the Chagossians? How do they conceive of the instrumentalization of their history? How do the ways in which they articulate their demands for justice make us rethink conceptions of agency? The most striking contribution of her novel is its use of language to create images that explore the subjectivity and affect of the Chagossians.

*Le silence des Chagos* (hereafter *Le silence*) is a documentary fiction that offers a mediated account of the Chagossian experience of displacement.[103] The text opts for historical accuracy in documenting the facts of the people's displacement and the negation of their right to stay in their native land but exerts creative license in accessing their interiority. *Le silence* centers on the experiences of Charlesia and Désiré. The novel is set in Diego Garcia and Mauritius. The

Commonwealth Secretary David Miliband announced the creation of a Marine Protected Area (MPA) in the British Indian Ocean Territory of Chagos, which pits the Chagossians against hypocritical environmental policies. The Chagossians had not been harmful to their environment.

[101] The essays in the collection *Eviction from the Chagos Islands: Displacement and Struggle for Identity Against Two World Powers* edited by Sandra Evers and Mary Kooy cover a wide range of perspectives and are shaped by historical, anthropological, and legal frameworks.

[102] Other literary and artistic productions inspired by the Chagossian experience include *Rôde Parole* by Khal Torabully and the documentary film "Diego L'interdite" in which Patel participated.

[103] By "documentary fiction" I mean that the novel documents the historical events with accuracy while taking creative licence in probing the subjectivity of the Chagossians. I borrow the term from Françoise Lionnet's description of the text in *The Known and the Uncertain*.

chronology is disjointed. The first sections of the novel are headed by the location (either Diego Garcia or Port-Louis) and dates (in this order, 1968, 1963, 1967, 1973). The text revolves around Charlesia's visits to the port and juxtaposes her experiences of alienation in Port-Louis with recollections of her quiescent life in Diego Garcia. The absence of the ship in the sea embodies her trauma. In the second half of the novel we meet Désiré. This young man was born on the vessel *Nordvaer* during the last deportations from Mauritius to Diego Garcia in 1973. He has been told very little about the history of his people; he embarks on a quest for knowledge. His affects and his imagination become his main sources for knowledge.[104] He finds work on a ship in an endeavor to get to know the sea that birthed him. The sea violently thrusts him around and rejects him. Inspired by archives he obtains from Norway, he imagines the crossing from the *Nordvaer*'s tormented perspective and hence redeems the ship. When he meets Charlesia, she fills many of the gaps for him. She tells him that the Chagossians were bartered in exchange for Mauritian independence, explains to him that the history of their ancestors was denied and recounts the protests she led, which included hunger strikes and occupying the British High Commission.

Patel imagines how the events were experienced by the Chagossians and their children born in Mauritius as well as how they conceive of the collusion against them and their agency. In this chapter, I argue that the text participates in the Chagossians' demands for justice by imagining the subjectivity, affects, and cognitive activity of Charlesia and Désiré. The premise of this chapter is that literature performs the sociocultural work of human rights discourse. In other words, literature makes human rights more legible. I draw this premise from the work of Joseph Slaughter, who underscores that by giving us access to the interiority of characters literature allows us to

[104] My use of the term "affects" in the plural is drawn from Gilles Deleuze's *Essays Critical and Clinical*. He describes affects as "not simply effects of the body, but veritable critical entities" (124).

develop empathy for them and thus recognize their autonomy. He argues that literature and human rights discourse share much of the same conceptual vocabulary. One such shared concept is plotting.[105] Indeed, the right to self-determination is the right to write, or plot, the course of one's life. In the first section I show that the text invites us to expand our understanding of "plotting" by foregrounding affect as an experience that produces meaning and allows characters to claim their human right to know and to plot or plan the course of their lives. In the second section, I turn to ways in which the text interrogates the violent logics of dispossession that undo human rights. By establishing a conduit between the works of Slaughter and Judith Butler, I am able to examine how *Le silence* both points out exclusions from the community of humans with rights and traces a genealogy of these exclusions. In the third and final section, I borrow from Jean-Luc Nancy's philosophical aesthetics and Françoise Lionnet's understanding of "world-forming" in order to locate the literary forms that carve out a space for the coming into being of a "world" in *Le silence*. I argue that by opposing the phenomenological places of Mauritius and Diego Garcia, the text stresses the lack of common ground between the two worlds and the denial of justice. By recounting Chagossian activism, the narrative serves as a concrete tribute to the human practice of resistance and the demand for a just world.

## "Le droit de savoir": Human Rights Plots

In *Le silence*, the high frequency of verbs such as "savoir," "connaître," "comprendre" and "expliquer" indicate that the protagonist Désiré is on a knowledge quest that simultaneously calls for a rethinking of our modes of knowing. He tells his mother that he has "le droit de savoir" (112) and the narrative will specifically foreground affect as a mode of knowing. His claiming the right

[105] Slaughter adopts the definition proffered by Peter Brooks in his canonical study *Reading for the Plot*. For Brooks, plot is "the design and intention of narrative, what shapes a story and gives it a certain direction or intent or meaning" (xi).

to know or plot his life takes the form of a quest that is full of obstacles. Désiré's knowledge quest is precipitated by a leitmotif; the interplay between literary craft and the right to self-determination is embedded in this leitmotif. Knowledge is withheld from Désiré who has not been told the story behind his nickname. His aunts nickname him "Nord" after the ship "Nordvaer" on which he was born in 1973 during his family's forced displacement from Diego Garcia to Mauritius. His mother, Raymonde, is reluctant to explain to him what she herself does not fully understand. Désiré is drawn toward discussions that he is not privy to: "Son oreille avait été attirée par des discussions animées au salon, des bribes revenant en leitmotiv autour des mots 'retour', 'compensation'" (84). With the term "leitmotif", the text calls our attention toward its own craft and the formal coherence of plotting. The literary text is constructed in such a way as to give the reader elements from which to build meaning. As Peter Brooks points out in *Reading for the Plot*, readers build meaning from variation within repetition. The use of the term "leitmotif" in the narrative also orients our reading toward the leitmotifs that unfold in the text. The repetition of images linked to eyes, the iris, pupil, retina, and eyelid invite us to think about different ways of seeing in the metaphorical sense (ways of seeing to which we will return). These leitmotifs make the reader receptive to the parallels between Désiré's plotting activity and the text's plot. Hearing repeated conversations that revolve around the terms "return" and "compensation" allows Désiré to begin to plot his life. Indeed, through hearing about two major preoccupations of his people, he begins the process of giving coherence to his past.

*Le silence*, however, eludes well-ordered coherence. The text partially keeps the reader in the dark, thereby giving a sense of the darkness in which the Chagossians were held. Raymonde recalls that she was forced out of the island at night time: "Que la nuit tombe, pour qu'ils ne puissent pas voir ce qu'ils quittaient" (99). Figurative and literal darkness characterize her

experience. In this context, Désiré's quest involves fumbling in the dark. The non-chronological narrative mirrors how Désiré gives shape to his life story. Neither is well ordered. The narrative is not linear.[106] The analepses are not clearly introduced. Muddled transitions convey a sense of disorder. One section begins with Raymonde wondering how to explain to her dear son "ces eaux qu'elle n'a pu endiguer" (88), or the flow of rage she has not been able to stem. The ensuing section begins by mentioning the biological waters of her pregnancy. These waters link the two sections but they do not provide narrative logic. Though many years separate the diegeses that are the foci of each of these two sections, the present tense is used in both. The lack of a clear transition leaves the reader to speculate as to whether Raymonde shares the recounted experiences with Désiré or not. The narrative present both immerses the reader in Raymonde's experience and suggests that Raymonde does not exert narrative mastery over her past. The befuddling and intricate transition hence indicates that there is a misalignment between Raymonde's meaning-making activity and the reader's. This misalignment heightens the reader's awareness of plotting while suggesting that this text's plot does not involve a well-ordered story.

*Le silence* is self-reflexive and points to varied modalities of making sense. When Désiré exclaims "Ça ne rime même pas !" (147), he is figuratively stating that what he is being told makes no sense. Through the interplay between the literal and figurative referents of this expression, the text indicates that sounds shape meaning. The text also hints at the role of musicality by frequently evoking rhythm and notes, be it the caressing and resounding rhythm of the sea or the menacing echo of the notes of the malakapo instrument. Through these references, the text subtly suggests that its own cradling rhythm, which stems from crystalline sentences composed of smoothly

[106] In constructing a disordered life story, Désiré's process departs from that of the hero of the *Bildungsroman* discussed by Slaughter. Slaughter writes: "The social patronage of the Tower becomes a form of narrative sponsorship that guarantees the apparently disordered events of Wilhem's life in fact have inherent meaning because they can be given meaning in a well-ordered life story – that can be plotted, naturally, as a *Bildungsroman*" (102).

concatenated clauses, might increase its potential to jolt the reader. The text calls for seeking meaning outside of a linear narrative, such as through affect.

In attending to how Désiré builds meaning from affect, the text creates images to respond to the representational challenges posed by affect. Raymonde's reluctance sparks in Désiré the unformed feeling of a closed eyelid that resists being opened: "Le sentiment, indéfini, d'une paupière fermée qu'on ne vient pas insolemment soulever" (84). This feeling he cannot define is a first instance of Désiré's affective meaning-making. His mother's closed eyelid suggests inwardness.[107] He senses that his mother is protecting herself in not telling him the story behind his nickname. Affect appears here as an undefined feeling. Frederic Jameson posits that affect denotes precisely those feelings or emotions which have not yet been defined and categorized.[108] Despite this unformed feeling expressed through the image of a closed eyelid, Désiré requests more information from his mother. His requests are met with silence: "De grands pans de silence se posaient sur ses lèvres et ses yeux" (87). The unusual expression "grands pans de silence" implies that silence can be sliced, it makes an aural phenomenon material and situates meaning on the edge of silence, thus accruing the significance of the title of the text. Raymonde's overwhelming silence spreads over her face. The sentence hence conveys a sense of the force of the resistance Désiré is facing. Désiré also notes that his mother's eyes do not reflect him. Instead, he sees something else, which he cannot quite describe: "Un vague frémissement au fond de ses prunelles, comme l'air humide qui tremble au-dessus de l'asphalte surchauffé" (87). The vague quivering at the bottom of her pupil is a bodily intensity that affects Désiré. For Gilles Deleuze,

[107] Jacques Derrida in "The University in the Eyes of its Pupils" underscores that the eyelid is a membrane that allows for inwardness and sleep. Some animals do not have eyelids.

[108] See Jameson, *ibid*, p.34.

bodily intensities or affects circulate.[109] They cannot be grasped. The representation of this affect here requires a literary device, the simile, which compares the quivering to humid air that trembles above the overheated asphalt. The trembling humid air suggests that intensities hover above the body and circulate. In addition to his mother's unease, Désiré also senses a general distancing. Raymonde's eyes gaze into the distance, her voice is disembodied and lifeless, which suggests alienation from the self and body. According to the creolized cosmopolitics theorized by Françoise Lionnet, Mauritians belong in Mauritius and elsewhere.[110] In contradistinction, Raymonde belongs only elsewhere, she does not belong in Mauritius. Désiré not only senses Raymonde's unbelonging but also recognizes it in Charlesia, whom he meets at the port of Port-Louis. He notes: "Dans ses yeux, le même halo étrange et tremblant qu'il voit parfois dans le regard de sa mère" (142). The strange and trembling halo also attests to bodily intensities linked to feelings of unbelonging that circulate but cannot quite be seized. Though I disagree with Brian Massumi's theory that affect is autonomous from signification,[111] I find it productive to consider that affect cannot be captured by language. In the images I quote above, which disrupt the reader's frame of reference, we see the creativity deployed by the text to convey affect without capturing it. The text also suggests that social constructs can obstruct the pursuit of knowledge.

Désiré attempts to get to know the sea that birthed him but instead the sea is birthed by the text; the sea becomes a character that cannot be constrained by social constructs.[112] The sea Désiré

[109] See Deleuze, *ibid,* p.124.

[110] See Lionnet, *The Known and the Uncertain: Creole Cosmopolitics of the Indian Ocean*, p.100.
[111] See Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*.

[112] In considering the sea as a character in the text, I respond to Margaret Cohen's invitation to overcome "hydraphasia", or the neglect of the sea in studies of the novel. My analysis is indebted to her book *The Novel and the Sea,* in which she thoroughly examines social constructs of the sea. Cohen's approach and mine share commonalities. I focus on plotting on several levels; Cohen focuses on craft on at least two levels (literary craft and sea craft, or mastering maritime information).

encounters differs from the sea he had imagined. Through this contrast, *Le silence* suggests that received notions obstruct Désiré's quest. The young man embarks on a fishing expedition because he conceives of his knowledge quest as entailing getting to know the sea: "Mais cette mer… il devrait la connaître. C'est elle qui l'a vu naître. Elle est son berceau. Sa mère presque. Il devrait s'en sentir proche" (116). This passage mobilizes the familiar French play with the homophones "mer" and "mère" and hence suggests that Désiré attempts to recreate his birth. Désiré considers that he should know and feel close to the sea. The French distinction between "savoir" and "connaître" is important here;[113] knowing the sea involves becoming familiar and intimate with the sea rather than mastering maritime information. How to know the sea becomes of paramount concern: "Peut-être qu'elle lui en veut d'être resté si longtemps sans la connaître, sans la reconnaître. Peut-être doit-il l'apprivoiser ? Mais il ignore comment s'en approcher" (117). These sentences put in proximity the verbs "connaître" and "reconnaître" as well as "apprivoiser" and "approcher". The affiliation between these verbs foregrounds both Désiré and the text's concern with modes of knowing. Désiré considers that he does not know the true sea, the one that carries along big currents beyond the lagoon. At this point the reader may recall the sea that has been described earlier in the novel through Charlesia's perspective. Désiré imagines the unknown beyond the lagoon to be the real sea. This imagined sea is estranged from the sea that marked the pace of the lives of his forebears in Diego Garcia and provided sustenance through its fish. Désiré's alienation from the sea extends further than he suspects. In his fantasies, he had bestowed majestic proportions upon the sea: "Il n'avait rêvé la mer qu'en images de grandeur, d'espace, de lumière. Il se trouvait confiné dans un lieu au plafond bas, mal éclairé, où deux hommes ne pouvaient se croiser" (120). Where do these grand, spacious, luminous images that he casts upon the sea come

[113] Rita Felski in the chapter on "Knowledge" in *Uses of Literature* sets forth that "faire connaître" as opposed to "faire savoir" is a use of literature.

from? These projections stem from the social construct of the sea inspired by the sublime aesthetic, the construct which according to Margaret Cohen emptied out the sea of its craft and made it a force that overcomes man and makes him surrender.[114] Désiré introduces a scale in which in comparison to the powerful sea he is "moins qu'une fourmi sur le pont de ce bateau minuscule" (124); a scale that is very much in line with the sublimation of the sea. Désiré aggrandizes his quest by comparing himself to the ant in a way that recalls Blaise Pascal's thoughts in *Pensées* on the infinitely small. However, the sea he had hoped to tame (to tame in the sense of overcoming and in the figurative sense of getting more intimately acquainted) forcefully rejects him. The sea violently thrusts him back and forth and makes him retch. He attempts to chase away "la nausée qui lui monte des tripes" (124) but he is at the mercy of her rocking movements that raise his guts and stomach. The chapter closes with Désiré vomiting feverishly, which can be read as a reversal of the traditional psychoanalytic logic in which the Other inspires nausea. Here it is rather the Othered who is nauseous.[115] The sea's rejection is an othering of Désiré. The failed encounter also relates to an important formal intention of the text, which is to render the sea into both a character (whose psychology is inaccessible) and an integral part of the fabric of the text.[116] Water permeates the pores of the sentences throughout the text and this especially through the lexicon ("endiguer" (88), "liquéfie" (126), "déminéralisé" (127)) as well as the references to the waters of the womb that are part and parcel of the constant play with the kinship between the mother and the sea.

[114] See Cohen, *ibid*.
[115] See Kristeva, "Powers of Horror: an Essay on Abjection".

[116] Though Désiré is a seeker of meaning in the sense defined by Georg Lukács, the novel's treatment of the sea suggests a departure from his canonical study of the novel. Lukács posits in *The Theory of the Novel* that the psychology of the hero provides the form of the novel. For Lukács: "the fundamental form-determining intention of the novel is objectivized as the psychology of the novel's heroes: they are seekers" (60). Notwithstanding the exploration of Désiré's interiority, his psychology is not the fundamental form-determining intention of the text.

The contrast between the sea imagined by Désiré and the sea he encounters is mirrored by the discrepancy between his aggrandizing notion of his destiny and the outcome of his voyage. As he attempts to tame the sea, Désiré's quest becomes impelled by the notion of destiny, a notion that seems displaced and grandiloquent: "Il n'avait plus le choix, il ne pouvait pas revenir, il faudrait aller jusqu'au bout, il ne pouvait pas être né pour rien, il devait être promis à un destin particulier, exceptionnel, et c'est dans de telles circonstances qu'on éprouve son destin" (121). Désiré projects himself as a hero showing his worth in the face of trying hardship. He frames his quest as involving fulfilling his destiny. The term "destiny" taps into a well of divergent philosophical and literary resonances. Whereas some philosophers attempt to reconcile two poles they describe as "la nécessité du destin et la liberté de la volonté",[117] the notion of destiny within a literary framework tends to be associated with the epic hero. Georg Lukács writes in *The Theory of the Novel:* "[the characters of the epic are] bound to [this world] by the indissoluble force of destiny, but each recognises it, sees it in its fragility and heaviness, only when he has travelled to the end of his path thereby made meaningful" (60). In the world that the epic gives form to, destiny is pre-determined. By considering that he needs to go to the end, Désiré not only seems to subscribe to the idea that the meaning of his life is predetermined, but also confers epic dimensions to his quest. The adjectives "particulier" and "exceptionnel" (121), which he uses to qualify his venture, further emphasize these epic dimensions. Along with the register of the epic comes that of the miraculous. Désiré believes that he will participate in "une pêche miraculeuse" (121). He deems that the miraculous fishing expedition will allow him to fulfill his dream: "Quelque chose le portera en avant, lui permettra de quitter ce bateau pour accomplir son rêve" (121). The notion of going to

[117] See Stănişor, "Appel à contribution". Revue philosophique et littéraire *Alkemie,* n°10 : Le Destin.

the end of one's destiny and fulfilling a dream are misaligned (the former relates to a meaning of life that is pre-determined and the latter to the agency of the individual). His projections are fanciful and drawn from disparate sources. Though Désiré fails to get to know the sea, he succeeds in imaginatively getting to know the ship.

After his failed journey at sea, Désiré learns about the crossing from Diego Garcia to Mauritius through his cathexis or affective anthropomorphizing of the ship. Associations with the Nordvaer shape the identity assigned to Désiré by his family. Not only is his nickname inspired by the Nordvaer, the lexicon related to the ship seeps into how his kin relate to him. When he seems ill, his cousin asks him "Ça tangue dur là-dedans?" (80). The verb "tanguer" denotes the rocking movement of a boat. Possibly impelled by these unconscious references, Désiré's instinct tells him to request archives from the national library of Norway. He becomes an active agent of his quest by seeking out these archives. He receives an article on the Nordvaer that had been published in a maritime journal. Though he is eager to read the article, his imagination provides the most helpful insights. Désiré falls asleep while the letters become blurry. In the following paragraphs, the novel focuses on the perspective of the ship. The seamless shift in perspectives allows the text to subtly voice the ship. The Nordvaer we get to know through prosopopoeia is a ship that has been deeply saddened from having been used to displace the Chagossian people. We learn that the Nordvaer began to rust from the inside when he first heard the muted cries of the Chagossians (the ship is referred to as "il", presumably because "bateau" is masculine). The Nordvaer thus imagined by Désiré has been affected by the Chagossians he has transported. This affect is not a slight change or impression that has been produced on him, rather the Nordvaer is haunted by the eyes of an eyeless three-legged dog that had run after him. This dog had escaped from being burned alive in

an oven used to incinerate the residue of copra harvest.[118] The eyes of the eyeless dog burn the Nordvaer; they are compared to two welding torches that pierce his core. This unsettling image underscores the intensity of the affect. The intensity of the affect felt by the ship serves a mediatory function in the text; it is a way of accessing the Chagossian experience of the crossing while respecting its opacity. The anthropomorphization of the ship is an avowedly creative act; the Nordvaer's thoughts suggest that there can be no facile mind reading of the passengers of the ship.

There is significant irony in this anthropomorphization of the ship. The ship takes on human attributes whereas the Chagossians were denied their human right to stay in their native land and were treated inhumanely. The Nordvaer remembers feeling the cramped and staggering bodies of the Chagossians crushed against his inside walls. Pressed against each other, these bodies were relegated to what Jean-Luc Nancy calls the "unworld". In *The Creation of the World*, Nancy writes: "A world is precisely that in which there is room for everyone: but a genuine place, one in which things can genuinely take place" (42). Nancy's definition of a world provides insights into the experience of the Chagossians. Just as their bodies do not get to occupy space or take place on the ship; the Chagossians do not get to take place as humans in the world. The anthropomorphization of the ship is one of the many ways in which the text invites us to ponder what is the "human" of "human rights" (considerations to which I will turn later in the chapter). As the ship is affected by the Chagossians as well as by one of their dogs, the text seems to gesture toward the conception of the "human animal" favored by Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou who emphasize that the modes of human life are connected with other forms of life.[119] The "human" of "human rights"

[118] Copra is the dried meat of the coconut. Chagos was an agriculture-based economy that produced copra. Coconut oil is extracted from copra. See Jeffery, "Ecological restoration in a cultural landscape: conservationist and Chagossian approaches to controlling the "coconut chaos" on the Chagos Archipelago".

[119] Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou point out in *Dispossession: the Performative in the Political* that considering human animality emphasizes our relationality to animals and unsettles fantasies of the self-sufficient human subject.

called for by the text is not a human that defines itself against the backdrop of the disavowed animal.

The final sentences of this section emphasize that this account is one that redeems the ship. Whereas Raymonde in an earlier section had referred to the ship as a thief that stole what should have been the happy event of Désiré's birth; the ship here claims that it has helped to birth Désiré and has cradled Désiré. In redeeming the ship, Désiré exerts agency in plotting his story. Charlesia also attempts to become an active agent of her situation.

Charlesia's acts of seeing and cognizing the trope of the ship are attempts to "become" an active agent of her situation, to write her plot, to write herself out of a meaningless void.[120] The ship plays the role of a heterotopia in the text, it is a place that should bring different spaces together, namely Port-Louis and Diego Garcia.[121] Meaning-making activity and the heterotopia share common features; the heterotopia puts sites in relation and meaning-making puts ideas in relation.[122] The meanings with which Charlesia invests the trope of the ship pertain to a wide array of signifying relations.[123] When she is first told that there will be no boat to take her back to Diego Garcia, Charlesia dismisses the statement as ridiculous: "Plus de bateau. Cela ne veut rien dire.

[120] My readings of Charlesia's acts of seeing draw from Lia Brozgal's analysis of scenes of blindness in *Against Autobiography: Albert Memmi and the Production of Theory*. My angle is especially oriented by Brozgal's claim that one of Albert Memmi's characters writes himself out of obscurity by becoming a receptive reader open to multiple interpretations.

[121] In his theorization of the heterotopia in "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias", Michel Foucault foregrounds relations between spaces. My focus is slightly different from Foucault's; I am interested in the meanings invested, cathexed, envisioned, and shaped around the trope of the ship.

[122] Peter Brooks writes in *Reading for the Plot*: "the key figure of narrative must in some sense be not metaphor but metonymy: the figure of contiguity and combination, of the syntagmatic relation" (91).

[123] I consider the ship as trope (and not more specifically as metaphor, simile, symbol or allegory) to accommodate the wide array of signifying relations that revolve around the ship.

Cette phrase n'a pas de sens. Ils feraient mieux de se taire au lieu de débiter de pareilles inepties" (32). Shock leads her to conclude that what she is being told makes no sense. Negating meaning here equates with refusing the unacceptable; it is inconceivable that return to Diego Garcia is foreclosed. Charlesia asks herself if "cette bande de jocrisses" (32), or the people who are declaring that the island is closed, confuse it with a restaurant or an office. The rhetorical question accentuates her denial.

While the ship embodies the trauma of displacement according to Véronique Bragard's reading of *Le silence*, I find that it is rather the void left by the boat's absence that embodies Charlesia's trauma.[124] The ship trope hence concentrates interplays between void and meaning. Tony, who works at the port, is drawn toward Charlesia and surmises that she is waiting for the ship. He senses that the absence of the ship is imprinted on her retina: "Un bateau. Ou plutôt son absence, imprimée sur la rétine fixe d'une femme vigie" (31). The affect mobilized here involves circulation and perception. The circulation of affect accounts for Tony being "aimanté" (31) or magnetically pulled toward Charlesia. Perception is what allows Tony to sense the absence. In ocularcentric traditions, sight is typically connected to what is present and hence erected as the primordial mode of knowing.[125] Here Charlesia's retina attests to the text putting absence and presence in relation in order to attempt to explore her trauma. In his theorization of the heterotopia, Foucault describes the ship as the greatest reserve of the imagination. By contrast, the acute way in which the text conveys the absence of the ship emphasizes Charlesia's trauma.

[124] See Bragard, "Murmuring Vessels".

[125] In opposition to ocularcentric traditions, antiocularcentric traditions refute the primacy of sight in knowing. However, for Martin Jay, sight should not be prioritized over language and vice versa; they productively nurture each other. Jay writes in *Force Fields: Between Intellectual History and Cultural Critique*: "Humbling the image is no antidote to humiliating the word. It is far healthier to nurture in both what is best called a mutual regard" (113).

Though Charlesia has been stripped of agency, she seeks to see herself out of the void left by the ship's absence. She tries to will the boat into presence with her eyes and in doing so she activates interconnected parts of her body and subjective disposition:

> Elle sonde l'étendue bleue, infiniment bleue, avec toute l'intensité qu'elle parvient à recueillir et faire remonter des plus infimes fibres de son corps. Deux prunelles aiguës, brûlantes, qui ne cillent pas, qui se mesurent à l'ardeur incandescente de ce midi portlouisien, qui se mettent à briller, qui se brouillent dans une brume aveuglante et chaude. Elle a beau essayer, elle n'arrive pas à trouer le rideau, aucune brèche ne laisse apparaître ce qu'elle appelle de tout son être. La mer reste obstinément vide. Il n'y a pas de bateau, il n'y a plus de bateau pour elle. (32)

The accumulation of subordinate clauses that start with "qui" render her pupils salient. The contrast between her burning pupil and the blinding haze accentuates her attempts to see herself out of this forced displacement. Though this paragraph emphasizes eyes and seeing, it activates other senses. For example, the pupils are burning and the mist is warm. Hence it appears that the text does not prioritize one sense over another. The passage also engages other parts of the body, for Charlesia garners intensity in the fibers of her body. Gilles Deleuze writes in *Essays Critical and Clinical* that subjective dispositions are formed by many interrelated parts including the senses and affects. *Le silence* avoids the pitfall of facile mind reading by instead giving us access to Charlesia's subjective disposition. The two piercing pupils are a vision from the text that conveys Charlesia's strong act of subjectivity.

The text highlights the affective dissolving of boundaries that occurs in Charlesia's meaning-making activity. When she observes Mauritians relocating to Australia embark on the

MV Patris, Charlesia is gripped by the scene that unfolds in front of her: "elle était absorbée par le spectacle qui se déroulait devant elle" (74). Charlesia is absorbed by the spectacle, which figuratively means that her attention is completely gripped. Marx Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno critique the hierarchy that puts sight above smell, which is shaped by the assumption that when we see we remain who we are whereas when we smell we are completely taken over by otherness.[126] The word "absorbed" in this passage disrupts this notion by suggesting that one can also be taken over by sight. Charlesia is struck by the curious mix of emotions that emanate from the passengers embarking on the MV Patris: "(…) frappée par l'étrange mélange de mélancolie et d'optimisme forcé qui se dégageait de la scène" (74). The Patris embodies emotions that come with departure. "Frappée" is used here in its figurative sense, but this use comments on the tenuous boundaries between the literal and the figurative sense. Though Charlesia is not aboard the MV Patris, the affect that results from the mix of melancholia and optimism dissolves the boundaries that separate her from the passengers of the ship. Charlesia also confusingly senses the continuity of violence carried by Chinese fishermen's ships: "Elle sentait confusément qu'ils étaient habités par trop de cris, d'échos de coups ou d'âpres corps à corps, qui semblaient sourdre de la coque, ricocher contre la ferraille du pont pour aller se percher dans le fouillis d'acier de ces mâts sans voile ni vent" (74). The image of echoes ricocheting against the deck, which foregrounds movement, is another instance (similar to the ones that form part of Désiré's plotting activity) wherein the text creatively conveys affect without capturing it.

Charlesia's shifting projections on the Nordvaer allow the text to explore the experience of displacement. These variations are most striking in the scene in which the Nordvaer arrives carrying the last expelled islanders. Its personified attributes change within a few sentences. As it

[126] See Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*

nears Port-Louis, Charlesia still has dismal hope that it will bring her home. She describes the Nordvaer as "fiérot" (75). She deems that she would recognize it among a thousand ships because of its proud appearance. As the passengers alight, Charlesia recognizes Raymonde. At this moment the Nordvaer seems tired and Charlesia knows it will not return to Diego Garcia. The change in its personified attributes stresses the change from embodying hope of return to tired resignation.

In the closing page of the book, Désiré partakes in Charlesia's strong act of subjectivity. They both will the ship into presence by drawing it with their eyes: "Ils dessinent, du regard, ce bateau qui les emmènera" (151). For Deleuze, writers draw on or shape aesthetic percepts like veritable visions. The ship in *Le silence* becomes an abstract idea that condenses Charlesia's acts of seeing and knowing. Whereas Charlesia and Désiré attempt to become active agents, independent Mauritius is depicted as a complicit agent in the plot that was sealed behind the backs of the Chagossians.

In becoming independent from the U.K. in 1968, Mauritius was granted the right to pursue self-development.[127] In *Le silence*, the literary framing of Mauritius' postcolonial path underscores the parallels established by the text between plotting, self-determination, and self-development. These parallels emphasize that Mauritian self-determination came at the cost of Chagossian self-determination.[128] Mauritius' path is first framed in literary terms through the perspective of the administrator of Diego Garcia who is concerned that political changes might exacerbate ethnic and religious tensions. Because in his view "les Musulmans et les Créoles sont à couteaux tirés" (58), the administrator is wary of independence: "Il se demande si Maurice n'aurait pas mieux fait de

[127] The formulation "self-development" is a typical way of discussing a nation's post-colonial trajectory in the language of human rights. See Slaughter, *ibid*.

[128] For Slaughter, the recognition of human rights presupposes belonging to an egalitarian and democratic nation-state *Le silence*'s treatment of Mauritian independence points to the undemocratic and inegalitarian practices that came at play in forging the Mauritian nation-state.

demeurer colonie britannique au lieu de s'embarquer sur le chemin hasardeux de l'indépendance" (58). The formulation "le chemin hasardeux de l'indépendance" calls our attention toward the path of self-development: an independent nation supposedly gets to write its path, to author its path, even if the path may be regarded as uncertain by some. In contradistinction with the administrator, the captain deems that it is high time for Mauritius to take responsibility for itself: "Il préfère garder la conviction que les choses vont bien se passer. Que l'heure de la décolonisation a plus que sonné. Que Maurice est assez mûre pour se prendre en charge, conduire son propre destin" (59). The captain's choice of the word "mûre" is notable in its personification of Mauritius. This adjective in French is often used to describe a person's maturity. Even in his conviction that it is time for decolonization, his view is inflected with paternalism; it is as if he were assessing the maturity level of a child. Charlesia personifies Mauritius in like manner later in the text when she asserts that Mauritius was complicit in the displacement. For Charlesia, Mauritius, too happy to obtain her independence, didn't do anything to defend them. If we consider Mauritius as a character in the book, it appears that both characters Désiré and Mauritius are on quests to conduct their own destinies. The expression "conduire son propre destin" can be read as an aporia if destiny is understood as predetermined (as I have discussed above). Notwithstanding these philosophical complexities, by evoking the "destinies" of both Désiré and Mauritius, the text suggests that these destines are interwoven. These interwoven destinies set the stage for engaging with Mauritius's political responsibility toward the Chagossians.

In addressing the historical event of Mauritian independence, the text adopts a critical stance toward the political category of the nation. Tony, the man who works at the port and whom Charlesia has befriended, explains to her that passengers of the MV Patris belong to the Creole middle bourgeoisie and that they are relocating to Australia because they view independence as an

attempt to Indianize the island. He quotes a newspaper article that denounced this venture as "ridicule et antipatriotique" (73), which shows that the media inform his political judgment. The text thus suggests that an exclusionary practice, pointing fingers at the fleeing middle classes, forms a rhetorical strategy that constructs the nation. *Le silence* also points at how the political category of the nation can be tinged with meaninglessness. Désiré's recollections of how he experienced Independence Day celebrations at school are marked by a sense of emptiness. Désiré recalls his classmates' agitation during the solemn speech uttered by the superintendent of the school: "Les ricanements fusaient immanquablement le long de leur colonne alors que le recteur parlait de discipline et d'obéissance et de construction de quelque chose dont le nom se perdait sous les "Sssssshhhhhhhtttt!!!!!" sifflants que leur adressait le maître entre ses dents serrées" (145). Though it is not surprising for children to lack interest in an official ceremony, it is significant that the text emphasizes the occlusion of the referent of what is being constructed. We surmise that the referent is the nation. The alliteration formed by the onomatopoeia "Sssssshhhhhhhtttt!!!!!" and the adjective "sifflants" dramatizes this occlusion and contributes to emptying out the significance of the event. Désiré remembers the sensations that came along with the distractions caused by his classmates rather than the content of the speech. Along with the boredom instilled by the superintendent's speeches came the jarring sounds of the children's screeches and the flute: "chantant à tue-tête l'hymne national avec tout ce que l'école comptait de voix (…) ne pas se laisser déconcentrer par les couinements de la classe de flûte censée les accompagner" (145). Désiré's recollections show that instilling a sense of allegiance to the pupils was not achieved by the school. Meanwhile, certain details such as the "gâteaux dits français" (145) distributed at the celebration also emphasize how colonialism leaves its imprint on the independent nation-state. The drowned-out speech and national hymn allow the text to critique the ceremonial component of

building, singing, celebrating, and performing the nation.[129] This critical stance is served by realist writing; realist writing allows for direct political engagement in this documentary fiction.[130] As opposed to the oblique allegorical writing of the nation of earlier generations of African women writers, the writing in this text is direct.[131] The text thus invites a reading that avoids the pitfalls of the reductive allegorical frameworks that tend to be imposed on postcolonial writers who engage with the nation.[132]

The text's main concern is not with writing the nation but rather attending to the exclusion of the Chagossians from the history of the nation.[133] Désiré remembers a photograph of the first Mauritian Prime Minister and the last British Governor proudly overseeing the flag change in 1968. The authority and pride of the Prime Minister are the punctum; they are what animates his

[129] See Butler and Spivak, *Who Sings the Nation-State? Language, Politics, Belonging*.

[130] The category "documentary fiction" highlights that we are given an account that is avowedly both mediated and carefully documented (and that the author had direct access to first-hand accounts). Patel's writing takes deliberate measures to provide a respectful and authentic account of the experiences of the Chagossians. Quotes in Creole are not translated but seamlessly paraphrased. Though Patel was trained as a journalist and participated in the making of the documentary film "Diego L'interdite", she emphasizes in an interview with Rohini Bannerjee that she considers her novel to be more on the side of the literary than the documentary. I go against the authorial grain in describing the text as documentary fiction. This category turns our attention not only toward how the text documents a little-known episode of history but also to the specific relationship with history that is entailed by the genre. Whereas some postcolonial authors write metahistoriographies that highlight the fictitiousness of historical narratives and other authors aim to "fill the gaps of history" by imagining the subjectivities of people whose lives are recorded as footnotes in archives, Patel imagines the subjectivity of people she has interviewed and knows.

[131] These writings are examined by Susan Andrade in her book *The Nation Writ Small: African Fictions and Feminisms, 1958-1988*.

[132] The most notorious allegorical reading of nation-building in postcolonial literature is that proposed by Frederic Jameson in "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism". Though the article has been severely and methodically critiqued, this framework remains in high currency. But while it would be reductive and erroneous to read the text as an allegory of the nation, allegorical readings are not to be discarded altogether for they present a potential productive interchange between different levels of interpretation. Désiré's story can be ready an allegory of Chagossian exclusion. Some Chagossians may have legal citizenship (contrarily to Désiré) but they do not have symbolic citizenship.

[133] Aijaz Ahmad writes in *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* that the political category of the nation and the ideology of nationalism are overemphasized in postcolonial studies. *Le silence* is much less concerned with constructing or deconstructing the nation then with underscoring that the displacement of the Chagossians was written out of the historical event of Mauritian independence.

affective response to the photograph.[134] The evocation of this photograph is immediately followed by a mention of how his parents' fate was sealed behind their backs. The juxtaposition stresses their exclusion. The Chagossians were not considered amidst the oompahs and gun salutes: "Là-bàs, de l'autre côté de la mer, loin des flonfons et des salves de canons, sa mère, son père, un jour comme les autres dans leur vie tranquille, un jour fatidique pour leur vie sans histoire. Leur sort scellé, dans leur dos, sans une pensée, sans un mot pour eux" (146). The rendering of their exclusion is visual ("dans leur dos") and spatial, ("de l'autre côté de la mer"). The contrast between "un jour comme les autres" and "un jour fatidique" dramatizes that Mauritian self-determination came at the cost of Chagossian self-determination. The text thus highlights that the Chagossian experience is marked not only by being deprived of plotting their life but also by their fates being plotted behind their backs.[135] The text also examines the logic of dispossession that undo the Chagossians' human rights.

**Interrogating Violent Logics of Dispossession That Undo Human Rights**

*Le silence* develops literary means to interrogate violent logics that undo human rights. The text both points out exclusions from the community of humans with rights and traces a genealogy of these exclusions. Establishing a transversal between the works of Slaughter and Judith Butler allows me to probe these means. These two scholars reflect on human rights from different vantage points. Butler's main angle is that of the critique of power. In *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence,* Butler writes that it is "an ongoing task of human rights to reconceive the

[134] In *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, Barthes defines the punctum as the detail in a picture that animates him (often due to a contrast). He states that photographs featured in newspapers often leave him indifferent.
[135] The interconnection of different plots brings about a contrast between self-reflexive literary plots and secret alliances. See Hayden White on the embarrassment of historical plots in *The Content of the Form*.

human when it finds that its putative universality does not have universal reach" (91). Butler analyzes exclusions from what she terms "the human family". However, what makes examining these exclusions more complicated (and is not addressed by Butler in her book) is that, as Slaughter explains, "human rights" is a misnomer. The figure of the "human person" in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is taken for granted.[136] In the UDHR, the entity that is defined as having rights and obligations in society is not the human but the legal person. The UDHR contained an exclusive dimension from the start, which itself stemmed from the legacy of imperialism.

In the opening pages of *Le silence*, a tableau suggests that the violence that renders the lives of Afghanis disposable is linked with the violence that dispossesses the Chagossians of their home:

> A des kilomètres de là, presque en ligne droite en remontant vers le nord, se découpe une autre terre. Montagneuse, rude, au nom qui siffle. Afghanistan. Un enfant lève les yeux. Un courant d'air chaud lui crispe la peau du visage. Il n'y a plus rien au-dessus de lui. Rien qu'une voûte incandescente qui crache des étincelles et des pépites brûlantes. A côté de lui, sa mère est allongée, ses grand yeux étonnés ouverts sur ses jambes, étalées pieds en dedans, à deux mètres de son corps. Dans le ciel, très haut, deux masses sombrent rôdent. Un dernier tour au-dessus du tas de ruines embrassées, puis les B52 repartent, allégés de leurs bombes, vers l'Océan Indien qu'ils rallieront en quelques minutes à peine, vers leur base là-bas, à Diego Garcia, point de mire des Chagos. (10)

[136] We also take for granted that the term human is shaped by intellectual history and ideologies and movements that need to be reassessed such as humanism. Nancy in *The Possibility of a World* writes that the figure of the man that humanism tried to shape is no longer tenable as such.

This passage is akin to a painting of war. Its composition features several planes such as the carved-out land of Afghanistan and the vaulted sky. Annihilation brings stillness. The deferred description of the mother's severed corpse foregrounds atrocity and is reminiscent of Pablo Picasso's surrealist painting "Guernica". This painting of war also displays characteristics of impressionism. Indeed, the adjectives "incandescent" and "sombre" pertain to a modulation of colors, and there is an interaction of isolated elements, such as the sparks and scalding nuggets. The impetus of impressionism and the immobility of a still tableau collide in this passage to convey the horror wreaked by U.S. war attacks on Afghanistan launched from the base of Diego Garcia.[137]

The tableau is a rendering of how terror formations are experienced on the ground. The total destruction is filtered through the perspective of the child; there is nothing left above him. The incandescent vault of the sky points toward vertical violence, warfare that operates from above through bombs (as opposed to earlier warfare which was fought on the ground). The visual dimension of the passage is complemented by the sentence structure. The last round of the B52 bomber is described with gentleness in the word choice ("allégés") and the caressing rhythm of a concatenation of short clauses. The qualification of the round as "un dernier tour" recalls the nursery rhyme "Ainsi font, font, font" about three little puppets that go on three little rounds and then leave ("trois p'tits tours et puis s'en vont"). As I have discussed above, a central feature of the sentences in *Le silence* is to cradle and jolt. Our reading of this sentence is oriented by the description of the name of the Chagos archipelago immediately above this paragraph: "Chagos. Un archipel au nom soyeux comme une caresse, brûlant comme un regret, âpre comme la mort…" (10). This opening passage hence sets the silky and raspy tone of the text. The tableau brings to

[137] Patel states in her interview with Rohini Bannerjee that she evoked the war in Afghanistan "de façon presque impressioniste" because she is more interested in the story than the geopolitical facts. However, it would be ill-advised to read the passage as peripheral to the text. Situated in the initial pages, the passage provides the reader with important information about the use the United States made of the island of Diego Garcia.

the fore the effects of what Achille Mbembe calls "necropolitics", configurations of power centered on death rather than on life.[138] Within "necropolitics", certain lives are constituted as disposable; such is the case of Afghani lives.

The dyad of a child and mother in Mauritius introduced in the following sentence parallels the dyad of the child and deceased mother dyad in Afghanistan: "Plus bas vers le sud-ouest, un autre enfant s'accroche à la main de sa mère, appuyée à la rambarde qui encercle l'eau prisonnière du port. Derrière eux, des touristes en bermudas…" (10). By juxtaposing the locations of Afghanistan, Diego Garcia, and Mauritius, the text gives a sense of how the U.S. military exerts its power by making geography malleable for its use.[139] The realm of terror seeps into the word choice; the water is described as incarcerated. The prison-like element perhaps carries over into the next sentence that points to tourists in the background. Tourism then becomes tinged with associations to the realm of terror. The passage lays the groundwork for the text's subsequent inquiry into the practices and rhetorical strategies that do not necessarily dehumanize the Chagossians but make them a category of human that do not have rights, or humans who are not persons in legal terms.

The text highlights the contingency of who is constructed as having rights. Between the chapters "Ile Maurice 1968" and "Diego Garcia, 1963" stands an excerpt from a note sent by the Colonial Bureau of London to the British Mission of the United Nations, followed by its translation

[138] See Mbembe, "Necropolitics".

[139] This juxtaposition of Afghan and Mauritian geography forms a nodal point of the narrative that connects these two countries. Greg Forter in his article "Atlantic and Other Worlds: Critique and Utopia in Postcolonial Historical Fiction" offers insightful analysis of nodal points that bring different spheres together. He writes "a nodal point at which it opens onto what cannot be fully integrated into its narrative system. In *Sacred Hunger* this takes the form of a conversation between [two characters]… In *Sea of Poppies*, the nodal point concerns the provenance of the novel's main vessel (…) Such moments reveal the internal limit of each novel's effort at systematization" (page). In *Le silence* this nodal point is not connected to efforts at systematization but it gestures toward a global outlook.

into French. The excerpt negates the personhood of the Chagossians. In including this excerpt in its original language, the text critiques the colonial logic by letting it speak for itself:

> The object of the exercise was to get some rocks which will remain ours; there will be no indigenous population, except seagulls, who have not yet got a Committee (the Status of Women Committee does not cover the rights of Birds). Unfortunately, along with the Birds go some few Tarzans and men Fridays, whose origins are obscure, and who are being hopefully wished on to Mauritius.
>
> Extrait d'une note envoyée en août 1966 par le Bureau Colonial de Londres à la Mission Britannique aux Nations unies. (39)

The analogy that compares the Chagossians to Fridays and Tarzans draws from colonial literary frames of reference. The analogy also reasserts the colonial conception of the island as *terra nullius*. The inhabitants of the *terra nullius*, being from a place that belongs to no one, are subject to being colonized, annihilated, or displaced. They are deprived of legal personality. Dismissing the Chagossians by comparing them to Fridays and Tarzans reactivates the colonial logic of displacement (at a historical juncture that immediately preceded Mauritian independence).

The significance of this passage accrues if we take into account Friday's exclusion from the considerations of the drafters of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Slaughter recounts that *Robinson Crusoe* served as an enabling fiction for the UDHR. It provided a literary shorthand for theoretical debates about what it meant to have rights and duties in society. Defoe's novel made it possible to recognize the human personality as primary agent and component of human society. In the United Nations committee's reading of *Robinson Crusoe*, Robinson developed his personality by reactivating civilization in his daily readings. The United Nations

committee did not consider that Robinson developed his personality by socializing with Friday. Human rights hence rearticulated Defoe's colonialist imaginary of the social and civil order of Robinson's island. Reading the excerpt within the history of writing human rights thus highlights that what Butler terms as the "putative universality" of human rights contained an exclusive dimension from the start. The excerpt is another iteration of this exclusion. By including the excerpt, the text establishes an interaction between its own literary humanizing of the Chagossians and the rhetoric this humanizing works against.

Furthermore, by quoting an excerpt that decrees that birds do not yet have a committee that represents their rights, *Le silence* contrasts the potential rights of birds with the denying of rights of the Chagossians. The author of the excerpt was presumably ironic in stating that the Committee of the Feminine Condition did not yet cover the rights of birds, and yet birds can be constructed as legal persons. For instance, Crusoe considered his talking parrot as one of his subjects. Corporations have also been constructed as legal persons. The ironic mention of birds echoes the contrast between Crusoe's talking parrot and Friday. Patel lets the Colonial Bureau speak for itself and in spite of itself to suggest the contingency of who is constructed as having rights. *Le silence* also examines the legacy of slavery in undoing human rights.

The dialogue between Désiré and Charlesia at the end of the novel is a form mobilized to examine the rhetorical work used in undoing human rights. The history of the Chagossians was negated and they were turned into "morts vivants", or spectral humans, not quite recognizably human with rights. Charlesia figuratively states that the Chagossians were sold. Désiré retorts: "Comment ça, vendus ? Vous n'apparteniez à personne. Vous n'étiez pas des esclaves, non ?" (144). Though the deported Chagossians were not slaves, this rhetorical question sets forth the category of the slave as foundational to understanding the thought formations that shaped their

displacement. The back and forth of the dialogue between Charlesia and Désiré allows for testing out categories. Charlesia's knowledge stems from oral transmission. She has heard that their ancestors were slaves, brought over from Mozambique and Madagascar in the 18th century by a French colonizer who had obtained from the governor of Mauritius the authorization to develop a coconut plantation in Diego Garcia. This history informs how the Chagossians were treated as a kind of human related to slaves.

However, this history was denied. Charlesia expounds that "they" claimed that the Chagossians were only seasonal workers.[140] The referent of "they" is implied but not specified, which conveys a sense of the three entities of the U.S., the British and Mauritius morphing together. Claiming that the Chagossians were only seasonal workers denies that they had inhabited Diego Garcia for generations. Hence dual logics related to their history as slaves come into play in the Chagossian displacement. On the one hand, their history informs how they were treated as a kind of human related to slaves. On the other hand, negating their history was an integral part of nefariously justifying the negation of their human rights. Françoise Lionnet suggests that if more attention were paid to the creolized history of the Chagossians, the historical episode of their displacement would possibly also receive more attention.[141] Charlesia indicates that ignoring the creolized history of the Chagossians was not an accidental omission on the part of the British and the U.S. Rather, this omission results from a rhetorical strategy that instrumentalized Chagossian history.

[140] See Vine's *Island of Shame* for an incisive analysis of how British bureaucrats worked on what they termed as "maintaining the fiction" that the Chagossians were mere seasonal workers.

[141] See Lionnet, *ibid*, p.81.

Charlesia further decries a systematic erasure of their history: "Ils ont tout effacé, tout nié, même nos cimetières, même les tombes de nos ancêtres" (144). By emphasizing that the systematic erasure went so far as to negate their cemeteries and the tombs of their ancestors, Charlesia also stresses the importance of upholding the work of death by honoring the dead.[142] She points out that the claim that they were seasonal workers is absurd. Seasonal workers would not have brought their dead with them to Diego Garcia. She adds: "C'est Maurice, les Anglais et les Américains qui ont fait de nous des morts vivants" (144). Charlesia thus advances that in depriving the Chagossians of a connection to their dead ancestors, Mauritius, the English and the Americans have turned the Chagossians into the living dead. With "morts vivants" Charlesia suggests that the outcome of negating slavery reproduces what has been theorized as an essential characteristic of slavery, death-in-life.[143] Along with probing how the Chagossians reflect on the inhumane treatment to which they were subjected, the text explores how they conceive of their struggles for justice.

**Autres mondes: Other Worlds, the Unworld and Demanding a Just World**

The novel is dedicated to the Chagossians who have been uprooted in favor of the "monde libre" (17). The "monde libre" is in scare quotes, which suggests a critical distancing on the author's part. As Diego Garcia became a military base, we surmise that this "monde libre" is the world defended by the war on terror, which claims to preserve freedom. Instead of a world that is free in name only, Patel's novel asks for a just world, a world in which humans have a place, a

[142] See Lionnet and Jean-François, "Literary Routes: Migration, Islands, and the Creative Economy" for an analysis of literary mediations of upholding the work of death.
[143] See Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*.

world of humans with rights. *Le silence* brings to the fore ways in which the Chagossians do not live in a world that is a multiplicity of worlds; that is, there is no sharing out between Diego Garcia and Mauritius.[144]

The first pages that center on Charlesia's perspective stress that she experiences Mauritius and Diego Garcia in radically different ways. *Le silence* hence highlights a distinction between the two phenomenological spaces. I adopt a phenomenological perspective here because it allows me to probe how the text portrays Charlesia's experiences and affects in these two spaces. The distinction between Diego Garcia and Mauritius is initially indicated through recurring oppositions between the adverbs "ici" and "là-bas", which first appear in conjunction with the disorientation of the sun: "Ici rien n'avait de sens. Tout était si différent de là-bas. Le soleil même ne semblait plus à sa place" (15). The sun is out of its place; this displacement could be read as Charlesia projecting her own disorientation onto the sun. However, the text's description of Port-Louis is not an allegorical or symbolic projection of Charlesia's feeling out of place.[145] Rather, the text foregrounds her experiences in Port-Louis. Her discomfort in this crowded city is palpable:

> Charlesia se dresse d'un mouvement brusque. Il y a trop de bruit ici. L'air est trop pesant dans cette cité. Toute cette masse de tôle qui emprisonne et solidifie la chaleur dans ses cannelures, cette musique aigrelette qui se déverse sans relâche des radios insomniaques, ces mobylettes traficotées qui pétaradent et s'étouffent comme des poules asthmatiques en crachotant une fumée qui crispe les poumons, la chaleur d'étuve qui chasse le sommeil, cette promiscuité qui donne le sentiment d'avoir la cité tout entière sous son toit. (19)

[144] See Nancy, The *Creation of the World.*
[145] Allegorical in the sense of Barthes's reading of Flaubert, wherein descriptions of objects represent ideas. See Barthes, *Le degré zero de l'écriture*.

This passage is a telling example of how Patel's realist writing foregrounds affect as vehicle for being in the phenomenological space of Port-Louis.[146] The tone is set with the adverb "trop" which is repeated in the subsequent sentence and invokes excess. Sensorial excess emerges from these lines. Indeed, the senses in this passage take on a life of their own; they travel. The heat, for instance, is imprisoned but at the same time generates the movement of chasing sleep away. As the senses saunter from sentence to sentence, they separate from their physiological bearers. In this separation from their physiological bearers, they become affect (Jameson, 55). Sleep deprivation, impelled by the personification of radios as insomniac, also jumps from one sentence to another. The heat and the sounds are driven by two main impulses; a movement of closing confines ("emprisonne", "crispe") and a movement of expansion overwhelms ("se déverse"). The literary figure of the simile conveys further movement; the simile is an invitation for the brain to set itself in motion by making associations. The lexicon is shaped to suggest amplification, the text presents the amplified form of several words (the suffix "ette" lengthens the adjective "aigre", "traficoter" and "crachoter" are colloquial longer versions of the word "trafiquer" and "cracher"). Within one sentence, the demonstrative adjective "cette" appears three times in the singular form and once in the plural form. This repetition also has an amplifying effect. Additionally, the demonstrative adjective "cette" indicates immediate proximity. We are given the impression that Charlesia is trapped. The adverb "toute" conveys a sense of totality and suggests that the sensorial excess is all encompassing. Being in Port-Louis for Charlesia is being ill at ease to a point that overcomes her senses.

[146] I draw from Frederic Jameson who in *Antinomies of Realism* posits that realist writing foregrounds affect as a vehicle for being in phenomenological spaces.

Charlesia's malaise in Mauritius is even more pronounced in comparison to the ataraxia she felt in Diego Garcia:

> Rien ne va ici. Des rues aux contours braques, des culs-de-sac vous arrêtent soudain en pleine descente. Marcher ici n'a pas de sens. Là-bas, les yeux fermés, elle glissait ses pas dans l'inclinaison naturelle du sable, la mer devant, la mer derrière, calme et belle, pour caresser et faire frissonner leur terre comme un corps alangui au creux d'un corps amoureux. (20)

"Marcher ici n'a pas de sens" echoes the aforementioned disorientation of the sun. "Here" she is disoriented whereas "there" she was at one with the sea. The analogy with interlaced amorous bodies casts her ease in a sensual light. The natural inclination of the sand is opposed to the angular streets. Interruptions and disjointedness stand in contrast with the symbiosis with the sand and sea.

The perspective of the captain who regularly navigates between Diego Garcia and Mauritius (before the closure of Diego Garcia) reiterates the distinction between the two spaces (or places): "A chaque voyage, il avait l'impression de *changer de monde*, de respirer mieux, différemment, à mesure qu'il approchait de ces îles où il aurait aimé, à l'occasion, passer un peu plus de temps que ces escales trop brèves" (54, emphasis mine). The cut between the worlds introduced by the captain provides us with another lens to read the phenomenological spaces of Mauritius and Diego Garcia: they are separate worlds.

*Le silence* forges images to show how the characters share in the tonality of these worlds. Nancy writes in *The Creation of the World* that "a world is a space in which a certain tonality resonates" (42). The mountains of Port-Louis provide an example of a modulated tonality of the world of Mauritius. Reading descriptions of the mountains from the perspectives of Charlesia,

Raymonde and Désiré side by side allows for highlighting these resonances. For Charlesia, the mountains amplify grating sensations; their physicality is to blame for intensifying her discomfort:

> Impossible d'échapper au bruit. Ici, de toute façon, on ne pouvait jamais être tranquille. Quelle idée de construire une cité adossée à la montagne ! La masse compacte du basalte concentre et répercute tout, le soleil cru de ce midi torride, les cris incessants des enfants, les coups sourds du canon, menaçants dans l'air immobile. (15)

As for Raymonde, she associates the mountains with the people of Port-Louis and hence transfers on them the inhospitality of its people: "Comment lui raconter? (…) La terre d'avant. (…) D'avant cette nouvelle terre aux montagnes hautaines et indifférentes, aux habitants distants et méprisants" (88). For Désiré, the mountains become part of a tableau as he views them from a distance while the boat he works on sets sail. The big masses of basalt are swallowed by the sea. This image intensifies his own vulnerability to the potent force of the sea:

> Quand il ressortit sur le pont, Port-Louis n'était plus qu'un ensemble de boîtes d'allumettes dans une anse montagneuse qui regardait les nuages par en-dessous. Il n'eut pas le temps de s'attarder à contempler ce spectacle pour lui inédit, les ordres avaient déjà fusé. (…) Les montagnes, elles, avaient basculé de l'autre côté, l'eau les avaient englouties. Si elle pouvait faire disparaître ces grandes masses de basalte, que ferait-elle de lui ? (121)

The shared feature of these mountains from the three perspectives is a harsh quality. The characters recognize the resonance of the harsh mountains but they modulate their depiction through the associations they forge. The harsh tonality of Mauritius stresses the distinction between the worlds of Mauritius and Diego Garcia.

For Charlesia, loss of enjoyment of the senses occurs conjointly with a loss of meaning in Mauritius. As Charlesia meanders in Port-Louis, she waits for sun to orient her toward the sea but her frame of reference is disrupted: "Mais sa boussole est inopérante ici. Trop d'odeurs comme autant d'obstacles, l'huile épaisse et rance du marchand de gâteaux frits à ce coin de rue, les relents forts de caoutchouc et d'essence qui émanent d'un atelier de mécanicien un peu plus loin" (20). The figurative inoperative compass embodies Charlesia's disorientation. The compass reminds us of the words "ici rien n'avait de sens" (15), whereby "sens" denotes both meaning and direction. Lack of sense and of the enjoyment of senses is condensed in the comparison of scents to obstacles. Though the passage depicts excess, the descriptive practice is measured rather than voracious.[147] Indeed, equivalent weight is assigned to the description of the oil and the lingering odors of rubber and gas. Each is qualified by one or two adjectives; in each case the source of the odor follows these adjectives. The contrast between the realist measured descriptive practice and the excessive nature of its referent emphasizes Charlesia's displeasure. Combined and interlaced, the two losses make of Mauritius the unworld, a world that precludes meaning and enjoyment for Charlesia. The isolation of the Chagossians in Mauritius also points at how there is no exchange between the two worlds.

There is no productive interchange between the worlds of Diego Garcia and Mauritius in the wake of the expulsion of the Chagossians. Charlesia laments that the Chagossians are not allowed to eat nutritious turtle flesh in Port-Louis because it is deemed to be a carrier of tuberculosis. This foreclosure of local knowledge attests to a missed opportunity for cultural exchange and enrichment. Désiré wills contact between the two worlds; his longing stresses that there is no sharing out, no coexistence, no "with" of the two worlds. Désiré wills his island into

[147] The measured descriptive practice differs from realist writer Emile Zola's voracious descriptive practice.

presence in a way that calls to mind how Charlesia wills the ship into presence. The confinement he feels as he looks out into the sky is expressed through the ingenious metaphor of a tinted blue eyelid:

> Le corps tendu en avant, il plonge le regard dans ce ciel dont le bleu se dégrade et jaunit, au loin là-bas, au contact de la mer. Ce doit être le sable que soulève le vent, juste là-derrière. Son sable. Son île ne peut être aussi loin que le disent les atlas. Elle est sûrement là, juste là, il voit sa mère qui y perd chaque jour son regard, du fin fond de cette Vallée des Prêtres à l'embouchure fermée. Lui-même se sent trop à l'étroit sous cette paupière bleutée, qu'il voudrait pouvoir entrouvrir sur un au-delà qui lui est ici refusé. (114)

Chromaticity is salient in this passage. The color blue degrades and yellows and gives a sense of scale differentiation. The tinted blue color of the eyelid is on this scale. The metaphor that associates the sky to a tinted blue eyelid affectively conveys the absence of contact. For Jameson, light is a medium that is allegorical of the affect for which it is the recording device. Both light and affect are characterized by scale and differentiation, phenomena of lateral dissociation, and strange evanescent dissonance within unison.[148] Through the blue eyelid, the passage both expresses and allegorizes the affective experience of willing contact between the two worlds.

Désiré also wills contact between the two worlds by seeking to share in the tonality of Diego Garcia. In response to Désiré's enquiries about Diego Garcia, Charlesia asserts the importance of the coconut in Chagossian daily life. As I have noted above, the coconut provided nourishment to the Chagossians and its shell was used to make instruments, utensils and toys. The coconut is an integral component of the tonality of Diego Garcia. As such, the fruit inspires many

[148] See Jameson, *ibid*., p. 69.

images and similes in the text. Désiré asks Charlesia whether life was really that good in Diego Garcia. This question is an attempt to get at the quintessence of Diego Garcia. Charlesia acknowledges the limitations of nostalgic attitudes toward the Chagossian past.[149] Charlesia introduces the notion of "souvenance" (150), all that is left to the Chagossians in the absence of sharing out between the two worlds. Stressing this lack is a step toward demanding justice.

In the concluding pages of the novel, Charlesia shares with Désiré an account of how the Chagossians struggled to demand reparations; the text carves a space to foreground Chagossians taking place as humans through what I call "relational narration".[150] I define "relational narration" as the narrative movements that animate this passage and relate different perspectives and modes of narration and situate the narrator between rather than above these movements. The modes of narration in this passage range from Charlesia's direct address to Désiré in dialogue ("je peux te dire" (148)), to a third person focus on Désiré's recollections of seeing a photograph of Charlesia in the newspaper, to third person narration that tells Charlesia's story. The third person narration of Charlesia's story is one of closeness between the narrator and the character; the narrator knows how the women strategized.[151] For instance, the narrator indicates that the women knew they would never be allowed in an official building and hence decided to dress up as visa seekers. The

[149] Her awareness rebuts readings that cast aspersion on the text by suggesting that it indulges in nostalgia. For instance, Valérie Magdelaine-Andrianjafitrimo claims in "Ethnicisation ou créolisation? Le paradigme de la traite dans quelques romans francophones mauriciens et réunnionais contemporains" that "l'origine l'emporte sur les fondations" (13) for the Chagossians in *Le silence*. She is critical of what she terms as their reconfiguring their place of origin according to the topos of a lost paradise.

[150] My examination of the text's portrayal of the Chagossians' struggles for justice is indebted to the essays from *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political* by Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou. I borrow from their language because it provides a forceful lexicon that allows for analyzing practices of claiming agency in the face of the logic of dispossession. Their work operates a paradigm shift in that rather than reifying visibility, they focus on how people make intelligible their challenge to norms of intelligibility.

[151] The narration hence differs from totalizing omniscient narrations that take characters from above to subject and dominate them (Flaubert's omniscient narration is typically regarded as totalizing, whereas Balzacian narration is viewed as democratic).

shifts also have the effect of highlighting certain characteristics by isolating them, such as Charlesia's word choice in addressing Désiré. Charlesia's tone is clear, concise, intimate, familiar, resigned and resilient, mirthful. When Charlesia proclaims "Ah oui, ça on s'est bien battues!" (147), we hear pride and resignation in her voice.[152]

These narrative shifts inscribe the narrator in the struggle for justice; the narrator partakes in the story. Relational narration makes room for the between. What is between and relates different modes of narration is an enactment of what the text calls for, the between of human exchange, which, according to Nancy, is in language.[153] Nancy's definition of justice is pertinent here.[154] He writes:

> Justice must be rendered to the line of the proper, to its cut each time appropriate – a cut that does not cut and that does not rise from a background, but a common cut that in one stroke separates and makes contact, a coexistence whose indefinite intertwining is the sole ground on which the "form" of existence rises. There is then no ground: there is only the "with," proximity and its spacing, the strange familiarity of all the worlds in the world. (111)

Hence, the "with" of justice correlates with the between of relational narration. Therefore, relational narration is a privileged site for the text to honor the practices of the Chagossians in their demands for justice. Relational narration is a "world-forming" form in the sense theorized by

[152] Charlésia's activism and her strength could be compared to the vigor of the forgotten slave of the Saint Géran shipwreck. Lionnet explains in "Shipwrecks, Slavery, and the Challenge of Global Comparison: From Fiction to Archive in the Colonial Indian Ocean" that the shipwreck of the Saint Géran has become part of foundational fiction for Mauritius because of Saint Bernadin's novel. She writes that the slave who swam to shore after this shipwreck and has been forgotten. Lionnet calls for to be included in Mauritian literature.

[153] See Nancy, *The Possibility of a World*.

[154] See Nancy, *The Creation of the World or Globalization*.

Lionnet, a form that calls for mutual exposure between different worlds.[155] Nancy further specifies that in a just world, justice is given within the world. Justice does not come from the outside, it does not hover above the world. As justice does not hover above the world, neither does the narrator hover above the characters in *Le silence.*

Demands for justice are enacted through the body. Charlesia led many protest marches. As he listens to her mention that she was clubbed by the police and imprisoned, Désiré recalls seeing a photograph of Charlesia in the newspaper: "Il se souvient très bien d'elle dans le journal, une femme arc-boutée, pieds-nus sur l'asphalte qui résistait à trois policiers en uniforme tentant de la tirer vers leur Jeep" (147). Charlesia's vulnerable and enduring body affected Désiré to the extent that he clearly remembers her arched posture, her bare feet on the asphalt and the three policemen who were attempting to subject her to brutality. Charlesia's arched posture stands out. The apposition occupies a central position in the sentence. This posture that defied the police thus seems to be the punctum of the photograph for Désiré. This punctum turns our attention to dynamics of power and resistance located in the body. Charlesia's arched body embodies Foucauldian agonism.[156] Her vulnerable and defiant body is a site that enacts resistance to state power. The women also challenged norms of intelligibility imposed by configurations of power.[157] Charlesia mentions to Désiré that she and other women went on hunger strikes. With the hunger strikes, the women made political claims; their bodies performed a message of resistance.

[155] In her article "World Literature, Postcolonial Studies, and Coolie Odysseys: J.M.G Le Clézio and Amitav Ghosh's Indian Ocean Novels", Lionnet considers the texts of Ghosh and Le Clézio as "world-forming literature" rather than "world literature" and focuses on mobilities within the texts of Le Clézio and Ghosh. In examining these mobilities, she analyzes the forms developed by the texts that allow for mutual exposure between different worlds.

[156] Foucault's theorization of agonism in "The Subject and Power" allows for exploring power through its relationship to resistance. For Foucault there is only power if there are limits to it.

[157] Athanasiou and Butler point out in *Dispossession* that in certain contexts, the power of dispossession works by rendering certain subjects, communities or populations unintelligible. This is certainly the case of the Chagossians, whose demands were ignored.

Charlesia and the women's occupation of the British High Commission Building intertwines the bodily and spatial qualities of defiance. The women decided they would go be heard in this official building. They dressed up as visa seekers. Once inside, they rushed to the windows where they brandished signs they had hidden in their bags: "Ranne nou Diego!" "Anglais Assassins!" (148). They hence occupied space as an act of resistance that had not been available to them in Diego Garcia, given that they were forcibly removed from the island. Their protest can also be read as occupying a place that was not their "proper" place according to the authorities. It is significant in that regard that the women adopted conventional propriety and wore make-up to infiltrate themselves in the building. The Chagossian women's displacement of the "proper" place (or the place that the authorities deemed proper for them to inhabit: the margins) was performatively enacted by their bodies which took up space.

With their collective occupation of the British High Commission building, the Chagossian women set forth a collective form of agency. It is a frequently lauded virtue of literature to bring about the universal resonances of a singular story. This passage rather centers on how Charlesia's story and claims are shared with others. It is significant that the inclusive pronoun "nou" is at the center of "Ranne nou Diego", the sign they held outside the window. The pronoun "nou" emphasizes the collective and encourages a departure from a view of rights that reinforces forms of individualism. Addressing deterritorialization presents the risk of being pulled toward robust ideas of possession. The claim "Ranne nou Diego" goes against a pull that associates personhood and property. Formulating the claim in Creole (when it was exhibited in a British official building) and hence refusing French and English, the languages of the former colonizers, adds political weight to their demand.

Read through the lens of the world-forming potential of the "between", documentary fiction becomes a world-forming genre. The interaction between documentary and fiction is mutually enriching and allows for recording the struggles of the Chagossians with accuracy while taking creative license in probing their experiences. Before concluding, a different literary approach to representing the displacement of the Chagossians bears mentioning. In *Mutiny* (2001) by South African born, Mauritius based, and English language writer Lindsey Collen, the focus is less on demanding justice than on staging the possibility of a mutiny. The setting, a dystopic women's prison on an island that resembles Mauritius and in which the inmates weave baskets for a world market, allows for critiquing dehumanizing globalizing forces. While the eviction of the Chagossians in *Mutiny* is not as foregrounded as it is in *Le silence*, it is regardless an essential component of the novel: Collen deploys exacerbation and defamiliarization to point to the continuity between the global power dynamics that regulate the women's prison and those that led to the uprooting of the Chagossians. *Mutiny* aestheticizes rage and dramatizes the consequences of the historical episode to invoke the possibility of a revolution. The novel centers on the subjectivities of three women – Juna, Leila, and Mama Gracienne – who interact within a shared cell. Collen explores the Chagossian experience through the character of Mama Gracienne, who arrives in the cell later in the plot. Juna and Leila progressively learn about her displacement; her story participates in nourishing the rage that builds the mutiny.

The suspenseful unveiling in the novel of the closure of the islands emblematizes Mama Gracienne's role in the political economy of *Mutiny*: Juna and Leila slowly develop empathy for Mama Gracienne - outrage on her behalf becomes a key element in fomenting a mutiny. When Mama Gracienne first walks into the cell, Juna recalls that she has heard her upon her arrival in the prison telling a guard that "The islands have been closed" (215). This elusive statement gains

meaning as the plot carries forward. Little by little, the women learn about how Mama Gracienne was told in Port-Louis that she could not return to her home in Diego Garcia and the precarious conditions in which she had to build a new life in Mauritius. They come to intuit that the ramifications of the trauma led to her dazingly confessing to her daughter's murder. When Mama Gracienne first arrives in the cell, Juna and Leila perceive her presence as an invasion. Notwithstanding her discomfort, Juna states that she can feel Mama Gracienne's "vibrations" (99). Her affective receptiveness toward the newcomer grows and spreads: Leila who had been even more distrustful also warms up to Mama Gracienne. Not only does building empathy allows them to recognize Mama Gracienne's autonomy and her rights, it simultaneously fosters outrage, or in this case, rage on behalf of the Other. Outrage becomes a productive emotion that helps build momentum and increases the political force and stakes of the mutiny.

*Mutiny* makes global power dynamics and market relations more legible by intensifying them in the form of a dystopia. The highly frequent use of italics establishes a disjuncture and instills discomfort. Sharp sounding verbs are reiterated and have a jarring effect. The news the women hear on the intercom render the climate even more distressing. They are informed of electronic break-downs, meteorological satellite implosions, damages the Supreme Court decides that workers owe their employers, and massive prescribing of anti-depressants, news which Juna interprets as signals of impending doom. The women formerly produced buttons for the world market but the electronic button factory is defunct and so they are "back to *low-tech*" (229) and weave baskets instead. Andrew Sobanet points out that prison novels tell from within the institution the story of the difficulties of incarceration which are often linked to larger social and economic forces;[158] the inoperative electronic button factory functions in *Mutiny* as a parodic

[158] See Sobanet, *Jail Sentences: Representing Prison in Twentieth-Century French Fiction.*

critique of the ways in which the forces of globalization exploit workers. The dystopia is further shaped by an oppressive temporality. When the women learn that the second will become 0.439 longer, they boil with fury because this means that their sentences will be 0.439 per cent longer and that every bit of prison work paid by the second will bring in less money for when they get out. Time becomes inextricably tied to agency; the women lack agency to shape their temporality.[159] In the context of *Mutiny*, the closure of the Chagossian islands seems as unimaginable and dystopian as the lengthening of the second.

Meanwhile, the novel imagines bonds of solidarity amongst the women and stresses that they forge these bonds by engaging with Chagossian culture; *Mutiny* hence implicitly advocates for an understanding of Mauritian culture that addresses creolizing processes and the role of the Chagossians in these processes.[160] The women develop a sense of community in the cell by playing creative games, one of these is sharing recipes. Their imagination allows them to kill the boredom and break beyond the confines of the present: they draw from their pasts and store knowledge for the future. The "Dried fish, crisp-fried like in Diego Garcia in homemade tomato sauce" (165) recipe is especially notable because it sets forth that Mama Gracienne had fish at her disposal in Diego Garcia and led a self-sufficient life. The recipes are a site of creolization, they incorporate varied traditions and ingredients from different cultures that attest to multifarious trends of migratory flux. For Françoise Vergès, practices of creolization can "be strategies of resistance,

[159] Wai Chee Dimock proposes that hell is a temporal effect, the effect of a now that has everything under its thumb. Dimock states: "That thumb shrinks in size the moment we can bring to bear on it a different time scale, different verb tenses" (183). In *Mutiny* with the lengthening of the second, the temporal effect of a crushing now is magnified. See Dimock, "Literature for the Planet".

[160] For a critique of a reading that fails to acknowledge that Lindsey Collen is representing a creolized life-world, see Lionnet, "Review of *The Subversion of Class and Gender Roles in the Novels of Lindsey Collen (1948-), Mauritian Social Activist and Writer* by Felicity Hand".

inventiveness, of creativity in the arts, music, and even in the political discourse" (209).[161] Sharing recipes can hence be read as creolizing practice, it is a creative coping mechanism for the women. Both sharing recipes and imagining the possibility of mutiny have to do with envisioning a future; *Mutiny* calls for a future that acknowledges the Chagossian people and their history.

Both *Mutiny* and *Le silence* give visibility to a little-known episode of history, but they mobilize different genres to make distinct but related political gestures: *Mutiny* calls for a revolution through the dramatization enabled by the dystopia while *Le silence* demands reparations in a documented and realistic mode. That these two authors express their affiliated literary and political commitments in different languages is a case in point to my contention – delineated in the introduction of the dissertation – that writers share sensibilities beyond the framework of a common language. This is also true of the Haitian authors Yanick Lahens, Edwidge Danticat, and Evelyne Trouillot to which I now turn. In the third chapter, "Healing the World in Yanick Lahens's *Failles*, Edwidge Danticat's *Create Dangerously*, and Evelyne Trouillot's *La mémoire aux abois*", I examine the formal qualities of a personal narrative, a collection of essays, and a novel; I tease out healing processes within these literary forms.

[161] See Vergès, "Kiltir Kreol: Processes and Practices of Créolité and Creolization" and "Open Session" in *Créolité and Creolization*.

## CHAPTER THREE: HEALING THE WORLD IN *FAILLES* BY YANICK LAHENS, *CREATE DANGEROUSLY* BY EDWIDGE DANTICAT, AND *LA MÉMOIRE AUX ABOIS* BY EVELYNE TROUILLOT

*Can the reenchantment of the world be an instrument that we use to shatter the realism of the prison?*

- Jackie Wang

Haiti is a fertile artistic terrain. Though storytelling in Haiti is mainly oral, though the illiteracy rate is high, and though only the elite speaks French, the country carries a strong literary tradition, especially in the French language.[162] While scholarly interest in other parts of the Francophone Caribbean (such as Guadeloupe and Martinique) has lessened due to a perceived decrease in creativity,[163] scholars recognize Haiti as a dynamic artistic site and numerous academic studies are being produced both from within Haiti and worldwide.[164]

Examining resistance to oppression and power dynamics are the main axes of postcolonial studies. Rather than focusing solely on oppositional forces, I am more interested in the ways in which literary writings allow authors and characters to heal from trauma: how texts explore processes of healings both thematically and structurally. The title of my dissertation, "Physicians

[162] *Gouverneurs de la rosée* by Jacques Roumain, *Compère général soleil* by Jacques Stephen Alexis and *Amour* by Marie-Vieux Chauvet are some noteworthy examples of canonical Francophone Haitian texts.

[163] In his assessment of the field of Caribbean Francophone Studies during a roundtable at UCLA, Martin Munro pointed out disparities in the current scholarly attention given to these areas. Munro, Martin "Table ronde: The Transnational Landscape of the Profession Today", SFPS Workshop, UCLA, May 4th 2018.

[164] The leading experts in the field include Martin Munro, Régine Jean-Charles, Charles Forsdick, Michel Rolph Trouillot, Thomas Spear, Michael Dash, Myriam Chancy, Laurent Dubois, and Joëlle Vitiello.

of the World", might suggest that I engage with the medical humanities. The title might also suggest that I draw from anthropology to examine and compare Western and non-Western modes of healing.[165] However, my focus is on literary healings of the psyche such as overcoming writer's block, immigrant guilt, nightmares, and repressed memories. I probe how writers reinvent language and narrative to work through and overcome shock and guilt, creating literary forms better able to communicate this transformative process.

When it comes to Haiti, with its fraught history of slavery, dictatorships, and catastrophes such as the 2010 earthquake, my interest in trauma and its consequences is sharpened.[166] Representations of Haiti often reduce the nation to a two-faced coin: Haiti is the first Black Republic, but it is also cast as the poorest and most "damned" country in the world.[167] Haitian writers work against these reductive representations;[168] they explore different forms of resistance and coping mechanisms to the many traumas that the country has endured. In the corpus of this chapter, Yanick Lahens, Evelyne Trouillot and Edwidge Danticat reflect directly and indirectly on the abilities of their texts to heal; they also weave healing into the thematic and aesthetic fabric of

[165] See Comaroff, "Healing and the Cultural Order: The Case of the Barolong Boo Ratshidi of Southern Africa".

[166] The 2010 earthquake amplified unequal structures in the country. Haiti is a deeply enclaved society, the color hierarchy that was instituted by colonialism remains. French control in Saint-Domingue began in 1660; slaves were brought from Africa to harvest sugar and coffee. Haiti became one of the most prosperous French colonies. In 1791 slave rebellions led by Toussaint Louverture overthrew the colonial order. Napoleon struggled to maintain the colony and Haiti finally became the first Black Republic in 1804. Since then several rulers of the Republic have consolidated oppressive regimes. The U.S. occupation from 1915 to 1934 also caused unrest. Dictator François Duvalier, who ruled from 1957 to 1971, developed his private militia, the Tonton Macoutes, who instilled and maintained terror in the country. His son Jean-Claude Duvalier took over the reins and enforced political repression until 1986. Haiti has also endured oppression from its neighbor on the island of Hispaniola, the Dominican Republic. In 1937, Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo ordered the massacre of Haitians who were crossing the river in attempts to find work in the Dominican Republic. For an incisive analysis of Haitian history, see Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*.

[167] See McAlister, "From Slave Revolt to a Blood Pact with Satan: the Evangelical Rewriting of Haitian History". Elizabeth McAlister traces the neo-evangelical rewriting of the iconic Bois Caïman slave ceremony as a "blood pact with Satan".

[168] The president of the U.S. recently provoked outcry by making derogatory comments about the country (he also targeted El Salvador and African countries). However, few people commented on how his slandering tapped into a set of ideas and stereotypes about the country that are deeply rooted in the Western imaginary.

their texts. That is not to claim, though, that their writings heal the wounds of colonialism, for such a claim would negate ways in which violence and the legacies of violence are constantly reactivated and rearticulated. Rather, healing the wounds of colonialism is an ongoing process that keeps redefining itself.

Lahens, Trouillot, and Danticat are three contemporary Haitian women authors who share similar sensibilities. All three reflect on their role as public intellectuals. They are also committed to working out ethical writing practices. Though Danticat is Haitian American and resides in the U.S., their shared interests unite them.[169] All three have produced fictionalized transformative and gendered rewritings of Haitian history. These authors are prolific and have found creative outlets in different genres. The three books I analyze in this chapter belong to different categories and I examine the ways in which their specificities lend themselves to healing purposes. I treat the texts in an order that follows the temporal distance from the main event they deal with. It is possible that a greater temporal distance from the historical events is more propitious to fiction. All three were published in 2010. *Failles* by Lahens is a *récit*, *Create Dangerously: the Immigrant Artist at Work* by Danticat is a collection of essays and *La mémoire aux abois* by Trouillot is a novel. *Failles* relates Lahens's experience of the earthquake and of the days and months that followed. Danticat recounts a trip to Haiti after the publication of her first novel, an interview of a torture survivor, and dealing with the shock of the earthquake. Trouillot imagines an encounter between François Duvalier's widow and a young Haitian nurse. The encounter yields a reckoning of events that occurred years prior, during Duvalier's dictatorship.

[169] Danticat's interview of Trouillot for BOMB magazine attests to their friendship. See "Evelyne Trouillot by Edwidge Danticat". https://bombmagazine.org/articles/evelyne-trouillot/

I argue that the formal and aesthetic qualities of these texts constitute sites within which the authors and characters negotiate the ethics of bearing witness to traumatic events and that these negotiations produce multifarious healings. These writings pose the questions: how to bear witness without exoticizing misery? How to speak for the collective without ventriloquizing? How to guard inherited memories? Engaging with these questions provides the terrain to deal, overcome, and move forward, to lead a life whose meaning is not reduced to surviving. First, I contend that *Failles* proposes utopian thinking as a remedy to the geological, political, and economic fault lines that divide Haiti. Restoring the play of words allows for imagining a better life. I then show that Danticat negotiates the ethics of being a secondary witness and participant in the healing process within the formal qualities of her essays. Danticat notably proposes reading as a coping strategy in *Create Dangerously*. Numbed from the shock and doubtful of her right to speak about an event she did not experience firsthand, Danticat finds confidence in her role by staging herself as a dynamic and invested reader. Finally, I claim that in *La mémoire aux abois*, the main character heals from the trauma she has inherited from her mother by taking ownership of her mediations of her mother's memories. I conclude by demonstrating that this corpus, though firmly anchored in Haiti, proposes healings of the world, for the authors consider the fates of Haiti and the world to be intertwined.

**Yanick Lahens's *Failles*: Writing Healing and Utopian Thinking**

Yanick Lahens's *Failles* was written in the immediate aftermath of the 2010 earthquake that decimated Haiti.[170] It is a personal narrative that interweaves various kinds of writing including journalism, political discussions, excerpts of fiction, and reflections on the craft and

[170] Notable early post-eathquake works include *Tout Bouge Autour de* moi by Dany Laferrière, (2010) and *Haïti, kenbe la!* by Rodney St. Eloi. For a thorough and comprehensive analysis of post-earthquake Haitian literature, see Munro, *Writing on the Fault Line: Haitian Literature and the Earthquake of 2010*.

ethics of writing. Lahens aims to transform the pain through writing. For Lahens, the geological fault lines exacerbated the fault lines formed by colonialism and globalization. In her assessment of globalization, Lahens states that the world has lost its driving utopias. *Failles* advocates for utopian thinking: Lahens invites us to imagine better worlds to come rather than remain locked in the present. I contend that this *récit* heals in proposing utopian thinking as an antidote to the denial of fault lines. *Failles* probes the connotations and affective weight of words so as to recommit to the game of words and claim the right to life.

Lahens does not write to heal but her writing carves out a space where words play with each other and this space has healing features; it allows her to move forward. "Je n'écris pas pour guérir" (17) asserts Lahens. She is wary of the terminology of healing because she does not believe in an easy cure. *Failles* works against misconceptions and misappropriations: a "healing narrative" is likely to be recuperated. Western audiences may read it to assuage their liberal guilt.[171] And yet by stating that she does not write to heal, by positing a negative, she establishes a dialectic between writing and healing. She writes to "tenter de savoir" (17). Her writing seeks knowledge and puts thought in motion. Lahens invokes the connection between writing and thought through a playful transfer. "Moment des pensées pétrifiées, balbutiantes, blanches. Blanches d'intensité contenue. Quelquefois blanches d'absence de mots" (17). These white thoughts remind us of the white page; that the whiteness is made of the absence of words reinforces this association. Unmentioned but implicit pages become a metaphor for thought. But rather than a metaphor wherein one element represents the other, the two elements become interwoven. Writing, then, is an exploration that liberates intensity and that allows thought to be unpetrified, to move forward. In striving to restore

[171] Martin Munro suggests that one of the reasons we read Haitian books is to assuage our liberal guilt for Haiti. See *Exile and Post-1946 Haitian Literature*, p. 207.

what she calls "the paradoxical space of the game of words", an expression that aptly describes her poetics, Lahens proposes an understanding of writing that is tied to the *pharmakon*, and, by extension, to healing. This paradoxical game is most pronounced in the relation of words to silence. She uses words in one instance to state that silence is better than words. Silence is at times a threat, at other times it is welcome. Lahens poses the question : "Comment ramener les mots à l'espace paradoxal du jeu, où ils disent et ne disent pas?" (66). This question pursues a line of enquiry opened up by Jacques Derrida in *Dissemination* through his exploration of the ambivalence of the *pharmakon*. For Plato, the *pharmakon*, a metaphor for writing, is poison and cure for it simulates and communicates thought. In his reclaiming of the term, Derrida brings about its ambivalence, or "the movement and the play that links [the opposites] among themselves, reverses them or makes one side cross over into the other (soul/body, good/evil, inside/outside, memory/forgetfulness, speech/writing, etc.)" (443).[172] It is this movement and play that the paradoxical space of the game allows for; saying and not saying are linked, reversed, they cross over. But if the *pharmakon* as metaphor for writing in the sense reclaimed by Derrida applies to writing in general, a specificity of Lahens' *pharmakon* is that writing, rather than being poison and cure, entertains a paradoxical relationship to healing. As we will see, although Lahens does not write to heal, her writing has healing virtues.

*Failles* questions the weight and affective force of words. Lahens opens with considerations of words and the work of poets before turning to recounting her experience of the earthquake. The eponymous word "failles" is one of the first words the text comments on; the significance and affective valence of the word changed on January 12, 2010. Writers occupy the

[172] See Derrida, *Dissemination*.

"terre des mots" (18) and they are "travailleurs des mots" (46) or wordsmiths. Working on words implies transforming them; Lahens challenges the dictionary definition of "failles," which she describes as cold and neutral. Part of what she achieves is to redefine the term "failles" in a way that conveys the post-earthquake atmosphere as well as the affective imprint of the word for people who have experienced the earthquake.[173]

Lahens also interrogates ways in which stereotypes seep into language and colonize the imaginary; she challenges the term "resilience". Lahens ponders which words "font le poids" (17), which words can ethically bear witness to people relentlessly reinventing life in the rubbles of death. Words carry connotations, in some cases they forcibly inscribe change rather than merely connote.[174] Words also reassert clichés and projections that stand in the way of life redefining itself. "Resilience" is not a word that "fait le poids" or measures up. Lahens asserts:

> Il y a quelque chose d'exotique à glorifier la résilience des Haïtiens. Nous autres, Haïtiens intellectuels et/ou privilégiés, nous y laissons prendre nous aussi. Quant à l'étranger, il en a fait un tel leitmotiv que c'est devenu un cliché. Vivre et non survivre nous rendra certes moins exotiques mais juste banalement vivants. (142)

As Lahens underlines the exoticizing dimension of the word, we are reminded that exoticizing is a colonial dynamic. The unequal relations between North and South and the complicated history of the country account for the roots of the cliché. In *Tropical Apocalypse*, Martin Munro shows

[173] Lahens's approach to language and writing after the earthquake differs from that of Dany Laferrière in *Tout bouge autour de moi* (2010). While Lahens explores the term "failles", Laferrière states that he wants to write a book on "ça" ("Je veux écrire un livre sur ça"). "Ça" refers to the experience of the earthquake which he qualifies as "l'innommable". Though words are in interplay with silence in *Failles*, the text is not concerned with the inexpressible. The questions Lahens poses ("comment écrire (…) sans exoticiser le malheur (…) comment ramener les mots à l'espace paradoxal du jeu ») differ from the implicit question of « comment écrire l'innommable ». The second presupposes encountering the limits of language whereas the first one is committed to the ethics of writing and to using language in a way that allows for conceptual play.

[174] See Ross, *Communal Luxury: The Political Imaginary of the Paris Commune*.

that the legacy of slavery informs detrimental misrepresentations of Haitians. He stresses that the world and life came to enslaved Africans through death. According to Munro, this conception of death explains to some extent the stoic fatalism of Haitians which is often interpreted as innate "resilience". "Resilience" rearticulates a colonial view of Haitians which casts them as able and fit to endure the brutality of colonialism.[175] *Failles* works against these colonial dynamics by advocating for the right to a life that is not reduced to survival.

*Failles* undoes two simplistic albeit contradictory views: that art is irrelevant in the time of atrocity on the one hand, and on the other hand, that misery and disaster (particularly in the third world) produce great art. Writing after the earthquake raises ethical questions (how to write without exoticizing calamity?) and existential questions (what to write?). Lahens foregrounds questions in her process. Doubt is an integral component of her interrogations. She questions the function and value of art in the time of catastrophe. She quotes Marguerite Duras's *Hiroshima mon amour* and hence reminds us that these questions were particularly salient after the Second World War. Brad Evans recalls that Theodor Adorno and others have questioned the relevance of art in response to realities of extreme violence.[176] For Lahens, art is unquestionably relevant and yet it is not a remedy. Art is merely a process that needs to keep continuing, that does not need to be

[175] Political theorists Julia Reid and Brad Evans formulate a similar critique of resilience but they work it out on different grounds. Rather than examining colonialism, they focus on neo-liberalism. Evans and Reid argue in *Resilient Life: The Art of Living Dangerously* that "resilience" is a neo-liberal deceit that reduces the meaning of life to survival. According to Evans and Reid, the deceit is produced and sustained by liberalism, which announces the end of the world (due to climate change) and reduces people to vulnerability, diminishes or eradicates political subjectivity, makes no room for the poetic subject (a notion they borrow from Nietzsche). This complementary perspective warrants further examining how the colonial and neo-liberal logics interact.

[176] In a conversation with the visual artist, philosopher, and psychoanalyst Bracha L. Ettinger, Evans asks Ettinger how she responds to what he terms "this so-called unrepresentability of human atrocity". Her compelling answer has provided impetus for my approach to healing literature. She asserts: "Art proceeds by trusting in the human capacity to contain and convey its rage and its pain, and to transform residuals of violence into ethical relations via new forms of mediation that give birth to their own beauty and define them". See Evans and Ettinger, "Art in a Time of Atrocity". https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/16/opinion/art-in-a-time-of-atrocity.html. See also Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*.

precipitated by disaster either, and that keeps questioning itself. The author both states that writing transforms the pain and that this is not enough, that Haiti needs a new blueprint for society. Meanwhile, a right to beauty forms part of the right to life; Lahens asserts this right by describing scenes of experiencing beauty in Haiti.

Lahens develops metaphors and poetic images to question the rhetoric that announced a new solidarity after the earthquake. In certain places in the *récit*, a brutal lexicon ("clichés à abattre" (45)) attests to the author's position that makes no concessions and no compromise of principles. This lexicon also funnels through violent analogies and metaphors (Lahens compares writing to pulling out a rotten tooth and she states that she aims to whip the collective imaginary). This brutality indicates outright dismissals of this world; the dismissals are necessary so that we can reimagine a better world. At the same time, she cautions that the so-called new bears the marks of the old. The genre of the *récit* is especially apt for poetic flight that advocates for political transformation by challenging grandiloquent affirmations of the new. For Lahens, while the world announced its solidarity, birds of prey had gotten off the ground: « Les grands oiseaux de proie, si friands de la mort dont on peut se repaître, ont déployé leurs ailes. La belle nappe blanche des festins est déjà posée au-dessus de la faille » (19). To put a tablecloth on the fault line is to mask rather than rebuild.[177] Metaphor and images in *Failles* become a site for destabilizing "reality"

[177] The anthropologist Mark Schuller who conducted field work in Haiti after the earthquake has argued that not only does foreign aid not help rebuild the country, it worsens the situation. Schuller assesses how power works within the aid system as the NGOs impose interpretations of unclear mandates down the chain through a process he calls "trickle down imperialism". See Schuller, *Killing with Kindness: Haiti, NGOs, and international aid* and Schuller, "'Pa Manyen Fanm Nan Konsa': Intersectionality, Structural Violence, and Vulnerability Before and After Haiti's Earthquake". Lahens is very critical of the occupation of NGOs. In a subsequent project, I will examine the poetics of space she develops to describe the post-earthquake landscape. She provides a visual and spatial rendering of the inner logic of refugee camps, and of how NGOs implant themselves amongst the rubble. I will read *Failles* in conjunction with *Aux frontières de la soif* by Kettly Mars which is set in the refugee camp of Canaan. This project will aim to establish a productive interchange between critiques of the negative impact of NGOs and critiques of the humanitarian violence deployed by U.S. imperialism. Scholars such as Noam Chomsky, Mimi Thi Nguyen, Yen Le Espiritu, Neda Atanasoski have suggested that Western states began to authorize military aggression on humanitarian grounds after

and spurious rhetoric. Reviving a sense of the future requires taking aim at the forces that prevent us from venturing outside of the present.[178]

The term "utopia" is recurrent in *Failles*; utopias in the imaginary of this text are not imaginary, ideal, disconnected places. Rather, they exert critical functions, such as the ability to imagine the future. Lahens relates in Failles that she organizes a workshop in which she encourages her young filmmakers to project; her refusal to stay locked within the oppressive confines of the present drives the workshop. For Lahens, the present Haitian context is constrained by NGOs that bleed the country dry, a deeply enclaved society, and the corrupt political system which inspires people's defiance.[179] Martin Munro claims in *Tropical Apocalypse* that Haiti carries a strong tradition of utopian discourse and that utopian discourse is paradoxically tied to apocalypse. President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, by portraying himself as a divine agent that could bring Haiti into utopia, instead conferred upon himself the power to bring the country into apocalyptic bloodshed. *Failles* does not offer utopian discourse, nor does it present a utopian program. Rather, *Failles* sets forth the need for utopian thinking. *Failles* suggests that the legacy of slavery has shaped Haitian collective consciousness and made it all too receptive to apocalypse. Awaiting end times diminishes possibilities for imagining a better future.

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communism lost its value as justification for occupying the world's more vulnerable nations. The dialogue between these two fields could allow for articulating a robust analysis of mediated power dynamics.

[178] Frederic Jameson makes a case for venturing outside of the confines of the present in *An American Utopia: Dual Power and the Universal Army*. He opens the text with the quip that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism (he notes that in fiction there has recently been a plethora of dystopias and a paucity of utopias). This comment, albeit facetious, points to ways in which capitalism consecrates itself as reality. This is also the stance of Slavoj Žižek. Žižek's in his response to Jameson,"Seeds of Imagination" (featured in *An American Utopia*), writes that the enshrinement of capitalisms sheds leftist political activity in a utopian light, leftist political activity is thus cast as fanciful and unrealistic.

[179] *Failles* produces concrete political and historical analysis. For instance, as noted in the introduction of the dissertation, Lahens establishes a transcolonial contrast between Haiti and the Dominican Republic. She posits that the Dominican Republic is less impoverished in part because it kept the infrastructure set up by Spanish colonialism and grounded its socialism in modernity whereas Haiti destroyed all French infrastructure to do away with colonialism and slavery.

*Failles* indicates that utopias are not only about breaking out from the restrictive constraints of the present by imagining a better future, they are also about drawing from the past. For Lahens, the world has lost its utopias: « Il y a effectivement de quoi être pris de vertige face à un monde qui a perdu ses utopies motrices, ses anciens repères, implose à l'intérieur de ses réseaux et semble foncer sans boussole » (33). The adjective « motrice » shows that Lahens considers utopias to be a driving force. The visual image of a world rushing ahead without a compass suggests a need for reference points, points that would structure a social project. Theodor Adorno writes in *Aesthetic Theory* that utopia defines itself in negative relation to reality. The possibility of utopia according to Adorno converges with the possibility of catastrophe because art summons catastrophe in order to ward it off. In *Failles,* the catastrophe of the earthquake is the reality. Part of the work of the text is to show that the catastrophe was both deeply rooted in and aggravated by what Lahens qualifies as structural fault lines carved out by political and socioeconomic inequities. *Failles* presents utopias as necessary tools to overcome the denial of these fault lines and to provide a sense of direction.

The space for the personal carved out by the *récit* or tale allows for foregrounding the phenomenology of the utopia. Lahens underscores literature's capacity to give us "la saveur du monde" (134). In the same vein, Lahens describes the taste of utopia at the refugee camp where she helped out. « Mon utopie à moi a pris, le temps de quelques jours, les yeux de Makenson, de Nadia, de Feguens, le sourire de Gaétan, d'Erncia, de Peter, d'Eslain, la vitalité de Lissa, de Samy, de Narcisse, de Dady » (19). Utopia has taken the eyes, smile and vitality of people, *Failles* hence depicts utopia as an experience. "Mon utopie à moi" stresses that this account situates itself in the realm of the personal. Lahens indicates that the smile of children tastes like sun in the mouth. Given that her own utopia has taken the shape of the smile of people, we can surmise that by

association her utopia tasted for a few fleeting days like sun in the mouth. She thus proffers a personal and singular phenomenology of a transitory utopia. This phenomenology accompanies a political call for utopian thinking.

Utopia in *Failles* emerges as an experience, a line of thought and a set of practices. In recounting a workshop that she led and in which youth participated in a film project, Lahens defined the goal thusly: « Nous avions comme seule utopie, dans le cadre de cet atelier, non point d'accorder un privilège (car le privilège n'est pas généralisable), mais de donner l'occasion d'exercer un droit à des adolescents appelés à dessiner l'avenir. Un droit à la vie » (142). This particular manifestation of utopia is a set of practices that mobilizes different media and art forms in order to claim a right to life. Rather than offering a program, Lahens gives an account of a localized set of pedagogical practices. The utopia of this workshop is to claim a right to life. This aim is radical, its straightforwardness ascertains that the right to life is not the current reality for Haitians. Lahens quotes Cartier Bresson's definition of photography ("c'est mettre sur la même ligne de mire la tête, l'oeil et le coeur") to delineate her project. The right to life is the better future that Lahens invites the adolescents to put in their "ligne de mire". She asks adolescents to draw the future. Though she evokes drawing figuratively, combining references to drawing and photography in the context of a film project emphasizes the interconnection of art forms and media.

By assembling different genres, the writing in *Failles* embodies a poetics of reconstruction. The earthquake engendered a crisis of creativity for Lahens. She overcomes her writer's block by drawing from previous texts, including a novel she had begun to write (*Guillaume et Nathalie*, which was published in 2013). Jason Herbeck compellingly argues in "Literature of Reconstruction: An Architextual Assessment of Post-Earthquake Haiti in Yanick Lahens's *Failles* and *Guillaume et Nathalie*" that this intertextual process parallels the concrete rebuilding of Haiti.

[180]Piecing together prior writings is similar to piecing together rubbles of buildings that were previously there. Though Lahens rebuts the language of healing, *Failles* heals in that the poetics of reconstruction allow her to claim the right to live for Haitians. Edwidge Danticat also relies on intertextuality to work through the shock of the earthquake.

### *Create Dangerously:* Danticat's Healing Essays

In the collection of essays *Create Dangerously: The Immigrant Artist at Work*, Edwidge Danticat foregrounds her positionality as an immigrant artist. Danticat immigrated from Haiti to New York at age 12, she published *Breath, Eyes Memory* in 1994 and *Create Dangerously* in 2010. The immigrant artist creates dangerously because she writes with one foot in Haiti, where a tradition of censorship has left its imprint, and another foot in the U.S., where she is likely to offend the Haitian immigrant community. Dealing with dictatorship, torture, and the earthquake form guiding threads across the essays. As an immigrant artist she also presents a particular vantage point from which to reflect on the ethics of bearing witness in the healing process, especially given that she has not experienced most of the events firsthand. Here I treat three of the essays of the collection. In "Walk Straight", Danticat recalls the "healing journey" she embarked on with the protagonist of her first novel. In "I Speak Out", Danticat writes about the torture survivor Alèrte Bélance, who deems that she healed so that she could speak against human rights violations. In "Our Guernica", Danticat, in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake, reads as a way to overcome her shock. These three essays are thematically connected in that they feature

[180] This approach to literature as a force of reconstruction is also that adopted by John P. Walsh in his reading of Kettly Mars's dictatorship novel *Saisons Sauvages*. Walsh emphasizes the tropes of reading and writing in Mars's novel. He notes that reading allows for a crossing of boundaries from private to public, past to present, and from psychological to allegorical modes. This crossing of boundaries, he argues, is central to the idea of literature as means of reconstruction, or the reconstitution of self, family, and society. See Walsh, "Reading (in the) Ruins: Kettly Mars's *Saisons Sauvages*" p. 72.

healing journeys but healing also informs a writing practice and an ethical discussion. I argue that the formal qualities of these essays constitute a site within which the ethics of being a secondary witness and a participant in the healing process are negotiated.

In "Walk Straight", Danticat explains the rationale of the addendum to her first novel: a refusal to bend under the burden of representation. In so doing, she foregrounds textual bonds within a web of texts she has authored. Danticat includes in the essay the letter she wrote to the main character of *Breath, Eyes, Memory* after its publication in 1994. In this letter, Danticat thanks Sophie for the "healing journey" they have embarked on together. The essay points to a parallel between the healing journey and the creative process, both are driven and sustained by nurturing bonds. She addresses the context in which she wrote the letter: during a visit to her ancestors' grave in the majestic lime colored mountain of Léogâne, Danticat, who had just read a book of essays entitled *Afterwords: Novelists on Their Novels*, penned a letter to Sophie in response to the backlash she received for depicting the practice of virginity testing. Because they were denigrated in the media, some members of the Haitian community deemed that Haitian authors should devote themselves to fostering more positive representations. They accused Danticat of exploiting her culture for money and fame. Danticat's novel made the Oprah book club in 1998, which significantly increased the number of readers. The media attention the novel received due to Oprah's book club selection exacerbated these criticisms. In the letter, Danticat decries that Sophie was read as representing all Haitian women.[181] Danticat advocates for the singularity of her character's experience. She states: "your body is now being asked to represent a larger space than

[181] Danticat responded to the accusation that she is a liar by emphasizing that lying is the definition of fiction. Gérard Genette points out in *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* that whereas writers like Balzac and Zola produced public responses to criticism, this self-defense component of the authorial epitext is no longer current. That Danticat had to write an addendum in self-defense shows how much pressure the immigrant community exerts on the writer.

your flesh" (34). This image functions as a metaphor for the burden of representation. She unearths herself from the weight by advocating for the singularity of her character's experience.[182]

The nurturing textual bonds which Danticat ties in this essay between different texts she has authored mirror the bond between Danticat and her character. The format of the letter allows her to position herself as intimately familiar with the singularity of Sophie's experiences. The epistolary form, its deictic markers and the direct address from first person to second person, heighten the sense of intimacy between author and character. This intimacy is also emphasized through the registers and lexicons of feeling (she repeats the verb "feel" five times in the letter), confidences ("secrets (34)), and gratitude ("blessed" (34), "thank you" (34)). In expressing gratitude to Sophie, Danticat suggests that it is the closeness between author and character that allowed the author to be part of Sophie's healing journey. In the novel *Breath, Eyes, Memory,* an integral component of Sophie's process of recovery is to join a healing group formed by women who support each other. In a vein similar to that of the healing group, this letter posits the author's caring disposition toward her character.

By including the addendum in the essay, Danticat disrupts the subordination logic that is typically theorized as the function of the peritext (all the textual elements that surround the text) to the text.[183] Initially written to mediate the novel's reception, the letter here becomes a focal point of the essay. In fact, Danticat constructs the essay around the letter. She describes both her arduous

[182] Many immigrant writers and writers from minority groups in the U.S. contend with the burden of representation. Junot Diaz and Toni Morrison, for instance, often discuss in interviews how they deal with this obstacle to creative freedom.

[183] I am drawing here from Genette's terminology (*ibid.*). The paratext is formed by the elements that surround and extend the text. The peritext is the paratext located inside the book (such as titles, a preface, notes), whereas the epitext is the paratext situated outside the book (interviews, correspondences, diaries). Because her work receives so much attention and because she steps up to the role of public intellectual, Danticat has produced an abundant epitext. This afterword stands out in that as Genette indicates, afterwords are rare because after the reading it is too late to shape the reading (shaping the reading is the function of the preface).

ascent up the mountain to visit her aunt Ilyana and the site of the gravestones where she wrote the letter to Sophie. In other words, the essay "Walk Straight" explores the context of the peritext of the text *Breath, Eyes, Memory*. The function and status of the texts change; the addendum of *Breath* becomes intertext in *Create Dangerously*. As these functions and statuses change though, the nature of the interactions between the writings is continuous, it is one of nurturing creativity. According to Peter France, the felt personal presence of the essayist is a central feature of the essay.[184] Danticat foregrounds her personal presence to show how much she cares for her texts; she wrote the addendum to tend to the reception of the novel.

These multileveled nurturing bonds (between texts, between characters, between character and author) make us receptive to healing as a creative process in Danticat's work. At the stylistic level, the forms of this essay can be read as what I call "healed forms". According to feminist scholars Ruth-Ellen Boetcher Joeres and Elizabeth Mittman, essays are frequently marked by a tendency to "wander around a subject, to investigate various paths toward a point, to enjoy the possibility of digression".[185] Danticat's essays do not digress, nor do they possess the fragmentary quality that Georg Lukács considers intrinsic to the essay.[186] The sentences are woven together through juxtapositions and hence achieve a smooth texture. There is a musicality to them (through the repetition of "I have come" for example). Associations also impel the images. Danticat describes the Cacos, Sophie's family, as "this family of yours, the Cacos, named after a bird whose wings look like flames" (34). This description of the Cacos implements a chain of signifying links;

[184] Quoted by Lia Brozgal in *Against Autobiography*.

[185] See Joeres and Mittman, "An Introductory Essay" (page xxx) in *The Politics of the Essay: Feminist Perspectives*. The editors point out that though the essay is unbound and difficult to define as genre, it is also very traditional: the essay comes from a predominantly elitist white male tradition. Their collection emphasizes and analyzes historical contexts and subject positions of women essayists. Their interest is in how and to what purposes women appropriate this genre. In Danticat's case, the essay allows her to develop her authorial self in relation to the Haitian collective.

[186] See Lukács, *Soul and Form*.

the Cacos are associated to the bird which in turn is associated to fire (there is also a very visual component in describing the wings, flames suggest fire, warm colors are hinted at through the mere mention of flames). Signifying links are a healed form in that they are driven by a movement of association and bringing together. The healed forms continuously gesture toward beauty; the smooth texture increases the reader's receptiveness to the aesthetic pleasure provoked by depictions of colors and landscapes.

Danticat describes the healing journey as extending "from here and back", which suggests that reckoning with a sense of place is an essential component of this essay. The title "Walk Straight" can be read as an inverted reference to the essay as penned by Montaigne.[187] Montaigne, in his essays, features walking as an activity as well as a metaphor; walking aimlessly parallels wandering thought. However, though associations impel the thoughts in "Walk Straight", the essay has a clear sense of direction, that of recounting two interwoven journeys, a visit with the aunt and the "afterlife" of the novel. These journeys are anchored in a site, in the landscape of Haiti.[188] For this reason, the Haitian landscapes seep into the writing. For instance, Danticat states that her family has "sprung" from the "lime colored mountain range" (22). The two journeys are condensed in one site in particular, that of the gravesite where Danticat communes with her ancestors and in so doing claims her affiliation with Sophie, whose family is marked by generations of love and trauma. Martin Munro notes that the physical distance of exile can have a consoling allure.[189] By

[187] See Montaigne, *Essays*.

[188] Danticat's attentiveness to her surroundings is also a feature of her travel writing. See Danticat, *After the Dance: A Walk Through Carnival in Jacmel, Haiti*.

[189] See Munro, *Exile and Post-1946 Haitian literature*, p. 104.

contradistinction, Danticat leaves and returns to face the pain; she grounds the healing journey by the gravestones. She also faces the pain of torture survivor Alèrte Bélance.

In "I speak Out", Danticat records her experiences as a secondary witness of Alèrte Bélance's testimony. The contrast between how Danticat carries her role as secondary witness and the way in which Alèrte's testimony was packaged on television brings into sharper focus Danticat's responsible narrating practices. In this essay, Danticat recounts interviewing and filming Alèrte for a documentary about Haitian torture survivors. Alèrte Bélance was arrested and tortured by a paramilitary group working for the junta of the 1991 coup d'état that deposed President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. After they left her for dead, Alèrte managed to crawl to the side of the road where other soldiers picked her up and brought her to a hospital. Doctors sewed her tongue back up, this was done in secrecy because the perpetrators were known to come finish off their victims at the hospital. Danticat situates herself as a secondary witness and offers a poetic rendering of the experience of receiving the testimony. The essay features an epigraph, a direct quote by Alèrte in which she stresses speaking out. The reader sees Alèrte's words before being introduced to Danticat's impressions. The epigraph affirms an ethics of secondary witnessing, wherein the primary witness is foregrounded. Danticat conveys her emotions and her impressions of Alèrte: according to Danticat, Alèrte conducts the act of bearing testimony with "strength and resolve" (81). This account fleshes out the meaning of the act of bearing testimony. To bear means to endure, Danticat stresses that this is an exhausting process for Alèrte. Speech is difficult for Alèrte because her tongue has been severed and sewn back; she seems relieved once she has stopped talking. In that Danticat is mediating Alèrte's testimony in this essay, we are reminded of the preface to Rigoberta Menchú canonical testimonio. Elizabeth Burgos, the anthropologist who

cowrote the testimonio, legitimized Menchú in her preface to the text.[190] The implication of such a gesture is that Menchú, as a third world woman, needed Burgos's stamp of approval in order to be heard by Western readers. By contrast, Danticat's role is not to give legitimacy to Alèrte's testimony. Rather, her role as secondary witness is to recount how she experienced the testimony and the reflections it sparked. Danticat is also an aesthetically receptive witness; Alèrte's scars spark a poetic vision: "the machete scars and suture marks like tiny railroad tracks leading toward her chin" (74).[191] Danticat hence forges a dynamic relationship between witnessing and creating.

Danticat conceives of her role as secondary witness within the framework of conceptualizing Haiti. She notes that she could not help but wonder where the rest of Alèrte's arm was: "Alèrte's missing forearm had dissolved in a mass grave, becoming part of the country that had helped create her" (75). Danticat's continuous preoccupation with writing Haiti is at play in this image. Rather than writing the nation directly or indirectly, she writes the nation transversally; she extends the nation (in its territory and as a concept).[192] The metamorphosis implied in the dissolution into the mass grave suggests that Danticat conceptualizes the nation of Haiti as subject to transformations and renewals.

Danticat dutifully records the shape that Alèrte wants to give to her testimony; this careful account brings about that Alèrte conceives of testifying as a duty and that she tinges her healing narrative with a dimension of self-sacrifice. Alèrte emphasizes that it was a slow recovery: "Slowly, she said, reaching up to the scars on the side of her face, she began to heal. But she did

[190] See Burgos-Debray and Menchú, *I Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala*.

[191] This quote inscribes Danticat in the lineage of Toni Morrison, for it reminds us of the scars on Sethe's back which form a tree in *Beloved*.

[192] Danticat in the interview "Bearing Witness and Beyond: Edwidge Danticat Talks about her Latest Work" states that she likes to take her time with an idea, to fill it out. Here she fills out the idea of Haiti.

not want to give the impression that it was quick and easy, as in a movie" (80). The allusion to quick and easy healings in movies refers to ways in which healing narratives can be fabricated to be consumed and digested easily. These narratives are designed to provide relief and entertainment rather than provoke thoughtful engagement. Some Hollywood movies come to the reader's mind, their stories are rife with sentimentality, naivety and self-congratulation. Danticat respects Alèrte's agency in shaping the narrative by quoting and paraphrasing her with precision. Part of the healing process involved her children needing time to get used to her new body and her deeper voice. Danticat reports that the tongue had been hanging by a thread of flesh and that after it was sewn back on, it healed "miraculously" (80). It is not certain whether in this use of adverb Danticat is quoting Alèrte. However, the adverb is tonally coherent with the self-sacrificing component of the narrative. "Miraculously" taps into a well of religious resonances and suggests that Alèrte is a saint. The reader also recalls that in the epigraph, Alèrte's direct words, Alèrte stresses her "martyrdom" (73). Alèrte believes that her tongue healed to allow her to serve a greater purpose: '"It healed", she said, "so I can tell my story, so people can know what happened to me"' (80). Alèrte conceives of telling her story as her (saintly) duty. She accepted to testify on the *Phil Donahue Show*--despite her discomfort with people staring at her scars--in the hope that it would help her country.

This essay's commitment to Alèrte's agency in shaping her narrative stands as an inverted mirror to the way in which her testimony is packaged on the *Phil Donahue Show* so as to be made palatable to an American audience. Danticat recounts that she attended the show as an audience member to support Alèrte. The show was meant to encourage the Clinton administration to take measures against the junta. Danticat points out that to garner interest from the audience, there needed to be a lure, that of celebrity involvement (such as that of Susan Sarandon). Alèrte

appeared on the show with a translator but because this was a slow process, she was made to raise her missing arm in lieu of testifying. Whereas her testimony was reduced to a visual display on the show, Danticat honors Alèrte's dignity by filling up poetic space with her testimony. Danticat also carefully takes on the role of secondary witness of the 2010 earthquake.

In the essay "Our Guernica", Danticat reflects on the role of the writer in bearing witness to the 2010 earthquake. She defines bearing witness as adding a voice to the chorus rather than speaking for the victims. However, the writer does not merely add a voice, the writer mediates by "gathering and then replaying voices" (159). Danticat shows how she proceeded, with responsibility, with due diligence, by reading "hundreds of first-person narratives, testimonials, blogs" (159). She stresses that her intellect and her heart were engaged in this process. In reflecting on expectations imposed on fellow writer Dany Laferrière, she finds more ground for thinking through the role of the writer. Laferrière, a Canadian based Haitian author who left Haiti in exile as a young man, was in Port-au-Prince during the earthquake. He was criticized by Canadian journalists for returning to his home in Montréal after the earthquake. Danticat states that she has no doubt that he would have stayed had he been a doctor. She hence shifts the lens away from moralizing judgments and toward practicality. She asserts that his role, his capacity to effect change, is to bear witness. His role in bearing witness is that of a public intellectual, writing short essays but also going on the radio and television. Her understanding of the work of the writer is broad, it extends further than the words on the page. The format of the essay allows Danticat to stage herself as a writer. She foregrounds the role of the writer as a thoughtful, diligent, emotionally invested writer. Danticat specifies that the earthquake will not quell the creativity of Haitian writers: "Daring again to speak for the collective, I will venture to say that perhaps we will write with the same fervor and intensity (or even more) as before" (162). We are reminded of the

title *Create Dangerously* because she stipulates in the introductory and eponymous essay that creating dangerously involves daring to offend. Daring is an integral component of creating dangerously. By extension, creating dangerously is also daring to speak for the collective. It poses risks of ventriloquizing but has the value of asserting that there is a collective of Haitian writers.

In contradistinction with texts that question the utility and value of art in the time of catastrophe (a very common question in the post-earthquake context, as we have seen above), Danticat shows the effects of art and pays homage to art through ekphrasis. Her description of the painting she and her friend Jhon come across in the makeshift refugee camp emphasizes art's capacity to move. She describes its beauty and aesthetics as "stunning" and indicates that it makes Jhon misty-eyed. Her description reflects the effort of the essay as theorized by Theodor Adorno: "a childlike freedom that catches fire, without scruple, on what others have already done" (152).[193] She produces an idea of art that is based on her experience, that is neither scientific nor philosophical. Picasso's "Guernica" is known for having produced new forms out of the rubbles.[194] By proffering that Haitians will have thousands of Guernicas, Danticat asserts multiplicity and makes an optimistic statement about creative energy.

The focus on the personal allowed by the form of the essay enables conjoining the ethical stakes of writing after the earthquake with the ethical stakes of writing about Haiti more generally. In both cases, Danticat acknowledges a responsibility toward Haiti. Danticat seeks to protect Haiti in the public consciousness. She invites the reader into the intimacy of her experience on the plane returning from Haiti back to the U.S. She felt hurt when the flight attendant claimed that the

[193] See Adorno, "The Essay as Form" in *Notes to Literature*.

[194] By contrast, for Lahens, there have already been thousands of Haitian Guernicas. Though the two authors share similar sensibilities, Lahens generally adopts a sterner position. Claiming that there will be Guernicas poses the risk of erasing a rich artistic tradition.

passengers must be relieved to leave Haiti. The attendant asserted "God bless America," to which Danticat responded "God bless Haiti, too" (171). This anecdote shows that Danticat conceives of her work and her role as partaking in transforming representations. She describes Haiti here and at other points in the essays as "battered" (which denotes a continued, ceaseless disparagement). This is a recurrent concern of hers that is intensified with the earthquake. Danticat confers upon representations of Haiti more dignity and nuance. She also pays tribute to people she knew. Whereas fiction imagines the life of others, the essay foregrounds the author's relationships to others. Danticat honors her cousin Maxo by writing about his impact on the community and on herself. While she reflects on her role as writer, Danticat shows that she is first and foremost a reader.

By staging herself as a reader, Danticat produces a conception of reading as a dynamic process that allows her if not to heal, then to overcome the numbness of the shock. She foregrounds her reading activity by heading several paragraphs with the words "I read". At a loss for words after the earthquake and uncertain about her right to speak about an event she did not experience directly, Danticat turns to reading: "So I did what I always do when my own words fail me. I read" (159). The adverb "always" stresses that reading to overcome failing words is a recurring practice in Danticat's life. Reading then appears to be an antidote that has repeatedly proved to be effective. Shock numbs emotions; reading conversely activates and intensifies her emotions. Danticat quotes a tale of death written by Dolores Dominque Neptune, daughter of the famous and beloved radio broadcaster and public personality Jean Dominique who was assassinated on April 3, 2000. Danticat describes the tale of Dolores's son's death as "one of the most heart-breaking" accounts she has read. This epithet emphasizes that she mobilizes her heart; the gerundive "breaking" underscores the effect of the testimony. Danticat also quotes accounts by the siblings Evelyne and

Lyonel Trouillot. She directly quotes an excerpt in which Lyonel Trouillot recounts encountering domino players exchanging jokes about the living and the dead.[195] Laughing in Trouillot's account is a coping strategy. The emphasis on laughter draws her toward a specific sensibility, that of Laferrière, whose oeuvre offers a larger than life sense of humor. She states: "I too needed to laugh, so I began reading my friend Dany Laferrière again" (160). A strong intentionality motivates her reading selection. However, reading Laferrière's novel *L'énigme du retour* elicits the inverse response: "I didn't laugh, I cried" (161). By addressing her responses to these writings, Danticat positions her reading activity within an intricate web of emotional responses and functions. Emotions serve a purpose in the coping process; reading enables sparking these emotions.[196]

As Danticat quotes and paraphrases these accounts, intertextuality becomes a central feature of this essay and amplifies the reading process. Intertextuality is an embodiment of one of the ways Danticat makes herself an "echo chamber" (a term she introduces to describe her approach in mediating testimonies after the earthquake). By prefacing the quote of Dominique Neptune's "tale" with the qualification "heart-breaking"; she mediates our reading of the quote. This is an instance of the process of extension of reading. Danticat does not quite offer her reading, she inflects our reading rather than overdetermining it. Rather than restricting by imposing interpretation, the mediation offers more interpretive possibilities. Intertextuality is also an invitation for the readers to expand their readings. Danticat slides from one text to another through affiliations, kinships and connections, which are characteristic of the process of reading and invite her reader in.

[195] Danticat treats death as interconnected with life. Her essay goes against the relegation of death outside of society, against denial and avoidance.

[196] Discussing emotions is more suited than affects in exploring the healing process because affects cannot be categorized. In the healing process there is a need to name and categorize what is being worked through.

Reading to cope, similarly to reading as a resistance strategy, allows for encounters between writer and reader across time and space. In the introductory essay which borrows its title from Albert Camus, Danticat explains reading dangerously within the context of dictatorship (though the meaning extends beyond this context); it is an act of sedition, of exploring censored and disruptive ideas (however this strategy is not available to many due to very strong illiteracy in a hierarchical society). [197] Danticat emphasizes that reading as political protest was an integral component of underground culture under the dictatorship. Deceased and foreign or "blan" writers could not be tortured because they were either not Haitian or already dead.[198] The constellation of writers she draws in this essay is far reaching and diverse. The list is too long to reproduce here but the following quote is exemplary of the connections she draws: "join Albert Camus and Sophocles to Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Osip Mandlestam, and Ralph Waldo Emerson to Ralph Waldo Ellison" (10). Reading allows for forbidden encounters across time and space. This practice of reading creates an experience of time that disrupts the imprisoning temporality of the dictatorship by forging kinships between authors of different time periods. Danticat portrays reading as an activity that allows for garnering courage in seeking intellectual affinities.

For the immigrant artist, reading also allows for bridging the gap with Haiti. Reading mitigates the guilt of the immigrant by collapsing the spatial divide. The distinction between inside and outside Haiti yields to a nurturing community of readers and writers. Danticat hence produces a conception of community that relies on elasticity. In the beginning of "Our Guernica", Danticat only quotes writers inside of Haiti but she then turns to Laferrière, who, like her, has only one foot inside Haiti. Haiti itself becomes an elastic notion, one that encompasses local as well as immigrant

[197] As Herbeck notes in "Literature of Reconstruction", citing Camus's text allows Danticat to reaffirm a critical, revolutionary discourse that runs counter to the dominant rhetoric of the times.
[198] Danticat explains in *Haiti Noir* that the Creole term "blan" applies to all foreigners regardless of race.

writers. Danticat has read hundreds of accounts, those she evokes represent an infinitesimal portion of her readings. Her selection is telling though, almost all are authored by established writers. Her selection is highly literary and hence suggests that a case for the literary is being made, it also forges the sense of a community of writers with a shared commitment to Haiti. Danticat specifies that the novelist Évelyne Trouillot is her friend; this may be a way of claiming legitimacy through a strong bond with a writer from inside Haiti. More importantly though, she forges the sense of a friendship beyond borders, one that is inscribed within a community (of writers). Furthermore, the passages she quotes foreground familial bonds. Évelyne Trouillot writes in an opinion piece for the *New York Times* that the family has set up camp in her brother's house, because "it makes us feel better to be all in the same house" (160). This model of familial kinship in which relatives want to be in physical proximity is extended to kinship among friends who seek figurative proximity, which reinforces the sense of community Danticat sets forth. Forging community is a way to heal. In her friend Evelyne's novel *La mémoire aux abois*, it is not healing from immediate shock that is at stake. The novel is about healing memory.

**Healing the Memory of the Dictatorship in Evelyne Trouillot's *La mémoire aux abois***

Evelyne Trouillot's *La mémoire aux abois* (2010) focuses on the memory of dictatorship in Quisqueya, a fictional but historically accurate version of Haiti (Quisqueya is an indigenous name for Haiti).[199] Rather than foregrounding the patriarchal figure of the dictator, the novel

[199] Trouillot could qualify as what Myriam Chancy terms a "memory archivist" of the "older generation". In an interview, Chancy explains that she found in writing her book *From Sugar to the Revolution: Women's Visions of Haiti, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic* that Caribbean novels no longer provide the "unofficial history". According to her, the genesis of Caribbean fiction was to correct inaccurate history. She attributes the disappearance of this tradition to a disconnect between the writers and grass-roots movements and a lessened sense of community (she points out for instance that people no longer speak to the elders in their communities). See Chancy and McLoughlin, "Bridging Islands with Myriam J.A. Chancy".

explores the memories of two women.[200] Marie-Ange, a Quisqueyan young woman who has grown up in Martinique and who lives and works in metropolitan France, finds herself having to care for Odile Doréval. Odile Doréval represents Simone Duvalier, the widow of dictator François Duvalier who ruled from 1957 until his demise in 1971.[201] There is almost no verbal exchange between the two women. Instead, the text focuses on their thoughts. Marie-Ange is plagued by the memories of oppression and murders that her mother, Marie-Carmelle, has transmitted to her. Simone reminisces about growing up an orphan, her love for her husband, and how she and her husband led Quisqueya toward progress. I argue that the novel offers a gendered counter-history of the dictatorship and develops images to explore Odile and Marie-Ange's tormented memories. In so doing, *La mémoire aux abois* gestures toward the need to heal the memory and postmemory of the dictatorship; Marie-Ange begins to heal from the trauma she has inherited from her mother by taking ownership of her mediations of her mother's memories.[202]

The novel invites the reader to deepen her understanding of the dictatorship through the juxtaposition of Odile and Marie-Ange's accounts. The juxtaposition rejects one single overarching narrative of history; no perspective subsumes the other, though one may be more challenged than the other. Whereas Marie-Ange's expresses herself in the first person, Simone's third-person narrative is italicized and hence kept at a distance.[203] *La mémoire aux abois* ingeniously opposes two underrepresented and undervalued perspectives, those of women, an

[200] Martin Munro in *Tropical Apocalypse: Haiti and the Caribbean End Times* points out that literary renditions of the dictatorship tend to focus on themes that relate to patriarchy.

[201] The name changes suggest the lingering effects in Haiti of the censorship the regime enforced.

[202] Memories are always already mediated. Hence it is by acknowledging that she has agency in shaping her inherited memories that Marie-Ange begins to heal.

[203] According to Munro (*ibid*.), though the text humanizes Odile, the third person indicates the author's wariness in accessing the perpetrator's subjectivity. The third person may also suggest that Odile is in denial.

orphaned daughter and an alienated widow. Both are arguably unreliable narrators. Odile is unreliable in that she is "on the wrong side of history": she is the spouse of a dictator who reigned in terror. Marie-Ange is unreliable in that she did not experience the events herself, they have been recounted to her by her mother. And yet, the novel partly validates both perspectives. For one, it humanizes Odile. As Odile reminisces on her childhood and her experiences as a mother, we learn that she perceived herself as a fiercely loving mother. Having grown up in an orphanage intensifies the importance she attributes to her role as mother. As for Marie-Ange, she has been told the stories so many times that it is as if she had experienced them herself.

Though the two women's chronicles of the attempted kidnapping of two of the Duvalier children are markedly different, they are both filtered through the experience of motherhood. When his children were kidnapped, Duvalier ordered the shutdown of schools as a retaliatory measure and threatened to hurt the schoolchildren if his own children were harmed. Odile and Marie-Ange both relate the event toward the beginning of the novel and hence present the attempted kidnapping as a foundational story of this historical period. In addition to being on the side of the oppressive abuse of power, Odile is unreliable in that she contradicts herself. She claims that her husband acted for the sake of preventing further threats, but she also alludes to the rage and spirit of vengeance that fueled these measures:

> *Aux côtés du Défunt, aussi furieux qu'elle, elle approuvait du fond de son cœur les représailles envisagées et toutes les mesures à prendre contre les coupables. S'ils avaient effleuré du doigt la peau de son fils, beaucoup d'autres enfants auraient péri. Même clouée sur ce lit d'impotence, elle sentait la rage d'alors habiter de nouveau ses membres et transformer ses doigts en griffes*. (15)

This passage indicates that the first lady played a role in motivating some of the strategies of the dictatorship. The spatial qualification "*Aux côtés du Défunt*" emphasizes her physical presence and reminds us of the philosophical sense of "presence": "being next to". Her presence affectively validated the dictator's fury. The transmogrification of her fingers into claws stresses that she conceives of protecting her children as a primal instinct so strong that it can be summoned from her deathbed. Odile pits herself against the collective in the sentences that follow, she groups "*les mères de famille*" (15) as one entity that began to howl when Duvalier ordered pupils and students to stay in schools. "*Un cheveu touché et ils y seraient tous passés*" (15), she adds. This single hair, as synecdoche of the Duvalier children, reinforces the opposition she draws between her family and the people. She erects her family as sacred.

Marie-Ange's retelling of this same event offers an inverted mirror in which mothers experience the terror of the dictatorship as a collective. She uses the term "scène" (26), which denotes the place where drama unfolds, and impresses on the reader the spectacular component of the episode. Her mother Marie-Carmelle would vividly portray the dreadful atmosphere:

> L'annonce de la décision se répandit avec la fulgurance des catastrophes : celles qui travaillaient en ville passaient récupérer leurs enfants et avertir leurs voisines. Sans prêter attention à leurs vêtements, savates aux pieds, les femmes dévalaient les pentes, s'engouffraient dans les taxis, les camionnettes. (26)

Though Marie-Carmelle would begin the story by depicting her own mother's terror, this passage expands its reach and evokes mothers in the plural. And although we are then told that men were rushing, oblivious to the car honks and the vociferations of other pedestrians, it is mothers who are in the forefront. The use of the imperfect for the verbs of haste "dévalaient" and "s'engouffraient" seems paradoxical and might suggest that the catastrophic atmosphere made the mothers' actions

of hurrying to pick up children seem prolonged. Marie-Carmelle would go on to point out that all parents were trying to find their children before the avenging guillotine blade fell on them; the guillotine recalls the French revolution and points to intertwined genealogies of violence. Marie-Carmelle would also stress that the entire city had taken on a grey color as the children hurried to follow their parents without fully understanding the object of their fear. Grey as a murky color conveys the children's sense of incomprehension.[204] The luckier parents were able to pick up their children before the orders from the infuriated dictator arrived to the guards or "cerbères zélés" (27). This reference to the mythological figure that guards the gates of the Underworld equates the dictatorship with hell. This description thusly draws up a panorama of panic that brushes through different perspectives while foregrounding the fear collectively experienced by mothers.

The naming of a city after the first lady is also addressed from opposed perspectives; Marie-Ange recounts how Marie-Carmelle deconstructed and perverted the inauguration ceremony which Odile deems to have consecrated her glory. The widow remembers her husband's gesture with great pride, she describes it as a "*jour de gloire*" (77) that satisfied her desire for longevity. None of Duvalier's predecessors had named sites after women; Odile sees Duvalier's willingness to honor her as a quality that distinguishes him from other rulers. Meanwhile, Marie-Carmelle considered that: "[Odile] donnait son nom à ce quartier où la misère inhumaine s'installait jambes ouvertes et fesses au vent" (78). The image of exposed body parts feminizes the spectacle of exploitation and squalor. The image reaffirms the novel's commitment to a gendered understanding of the history of the dictatorship, and of the broader power dynamics between Haiti and other countries. The feminized obscene spectacle emphasizes that women are especially

[204] The imaginary of the text is tinged mostly with grey, red, and black. These colors are modulated within a panoply that draws from blood and from "les années noires".

vulnerable in a country that is prey to sexual tourism and deformed mediatic representations. The media curate images of Haitian misery that are consumed by audiences worldwide.[205] Given that Marie Carmelle produced this image, the text points to how women themselves internalize frameworks that exploit women.

This deconstruction, however, does not completely discredit Odile's perspective. *La mémoire aux abois* provides an implicit explanation for her ambition by stressing her rags to riches journey and depicts her desire for grandeur as human. When she points out how rare it is for women to be honored publicly and politically, her aspirations become even more relatable. Furthermore, the text invites us not to take Marie-Carmelle's perspective as gospel. Later in the novel, we learn that Marie-Ange is still troubled by an incident that occurred when she was a child. A poor Haitian woman trying to buy presents for relatives was scoffed at and dismissed by the store owner. Marie-Carmelle herself refused to acknowledge the woman, which confounded Marie-Ange. This snub discredits Marie-Carmelle's legitimacy as denouncer of oppression and economic disparities. The juxtaposition of accounts thus plunges the reader into women's perspectives while encouraging her to remain critical.

The juxtaposition also draws in the collective and invites us to interrogate the dynamics that form collective memory.[206] The implied entity in this juxtaposition is that of the collective. This novel does not set forth a community of witnesses. Rather, it tends to associate Marie-

[205] Men are also the victims of sexual tourism in Haiti, Dany Laferrière addresses these practices in his novel *Vers le sud*.

[206] Michael Rothberg and Anne Whitehead point out that trauma studies tend to focus heavily on the individual and insufficiently examine the collective. However, in *La mémoire aux abois*, the individual and familial mode of exploring trauma intertwines the familial and the collective. See Rothberg, "Decolonizing Trauma Studies: a Response" and "Introduction: Between Memory and Memory: From *Lieux de mémoire* to *noeuds de mémoire*", and Whitehead, "Journeying Through Hell: Wole Soyinka, Trauma, and Postcolonial Nigeria".

Carmelle's memories with those of the collective. Marie-Ange notes that the executions of Lionel Dubois and Marc Noisin, who stand for Louis Drouin and Marcel Numa, two dissidents who were publicly executed on November 12 1964, have stayed in the memory of many Haitians. On the other hand, she points out in several instances that many stories have been forgotten. The novel hence implicitly asks what accounts for some events being remembered and not others. In the case of the public execution it is easy to fathom how such an event became part of collective memory. Duvalier meant for this collective experience to serve as an example, to terrorize, and to leave a forceful impact on memory.[207] The text also examines Odile's individual and singular memory work.

*La mémoire aux abois* probes Odile's subjectivity as well as her memory work. Trouillot asserts in an interview that in order to reclaim their history, Haitians need to understand the motivations of agents of history;[208] the novel explores Odile's motivations with nuance and subtlety. The novel's title invites us to consider which memories Odile attempts to keep at bay and the dynamics at play in her distancing efforts. Odile suffers from a sense of powerlessness as an aging woman in a hospice in a foreign land. The widow strives to seek shelter from her impotence in her memory. Her aim is to exert mastery over the narrative of her life as well as that of the dictatorship. She defines as part of her *modus operandi* the injunction not to think of the sea, the sea which is "*[t]oujours au creux de la mémoire*" (10). And yet she then reminisces on gazing at the blue and orange shades of the sea. From the comfort and elevation of her balcony, at a distance from Haitian misery, she would inhale the scents of the sea, which would reach her by rising above

[207] The regime also orchestrated secret disappearances that instilled fear in a different manner. On fear bred by secret disappearances, see Levey, "Of HIJOS and Niños: Revisiting Postmemory in Post-Dictatorship Uruguay".

[208] See Trouillot and Desrivières, "Entretien avec Evelyne Trouillot : Questionner tous les silences". http://www.potomitan.info/ayiti/desrivieres/trouillot.php

putrid exhalations of the city. The sea at the core of her memory thus becomes a signifier for the subjectivity of her memories and the partiality of her account, an account disconnected from Haitian realities.

In its painstaking exploration of Odile's memory work, the text draws a poetic and conceptual map of her entangled thoughts. The novel is very much concerned with Odile's individual psychology, with how maintaining control has been a central component of the building of her personality. For instance, she had tamed the expression of her eyes since childhood. In keeping with how she has constructed her personality, Odile now aims to control her thoughts: "*Elle fit un effort considérable pour échapper au vide, retrouver le fil de sa pensée, ne pas lâcher prise. Pas encore. Tant de choses à démêler pour son bénéfice à elle*" (100). Though "le fil de la pensée" is a common expression, in this occurrence it can be related to a Cartesian approach to structured thought. Odile wants to disentangle her thoughts. Thinkers of relationality such as Edouard Glissant and Françoise Lionnet theorize entanglements as productive sites that spell out meaning.[209] In wanting to align her thoughts, Odile closes herself off to ways in which her experiences and traumas are multilayered and bound with other Haitians' experiences. However, this task becomes increasingly difficult for Odile; the text charts her tired brain: "*Voici que maintenant, elle se perdait dans les mille détours d'un cerveau fatigué*" (153). As noted above, Odile's account is related in italics, which marks the novel's ambivalence toward accessing the perpetrator's subjectivity. The italics might also suggest that Odile is estranged from her own lucidity. The context of her deteriorating health and lessened cognitive and mnemonic abilities

[209] See Glissant, *Poétique de la relation*, and Lionnet, "Dire exactement : Remembering the Interwoven Lives of Jewish Deportees and Coolie Descendants in 1940s Mauritius".

heightens the contrast between what she strives to remember and the eruptions of what had been repressed.

Notwithstanding her efforts, sensory, involuntary, and repressed memories erupt. The writing gives form to these memory processes. The novel differentiates the blurriness of Odile's recent memories from the vividness of her memories of the dictatorship. Odile herself notes this distinction:

> *Alors que les souvenirs des dix dernières années se fondaient dans le mal-être de l'exil et lui importaient peu, des scènes beaucoup moins récentes surgissaient pourtant avec netteté. A la plus légère réverbération de sa pensée des images prenaient corps. Celles qui lui faisaient le plus peur car porteuses de chair et de sang*. (95)

The term "reverberation" denotes a movement in her thoughts that escapes her control. This movement spurs embodied memories that had been latent and that take the form of bloody and fleshy images. The notion of a reverberation of thought poetically conveys the seemingly elusive triggering of past memories. We are then told that on bad days, Fabien would tirelessly repeat the names of the people he had eliminated. The blood and flesh stand for tortured and murdered bodies, bodies that the dictatorship made expendable. This passage hence stresses the function of repetition in the memory process. Because these names had been repeated, they were forcefully inscribed in her memory and the reemergence of images associated to these names is sharp (as opposed to the mushy memories of the past ten years). The writing embodies images as they take shape in Odile's memory.

By examining her denial, the novel stresses both Odile's need to heal her tormented memory and the impossibility for this need to be fulfilled. The names that Fabien repeated

ceaselessly were those of former friends. Odile had learned to "fermer les yeux par en dedans" (95) so as to not imagine the anguish of a known face. The expression "to keep one's eyes shut", which figuratively means to refuse to see and acknowledge, is here modified to insist on interiority. Acknowledging the former friends' anguish would not allow her to stay in her role as dictator's wife, guardian of the regime. In the antepenultimate section centered on Odile's perspective, the widow recalls having been asked by a journalist how she felt about accusations from foreign countries that her spouse had employed torture to maintain his power. She remains committed to her denial of the torture. However, her denial is now accompanied in her mind by "*un arrière plan de plus en plus brumeux*" (179). By describing this foggy background, the text gives texture to her uncertainty. Lightening flashes erupt from this hazy backdrop: "*Et des éclairs inopportuns comme une boule si lourde au creux de la mémoire*" (179). Flashes of lightening are sudden and piercing in their loud sound, but they are not endowed with a heavy weight mass. The unlikely analogy gives the reader pause and points to the affective weight of these sudden images that vex her memory.

The novel underscores the tight bind between denial as a coping strategy and repression as a memory process. As the aforementioned heavy ball nests at the "core of her memory", we are reminded of the initial mention of the sea at the core of her memory. The heavy ball comes to dislodge the sea. Odile had wanted to foreground an ambivalent rapport to the memory of the sea by inscribing it in the depths of her memory, but it is an image she had attempted to repress that leaves the final impression. Henriette, an old friend from the orphanage and who was murdered by Duvalier, comes back to haunt her. And yet Odile stays committed to her denial: "*Non, cette femme ne pouvait être son ancienne amie de l'orphelinat. L'image refoulée dans sa mémoire tourmentée attendait sagement sa prochaine sortie*" (180). The anthropomorphization of images (in that they

are given the human quality of waiting calmly) emphasizes that repression is never complete, that the content always comes back. Odile is tormented by her memory until the end of the text. To heal, Odile would have to deal with what she has repressed, which she cannot do because her denial is integral to her sense of self, to how she conceives of herself as guardian of the revolution. By contradistinction, Marie-Ange's journey to heal her memory is more successful.

*La mémoire aux abois* explores Marie-Ange's postmemory of the Duvalier dictatorship by accentuating and interrogating the weight exerted in her consciousness by her mother's narrative. I use the term "postmemory" as theorized by feminist scholar Marianne Hirsch. Hirsch, in "The Generation of Postmemory," which focuses on the remembrance of the Holocaust, offers the following definition: "Postmemory describes the relationship of the second generation to powerful, often traumatic, experiences that preceded their births but that were nevertheless transmitted to them so deeply as to *seem* to constitute memories in their own right" (103).[210] Marie-Ange has not experienced most of the events herself but she remembers them as if they were her own. [211] She asserts: "je peux rapidement faire remonter à la surface certains faits devenus partie intégrante de ma mémoire" (77). Hence it is not only that she has taken on the memories as her own but that they form the main structure of her memory. Marie-Ange had kept the memories of these stories at bay as an adult but they come flooding back after her mother's death and when Marie-Ange finds herself having to nurse Odile Doréval. Daily contact with the widow thrusts her into memories of this period. Her postmemory is a vexed site; Marie-Ange has inherited her mother's

[210] Though Marianne Hirsch writes primarily about the Holocaust, she aptly points out that the concept of postmemory applies to other traumatic events.

[211] As Marie-Ange experienced trauma as a child in Haiti before her sense of self was constructed, she could be considered to belong to what Susan Suleiman terms the "1.5 generation" in her article "The 1.5 Generation: Thinking about Child Survivors and the Holocaust".

trauma. Stories are one of the main vectors of transmission of trauma. *La mémoire aux abois* emphasizes that Marie-Carmelle repeatedly told the stories of events that unfolded during the dictatorship. The text is shaped so as to convey that the narrator is crushed by her mother's stories, namely through the quasi absence of present plot, the confined setting, and the overwhelming use of past tenses, especially the imperfect. The reader as well is subjected to these stories, the novel offers no escape and no relief (unless we view Odile's perspective as relief).

Conversely, Marie-Ange suggests that she is enchanted by her mother's storytelling; her ambivalence turns our attention toward the function of narrative in dealing with trauma. Marie-Ange states: "J'admire tes talents de conteuse, maman, même si tes histoires relèvent le plus souvent du macabre" (53). In her examination of narrative in trauma fiction, Anne Whitehead poses the question of whether narrative is cathartic, whether it allows for a working-through of trauma.[212] Whitehead explains Pierre Janet's distinction between traumatic memory and narrative memory:

> Traumatic memory is inflexible and replays the past in a mode of exact repetition, while narrative memory is capable of improvising on the past so that the account of an event varies from telling to telling. For Janet, the conversion of traumatic memory into narrative memory represents the process of recovery from trauma. (187)

Repetition drives Marie-Carmelle's storytelling. This form of repetition does not involve improvisation and variation and thus likens her storytelling to the workings of traumatic memory rather than narrative memory. *La mémoire aux abois* pushes and challenges this distinction

[212] See Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction* and Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*.

because although Marie-Carmelle has narrativized the stories with talent, her repetitions suggest that she has not worked through her trauma.[213]

*La mémoire aux abois* probes the transmission of trauma by immersing the reader in an anxiety ridden atmosphere. In conjunction with storytelling, the memory has also been transmitted in ways that are nonverbal and noncognitive; Marie-Ange remembers her mother's prostrated silence that sometimes lasted for days, as well as her rage and her pain. The non-verbal and verbal transmissions result in a set of symptoms which include disquiet and anguish, suicidal thoughts and nightmares. Marie-Ange states in the first few pages of the narrative that her nightmares have come back since her mother's passing. Nightmares are a strong symptom of trauma; they suggest that a cycle of repression animates her psyche. Marie-Ange stresses the emotional pain that was an integral component of her mother's legacy:

> (…) tu as ponctué mon enfance de tes lamentations, de ta rage, de ta douleur. Ce que je n'avais pas vécu, tu as veillé à me le dire, à me le répéter jusqu'à ce que ma mémoire s'en empare. Me cachant seulement les circonstances de la mort de mon père comme pour protéger mon enfance alors que tu l'avais à jamais contaminée. (17)

The words "s'empare" and "contaminée" shape the mode of transmission; "s'empare" suggests forceful appropriation of what is not rightfully one's own, "contaminée" suggests expansive spreading and connotes disease. "Ponctué" establishes a rhythmic structure and underscores that the emotions of pain and wrath were a staple of Marie-Ange's childhood. By noting her mother's repetitions, Marie-Ange emphasizes the stronghold of the traumatic memory. The language of

[213] The text also invites us to consider the other side of the coin of storytelling. Marie-Ange points out that children used to sleep peacefully before Duvalier manipulated folk tales to terrorize the people and tales of the *Tontons Macoutes* overtook the collective imaginary.

invasion carries throughout the novel; Marie-Ange asserts that her mother's taboos "me collent à la mémoire et envahissent mes souvenirs" (49). This wording conveys a conception of her memory as both confined and malleable, but malleable in a way that is unilateral. Her mother's pain has suffused the pores of Marie-Ange's memory. Marie-Ange wonders if she will one day be able to rid herself of "cette enveloppe nostalgique et angoissée dans laquelle tu m'as élevée" (51). The encircling structure of the envelope conveys the binding force of this angsty atmosphere.

Though Marie-Ange wants to free herself from this envelope, she has at times sought refuge in her mother's trauma. As a child in Martinique, Marie-Ange was disparagingly associated with "boat people". She sought shelter from the trauma of stigmatization in her mother's trauma: "Je rentrais dans ta mémoire comme j'aurais voulu parfois regagner tes entrailles quand la vie fait trop mal" (22). Dominick LaCapra explains that reliving the pain is at times perceived by the second generation as fidelity to trauma.[214] In Marie Ange's case, reliving the pain occasionally served the function of a misdirected protective shield.[215]

At the same time, Marie-Ange considers herself a guardian of her mother's memories; the text examines her efforts to guard not only her mother's memories but also more broadly the history of the dictatorship and the numerous people who have lost their lives and whose stories are not told. Her name invites us to read her as a guardian through the implicit association with an *ange gardien*. As part of her memory work, she records events in great detail. She stresses that she

[214] See LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*.

[215] For Marianne Hirsch, children of survivors tend to view themselves as guardians of their parents' memories. In *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust*, Hirsch posits that gender is a mode of remembrance of the Holocaust wherein motherhood functions as a screen as well as a shield.

has amassed a wealth of archival information. In addition to her mother's journals, she has built her own archive:

> De mon côté, à ton insu, j'ai gribouillé de nombreuses notes accumulées depuis l'adolescence, à partir de lectures d'ouvrages sur la dictature des Doréval, d'anciennes revues quisqueyennes retrouvées à la bibliothèque Schoelcher, de films visionnés, de documentaires, de témoignages de parents et amis glanés ici et là. Mes cauchemars tels des monstres hybrides me restituent tout cela dans un amas horrifiant et toujours inattendu. (32)

The horrifying heap implies a lumping together that is not processed. There is a blockage in the memorializing work. Marie-Ange has not exerted her subjectivity in forming this archive. The compiling work, rather than giving her improved understanding, comes to haunt her nightmares. The hybrid monsters come to signify that archives have been amassed but not digested.

In a singular instance, however, her memory work takes on a radically different dimension, as she engages in revisionist history. Her revisions take up one page of the novel, she imagines what history would have looked like if the dictator had succumbed to cardiac arrest. The high frequency of the pronoun "je" stands out in this page, especially because these pronouns are followed by active verbs. These active verbs contain the prefix "re" which denotes a return to an anterior state ("je redonne", "je récupère", "je replace", "je restitue"). The conjunction of these elements highlights her imaginative agency. Marie-Ange claims that her imagination rehabilitates Fort Décembre, which stands for Duvalier's infamous prison Fort Dimanche. She makes it a commemorative site:

> Fort Décembre, fort de la honte, des corps disloqués, des reins à jamais abîmés, des doigts tordus et des cœurs brisés. Je le réhabilite en lieu de commémoration des victimes, des martyrs, de tous ceux dont on se souvient mais surtout de ceux et celles dont on ne parle pas. (49)

Régine Jean-Charles points out that there are no commemorative sites of the Duvalier dictatorship, whereas sites that glorify the revolution abound.[216] Because censorship and repression were fierce and had lasting impacts beyond the reign of the Duvaliers, it is only recently that Haitian artists begun to deal with the legacy of the Duvalier dictatorship. Marie-Ange's revision, a re-*en*visioning of the site, signals the need for a *lieu de mémoire*.[217] She gives significance to a material site that shapes collective memory.[218] In calling the prison Fort-Décembre rather than Fort-Dimanche, the novel draws an expanded temporality and thusly aligns itself with Marie-Ange's recuperative effort.[219]

On the level of plot, the novel gestures toward healing postmemory through a twist. Marie-Ange fantasizes about avenging the memory of those who have perished; Odile's face symbolizes for Marie-Ange the atrocities committed by the dictatorship. Viewing herself as a guardian is part of a slippery slope; the guardian becomes the avenger. But as the widow's health steadily declines, as she becomes frailer and the feasibility of the homicide increases, Marie-Ange relinquishes the

[216] See Jean-Charles, "Beyond Truth and Reconciliation in '*La mémoire aux abois*' and '*Un alligator nommé Rosa*'".

[217] See Nora, *Les lieux de mémoire*.

[218] Charles Forsdick argues in "Interpreting 2004: Politics, Memory, Scholarship" that commemorative sites can occult the complexity of memory. By contrast, Marie-Ange's recuperation asserts the force and complexity of her imaginative work.

[219] *La mémoire aux abois* could be considered to belong to the "anarchive" of the Duvalier dictatorship. Lia Brozgal in "In the Absence of the Archive (Paris, October 17, 1961)" develops the concept of the "anarchive" which she defines as "a set of works that evince an archival function and that, together, produce an epistemological system in oppositional relationship to an official archive" (50).

opportunity to kill Odile. Instead, she touches her hand. She later asks herself why she did not carry out her plan and concludes that there are too many dead around her. Embedded in such a realization is a shift in how she conceives of her role as guardian. She liberates herself from the misguided role of righter of wrongs, which in turn allows for removing one of the weights that burden her postmemory.

As the novel nears its end, Marie-Ange begins to take ownership of her mediation of her mother's memories. As Hirsch points out, postmemory is mediated and invested by imagination. Literary and artistic representational practices of postmemory comment on this mediation and on attempts to get at authenticity and truth. However, Marie-Ange in the first sections of the book rarely acknowledges that her recollections of her mother's experiences are molded by her own imagination. Our attention is turned toward mediation when Marie-Ange attempts to access the taboo that is not addressed in her mother's stories, her father's murder. She begins to assert her agency in shaping the postmemory when she strives to unsettle her mother's chronology in order to confront the year of her father's death. The notions of chronology and taboo underscore that the stories were structured according to her mother's rules. Marie-Carmelle chose the sequential order of the past events and she decided which topics were off limits. To the extent that it was structured around a taboo, her narrativized account formed an obstacle to remembering. Marie-Ange challenges her mother's authority; her mediation is disruptive and suggests that disorder may be a path toward truth.

Marie-Ange also exerts agency in freeing her memory by making room for her own memories. She aims to construct spaces in her memory in which, instead of only pain, there would be room for suffering and mirth: "Aujourd'hui, je voudrais me construire des espaces multiples et généreux, intimes et complices, où souffrances et allégresses cohabitent, où souvenirs et possibles

trouveraient leur place" (175). These spaces she is striving to carve out are embodied in the writing of the novel, as we will see below. The spaces come hand in hand with sharpened analytical thought; Marie-Ange becomes able to reflect critically on how we shape our memory:

> Sommes-nous prisonniers de notre mémoire ou serait-elle plutôt tributaire de nos blessures secrètes et de nos défaillances ? Incapable de s'épandre lorsque nos cicatrices s'accumulent et l'encerclent de barbelés ensanglantés. Ma mémoire se libère aujourd'hui et m'apporte un souvenir inattendu tel un sortilège heureux. (177)

Rather than memory freeing itself, Marie-Ange frees her own memory. The gory image of the bloodied barbed wire formed by scars both connotes lack of freedom and reminds us of the blood spilled by the dictatorship and the many deaths that are recorded in the text. This image ingeniously conceptualizes processes that confine her memory and becomes a metaphor for how the trauma of the dictatorship has structured her memory and impeded it from expanding.[220] We recall that she had qualified her memory as a sponge earlier in the narrative; the contrast highlights her progression. The title of the novel thus becomes somewhat of a misnomer. Though Marie-Ange had certainly attempted to hold the memories of the dictatorship at bay up until her mother's passing, the work of the novel is not to keep the memories at a distance but to show how they have become a burden and to gesture toward a more capacious memory.

A breakthrough in Marie-Ange's memories crystallizes her efforts at carving space for joy; this is enacted by a textual movement that makes room for aesthetic images. The narrator states "J'entrevois une image élusive et alléchante" (177). The choice of the verb "entrevoir" is significant, it emphasizes that she is beginning to see, that the beginning of a process is being set

[220] See LaCapra, "Trauma, History, Memory, Identity: What Remains?" for a discussion of the various selection processes (including repression and ideological formation) that form memory.

in motion. The qualification "élusive et alléchante" highlights the appeal of the image. Marie-Ange recalls playing with paper dolls that her grandmother Man Nini assembled. Man Nini's arm would undulate as she handed over the doll and this for Marie-Ange was the most wondrous of gifts. The little girl would then twirl with the dolls. Her recollection is eminently visual: "Une ribambelle de poupées aux couleurs variées selon le papier utilisé. Une longue chaîne de petites silhouettes, baignées de soleil et dansant au vent, fragiles et belles" (178). With the evocation of these beautiful dolls, it is the first time we notice in Marie-Ange's account a sense of aesthetics through varied color, sunlight, freed dance in the wind. It is as if this image, which conveys a sense of freeing and light movement, broke through the narrative in order to conceptually emphasize Marie-Ange's search for space in her memories. A healed postmemory is one that does not quell personal memories. Though Trouillot focuses on personal and collective memory in Haiti and though the novel barely mentions the rest of the world, discreet elements call for the world's investment in healing memory.

**Healing Haiti and the World**

*Failles*, *Create Dangerously*, and *La mémoire aux abois* all implicitly or explicitly suggest that the world should be concerned with Haiti's traumas and reconstruction. In so doing, the texts produce ideas and ideals of the world as a responsible community that is open to conversation and committed to fair relations. These ideals are intertwined with ideas of the nation as a vessel of resistance to globalization and predatory neo-liberal practices. It is in part because they propose healthier ideals of the world and of the nation that I read these writings as sites of healing.

Lahens asks that the world take a close look at Haiti's fault lines and take responsibility for forging and sharpening these lines. She is the most direct of the three authors in calling for the world's engagement because she foregrounds the need for worldwide utopian thinking. In the face

of uneven dynamics and well-intentioned but misdirected efforts (such as the invasion of Port-au Prince by NGOs), the nation she envisions is autonomous and dignified.[221] She requires from her readers that they examine different angles; her intertextual writing incorporates references to different scholarly perspectives on Haitian history and politics, and to her discussions with friends. Her ideal reader is open and fair. The openness Lahens requires from her readers she also asks from the world. Lahens requests for the world to strive to build fair relations with Haiti so as to allow the youth to have a future.

The healing process Danticat imagines for the world involves conversing, dialoging, and communing. Danticat aims to heal representations of Haiti in the public consciousness, she asks of the world that it truly encounter Haiti by learning about its people and its culture. The activity of reading she describes in the introductory essay and in "Our Guernica" becomes a metaphor for open dialogue and conversation. In calling for a world of metaphorical readers, Danticat also produces an expansive idea of the nation that is grounded in specificity. Danticat's account of readers encountering each other across time and space recalls Wai Chee Dimock's compelling discussion of reading encounters that distend temporality.[222] But whereas for Dimock the nation is a restrictive category and whereas she asserts that literature handily outlives the scope of the nation, Danticat seeks to reconstruct the nation. Danticat refers to Camus and other seditious authors in her portrayal of the underground readings that took place during the dictatorship. She thus rearticulates a revolutionary discourse and grounds her political philosophy in the context of forms of oppression that are specific to Haiti. In her renditions of the reading community, she

[221] In that the nation becomes a political category with the potential for resistance, the text's stance is markedly different from Shenaz Patel's critique of the political category of the nation-state in *Le silence des Chagos* which I treat in chapter two. Patel emphasizes the exclusion of Chagossians from the nation of Mauritius.

[222] See Dimock, *Through Other Continents: American Literature Across Deep Time.*

forges a sense of national identity that is tied to a particular history, but that understands itself by reaching out to foreign ideas and authors.

In *La mémoire aux abois*, though references to the world may seem discreet throughout the novel, the opening page challenges the world's detachment from Haitian trauma. As noted above, the novel is set in a French hospital. The director of the hospital dismisses Marie Ange's qualms about working with the widow. He emphasizes that Marie-Ange was only a child when she left Haiti and that the dictator (the father, he specifies), was already deceased. He admonishes her: "il ne faut tout de même pas exagérer"(7), thus diminishing her in his dismissal. The director becomes a synecdoche of the indifferent world. Instead of indifference, the text demands that the world actively listen to different voices. The act of reading responds to this demand. In *La mémoire aux abois*, the juxtaposition of accounts compels us to give both accounts due diligence, without necessarily justifying, excusing, or even witnessing a reconciliation. The healing process involves hearing more than one side. These three books hence call for reading practices that participate in the healing process and that actualize a better world.

# Afterword

In this dissertation I have treated theorizing the world, reflecting on and promoting human rights, and healing as three main uses of literature in the context of postcolonial Francophone (and Anglophone) literature. In retrospectively assessing how I had organized the chapters, I find that the dissertation was built toward healings, which the corpus of the third chapter explicitly addresses. Perhaps I constructed such a progression because some reckonings needed to take place before the dissertation could yield to its utopian commitments. I had set forth that one of the aims of the dissertation was to examine the authors' utopian goal of healing the wounds of colonialism. I now consider that I have examined more specifically how authors propose to heal from the traumas of colonialism by working through them.[223] In his panoramic overview of contemporary French literature, Alexandre Gefen probes the discursive stakes of what it means for literature to claim that it repairs or heals the world.[224] Gefen is not certain that literature actually heals. He stresses that whether literature actually heals is irrelevant to his study of how literature defines itself and its uses. I, however, am much more convinced that literature heals: I showed in the third chapter how traumas were worked through on the very page: through the intertextuality that allows Lahens to move forward, through the bibliotherapy that enables Danticat to cope, to overcome shock and deal with complex emotions, and through the images that pierce through the sentences and carve out a space for positive memories in Trouillot's *La mémoire aux abois*.[225] Admittedly, as Gefen points out, determining whether literature effectively heals is of the domain of affective

[223] I draw the concept of working through from psychoanalysis. For a detailed study of the productive interchange between literature and psychoanalysis in probing trauma, see Caruth, *Explorations in Trauma*.

[224] See Gefen, *Réparer le monde: la littérature française face au XXIè siècle*.

[225] Though I did not refer to bibliotherapy in my analysis of *Create Dangerously*, this term which comes from American transcendentalism aptly describes her process.

and cognitive sciences and the findings are still rudimentary.[226] Notwithstanding this caveat, in contending that healings are enacted on the page, I consider that writing is especially potent in working through trauma because writing accesses the psyche and fortifies its scaffolding.

Dealing with trauma in literary writings has required that I engage critically with memory work. A crucial aspect of assessing memory work involves examining mediations of memory and literary mediations. Marianne Hirsch's compelling analyses of literary mediations provided me with the conceptual apparatus to probe how Marie-Ange in *La mémoire aux abois* progressively acknowledges her agency in shaping her mother's memories.[227] These two conjoined fields of inquiry, trauma and memory work, have led me to value the importance of certain distinctions and to see the need to undo some detrimental binaries. Oppositions between history and memory, individual and collective memory, written archives and oral testimonies, victim and perpetrator obstruct cogent analysis.[228] Distinctions – many of which I have drawn from trauma theory and theorizations of trauma fiction[229]– allow for examining complex dynamics at work in trauma. This attention to distinctions and caution towards binaries is indebted to Dominick LaCapra's work; informed by Derridean thought, this critical gesture characterizes most of his scholarship.[230] In this dissertation I have found it especially productive to address the differences between empathy

[226] See Gefen, *ibid*., p.22.

[227] See Hirsch, "The Generation of Postmemory".

[228] Rothberg proposes the concept of the "implicated subject" to account for ways in which all are responsible for injustice. Though I have shown that *La mémoire aux abois* undoes the opposition between victim and perpetrator, my reading has not drawn in the implicated subject. Perhaps the implicated subject that has not assumed responsibility is embodied by the hospital director in Paris. See Rothberg "Multidirectional Memory and the Implicated Subject: On Sebald and Kentridge".

[229] Anne Whitehead sets forth the contours and parameters of trauma fiction in *Trauma Fiction*, I have applied her frameworks to non-fiction.

[230] LaCapra makes a case in *Understanding Others* for the relevance of Derridean deconstruction in apprehending trauma by deconstructing binaries.

and overidentification, narrative memory and traumatic memory, and memory and postmemory.[231] In my next project I aim to pursue my interest in healing as a use of literature. I will further my analysis of literary workings through of trauma in the context of the global refugee "crisis". I will seek to show that literature can provide conceptual distinctions that allow for assessing affective global responses to migrant "crises" in multiple geographical contexts and for envisioning how to repair the fabric of human community.

[231] See respectively LaCapra, *ibid*., Whitehead's discussion of Janet's distinction in *Trauma Fiction*, and Hirsch, *ibid*.

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