

# The Unspeakable



The Unspeakable:  
Representations of Trauma in Francophone  
Literature and Art

Edited by

Névine El Nossery and Amy L. Hubbell

**CAMBRIDGE  
SCHOLARS**

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P U B L I S H I N G

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## INTRODUCTION

# TRANSMITTING THE UNSPEAKABLE THROUGH LITERATURE AND ART

NÉVINE EL NOSSERY AND AMY L. HUBBELL

While suffering is a universal predicament, often arduous and at times impossible to speak of, trauma is a separating force that can render its victims silent or incapable of grieving. Horrific events, experienced in community or individually, encumber the victim as they resurge unexpectedly and continually in the present.<sup>1</sup> Past trauma constantly contaminates the present, and the present is haunted even when resistant to the past. The victim suffers the aftershocks and struggles to accommodate the enduring physical and mental anguish.

Traumatic experience may be unspeakable, but it is not necessarily unrepresentable. Even if pain is a corporal expression of trauma, it can further isolate the victim with its crushing reminders of the event. In cases of hideous violence such as genocide, torture, imprisonment, and rape, conveying the experience through alternate modes of expression may, if not heal wounds left gaping for years and even decades, at least help the victim survive. Thus, the literary and visual arts are one viable mechanism for transmitting what was initially unspeakable. Whether as a kind of “consolation”<sup>2</sup> or a temporary suspension of the overwhelming

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<sup>1</sup> In Karin Fierke’s study, “Whereof We Can Speak, Thereof We Must Not Be Silent: Trauma, Political Solipsism and War,” trauma is defined as “a ‘dislocation’ accompanied by an inability to mourn or speak of the trauma.” She further explains that grief is “embedded in a community, while trauma and emotional numbing correspond with a breakdown of community and an isolation, which may give rise to solipsism” (*Review of International Studies* 30.4 [October 2004]), 472.

<sup>2</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, “Reality and its Shadow,” in *The Levinas Reader* (Manhattan: Wiley, John & Sons, Incorporated, 2001), 130.

reverberations,<sup>3</sup> art can transform and render pain through images, shapes, and even words.

This volume studies the ways in which victims and witnesses attempt to overcome the barriers created by trauma, employing literary and visual devices so that healing may begin. The artists studied testify to unspeakable suffering in hopes that someone will receive the message thereby allowing trauma to dissipate. Although sometimes only an oblique expression of underlying pain, art can apprehend the unimaginable, depict the unrepresentable, and bear witness for those who cannot express it themselves and to those who will not listen or who refuse to believe.<sup>4</sup> Through representation and transmission, art may allow the survivor to successfully rejoin a community, annihilating the isolating nature of the trauma. But, can art represent real violence without exaggeration or idealization? How can violence be spoken about without relying on discourses of power and authority? Where does the artist's moral responsibility lie? Or as Mame-Fatou Niang questions in the case of the 2010 Haitian earthquake, how can artistic forms effectively and accurately communicate trauma without sensationalizing the event? If most theorists agree that expressing traumatic experience in literature or art is one way for the survivor to come to terms with it, how then can artistic forms represent a reality that transcends language and representation, as Barthes points out when he underscores that "le réel n'est pas représentable"?<sup>5</sup>

Even if language cannot always adequately convey trauma, it has the capacity to contain heavy burden. This contradiction is comprehensively theorized and analyzed in this volume. Diego-Alejandro Aguilar Beauregard looks at the syllabic emission of deeply felt physical trauma experienced in war, and Roxana Bauduin argues that it is precisely because we are facing a new era of trauma tinted with an overwhelming collective dimension and an inherently morbid nature that painful events cannot be represented without turning to a journalistic style. This genre of writing goes directly to the essence of pain without embellishment or symbolization, depicting the traumatic experience as if it were a documentary. As Ariane Bessette suggests in her study of AIDS documentaries, visual illustration can be more effective in transmitting pain when words are insufficient. Images can guarantee the passage from

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<sup>3</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/38427>, 259.

<sup>4</sup> See chapters by Mame-Fatou Niang, Amy L. Hubbell, and Afaf Zaid.

<sup>5</sup> Roland Barthes, *Leçon inaugurale prononcée le 7 janvier 1977 au Collège de France* (Paris: Seuil, 1978), 21.

“telling-everything” to “showing-everything,” as she argues. Even unbearable physical suffering and bodily degradation leading to death can be documented as they happen, providing a lingering register that testifies to the agony of the process. Likewise, Tatsiana Challier contends that theater brilliantly illustrates the intrinsic relationship between writer, audience and actors-narrators, as it brings them together in the same space and time, creating an “espace-tampon” or ‘buffer space’ that encompasses and convincingly portrays violence. Theater consequently becomes a place of merciless consolation as it shares tragedy and provides a venue for healing.

The aim of this volume is not to question if suffering is representable but rather to what degree art can transcend its own limitations and go straight to its essence. By gathering studies that explore diverse bodily and psychological traumas expressed through a broad range of literary and visual genres, this volume also interrogates how these expressive forms evoke a terrible reality through imagination. If art is a medium for aesthetic, cultural, and ethical transmission of pain, the artists are agents whose reflective witnessing and testimonial bring the addressee to comprehension, empathy, and understanding, or discomfort, rejection, and abnegation. Where the artist conveys the horrific event, the readers, the listeners or the viewers are necessary recipients, allowing trauma to finally be communicated. One of the main interests of the essays is the relationship between representing trauma through textual or visual narratives and receiving it through reading, listening or viewing. This is a crucial question in an era distinguished by its “spectacularity” and its emphasis on imagery and simulacrum,<sup>6</sup> and in this sense, art highlights the difficulties of articulation. As such, the essays explore both the representation of trauma and the social, historical and biographical context of their production, or what Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub describe as “the very tension between textualization and contextualization.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> See Jean-François Lyotard, *La Condition postmoderne: rapport sur le savoir* (Paris: Minuits, 1979) and Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacres et simulation* (Paris: Galilée, 1981).

<sup>7</sup> Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony. Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), xv.

## **Transmitting Trauma: Testimonial and Ethical Responsibility**

Because traumatic events sometimes occur on a mass scale involving numerous individuals and implying many divergent perspectives, representation of the horrific provokes ethical questions: our moral responsibility, and our role as recipients of the pain that others have experienced are indubitably implicated. While Valérie Dusaillant-Fernandes emphasizes that the diasporic community of survivors has a duty to mourn, demonstrating how authors may maintain the link with the victims who did not survive, Janice Gross sees Slimane Benaïssa's dramaturgical project grounded in memorial ethics. In her essay, Névine El Nossery stresses that in some trauma fiction and cinema, artists employ rhetorical and stylistic devices to elucidate ethical implications and impact the addressees' ideological view.

Numerous and occasionally conflicting debates on the moral implications of articulating suffering reflect the complex ramifications involved. In the tradition of Thomas Hobbes, certain critics and philosophers argue that we can feel the pain of others, share it and even identify with it. By contrast, Nietzsche and Bergson maintain that it is an illusion to believe that we can feel or even imagine pain that has not personally been experienced, and that our capacity is limited to observing it with heightened attention. Most of the essays in the collection tackle this issue and contend that the encounter could be beneficial for both the victim and the addressee, as it merges the two parties' experiences, potentially enabling the traumatic memory to be communicated, as Cathy Caruth states:

the history of trauma, in its inherent belatedness, can only take place through the listening of another. The meaning of the trauma's address beyond the victim concerns, indeed, not only individual isolation but a wider historical isolation that, in our time, is communicated on the level of our cultures.<sup>8</sup>

In order to be diffused, trauma must move beyond isolation and be shared with participants willing to engage in the victim's torment. Reception and

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<sup>8</sup> Cathy Caruth, "Trauma and Experience: Introduction," in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 11.

acknowledgement of the trauma are essential to its communication. As such, the listener:

come[s] to be a participant and a co-owner of the traumatic event: through his very listening, he comes to partially experience trauma in himself. The relation of the victim to the event of the trauma, therefore, impacts on the relation of the listener to it, and the latter comes to feel the bewilderment, injury, confusion, dread and conflicts that the trauma victim feels.<sup>9</sup>

Julia Frengs's chapter demonstrates in Claudine Jacques's texts that the reader's interrogation of the narrative effectively mirrors and expresses the uncertainty, the blanks, the silences, or the *non-dits* of rape and sexual trauma. Catherine Gilbert tackles the development of narrative authority when a collaborator is involved, overtly identified or not, obscuring the testimonial's authenticity. Gilbert's goal is not to address so much *what* is said or even speakable about the Rwandan genocide as much as how that story comes forth from exchanges with listeners, readers, and collaborators.

The traumatic experience not only reveals a common ground where survivors and addressees can meet, but it also reflects a complex predicament regarding our relationship to collective history. Public and private lives are intertwined in such a way that it is at times difficult to discern the borders between the personal and the collective. Many essays in this collection demonstrate that broad-reaching traumatic events such as war, genocide and natural disasters extend beyond traumatized individuals, who as Caruth points out "carry an impossible history within them, or they become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess."<sup>10</sup>

## Remembering Trauma, First and Second-hand

Abundant testimonial accounts using different mediums (literature, cinema, photography, performance, painting, installation, collection) have emerged in the last four decades, often conceived and created by artists who did not necessarily live a traumatic experience but rather inherited it from their parents and grandparents. The chapters in this volume attest to the many ways in which one can express what has been presumed forgotten, suppressed, or simply unspoken. Authors explore what Marianne

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<sup>9</sup> Dori Laub, "Bearing Witness, or the Vicissitudes of Listening" in Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, 57-58.

<sup>10</sup> Caruth, "Trauma and Experience: Introduction," 5.

Hirsch has termed as postmemory,<sup>11</sup> and how traumatic memory has been passed down along the generational lines allowing those who did not directly experience the event to finally put the atrocities endured into words. Postmemory is shared to either obliterate or resolve the traumatic memory, and the artists access a vast repertoire of unrecorded stories, sometimes unrecognized or even consciously erased from official history and social memory. In expressing second-hand trauma, however, authors take creative license and can manipulate the unspeakable in unpredictable ways as demonstrated in Jennifer Howell's study of Pied-Noir remembering and the Algerian War. Howell argues that Anne Sibrán's contemporary *bande dessinée* recounting of her Pied-Noir father's experience in the Algerian war provides a cohesive narrative in which the fragmentary nature of trauma is hidden beneath layers of solid character development, narrative stability, and engaging images. Likewise in her study of Franco-Algerian artist Zineb Sedira, Amy L. Hubbell demonstrates that the children of exiles break barriers of silence by transmitting their parents' suffering while modeling the role of the listener in testimonial documentary.

When trauma is represented many years after its occurrence, it is always influenced by memory; as such, several contributors point to the work of amnesia, forgetting, nostalgia, postmemory, mourning and melancholia, as well as to isolation—imprisonment, exile, and other physical separations created through time and language. Susan Ireland looks at the ways in which incarceration is reinforced by the interrelated images of haunting, branding, burial, exhumation, and ruins, which symbolize repression of memory, and of the difficulty of putting trauma in words on personal and collective levels. The essays also address common themes of identity doubling, repetition, and return to the site of the horrific as a means of dealing with unspeakable memories.

## **Psychological Trauma, Repetition, Silence and Working-Through**

Although the twentieth century witnessed atrocious historical events, the medical and theoretical understanding of their traumatic aftermath had

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<sup>11</sup> Marianne Hirsch defines postmemory as “the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can be neither understood nor recreated” (*Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012], 22).



already began in the late nineteenth century with Sigmund Freud's examination of hysteria and the compulsion to repeat. A main trope found in trauma narratives and to which several essays point, repetition results from trauma not being fully registered at the moment of impact and consequently it is reiterated through somatic symptoms.<sup>12</sup> Psychoanalytic theory stemming from Freud's concept of "traumatic neuroses" describes the re-emergence of symptoms, not in a distorted way but rather latently, during World War I, when soldiers had recurrent nightmares of reliving battlefield combat: "Dreams occurring in traumatic neuroses have the characteristic of repeatedly bringing the patient back into the situation of his accident, a situation from which he wakes up in another fright."<sup>13</sup> In other words, the victim of the traumatic experience will re-enact it through dreams, hallucinations, and flashbacks, and this will happen in a surprisingly literal way even if the person refuses its return. Yet when these overwhelming events occur in the present, their fragmented and incongruous nature reflects their validity as a history. During World War I traumatic symptoms were diagnosed as "shell shock" among soldiers who were psychologically devastated by the war. In the late 1980s post-traumatic stress disorder was recognized as a real illness that can affect both the body and the mind. It subsequently began to be recognized in cases of rape, child abuse or other forms of violence inflicted upon the other.<sup>14</sup>

Based on Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Judith Butler's "The Pleasures of Repetition" demonstrates that repetition itself is indicative of the subject's inability to accept the present:

The repetition is a vain effort to stay, or indeed, to reverse time; such repetition reveals a rancor against the present which feeds upon itself. ... In effect, repetition is associated with the re-presentation of the past, and hence, it indicates a way in which the ego fails to inhabit present time.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 22.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>14</sup> See Judith Lewis Herman's seminal book *Trauma and Recovery* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992) where she compares post-traumatic stress disorder exhibited after war with symptoms of neurosis related to rape and sexual abuse.

<sup>15</sup> Judith Butler "The Pleasures of Repetition" in *Pleasure Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, ed. Robert A. Glick and Stanley Bone. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 272-73.

Butler proposes that the subject uses repetition to repair the past because it is the past that has made the present uninhabitable. Similarly, Caruth posits:

the wound of the mind ... is not, like the wound of the body, a simple and healable event, but rather an event that ... is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor.<sup>16</sup>

In *Le Principe de répétition: littérature et modernité*, Marie-Laure Bardèche expounds on the inability of the traumatized repeater to inhabit the present:

Ces personnages en charge de la mémoire, voués à répéter le souvenir d'un événement traumatique, vivent dans un présent intemporel qui n'est pas un présent pur mais un temps fait de rétentions (souvenir et reconstruction des traces passées) et de protentions (projection de ces souvenirs). Une relation de pure successivité entre passé, présent et futur ne suffit pas à en rendre compte.<sup>17</sup>

Bardèche expresses that trauma prevents the repeater from continuing in the present. Because of the constant backward reflection and the projection of this memory onto the present, a fiction is created to replace the “pure” present.

Several contributors examine how recurrent words, scenes, and images might bridge trauma-induced gaps and separations taking the victim back, at least figuratively, to a time preceding rupture. Repetition—from syllables to whole stories reiterated across multiple pieces of literature and art—emerges as a common element for these trauma survivors. In the case of Virginie Despentes's repeated account of rape, Natalie Edwards states, “The fact that the episode may exist beyond language in the author's mind may render it even more difficult to narrate and lead to an increased need on the part of the author to *rewrite*,” and Carine Fréville explains in her study of Malika Mokeddem's repetitions of traumatic experiences across several literary works:

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<sup>16</sup> Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 3-4.

<sup>17</sup> Marie-Laure Bardèche, *Le Principe de répétition: Littérature et modernité* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1999), 145.

Comme dans le jeu du Fort/Da que Freud analyse dans *Au-delà du principe du plaisir*<sup>18</sup>, la répétition est soit une répétition passive, liée à la pulsion de mort, avec une répétition à l'identique (le *retour du même*), soit une répétition active, où peut être introduite de la différence. Dans les répétitions du matériau traumatique peut se développer un investissement du traumatisme (par l'acte créateur par exemple) permettant à la fois son élaboration psychique et son extériorisation—une extériorisation possiblement cathartique.<sup>19</sup>

Where some victims incessantly repeat their traumatic experience, others emphasize the silence that has overwhelmed them. Silenced memories have been studied in psychology and sociology, yet only a handful of articles have appeared on Francophone literary and artistic production related to suffering.<sup>20</sup> This collection of essays addresses the many ways a traumatic experience is articulated, demonstrating through various approaches the specific difficulties of finding linguistic, visual or artistic equivalents for suffering and the ways artists may render it. All the contributors agree that traumatic experience cannot be represented in a linear, cohesive and coherent narrative, but rather it is hinted at through overt silence, blanks, ellipses, and hesitations which point to the unspeakable and the unknown. And since trauma narratives are by nature incomplete, full of gaps and inconsistencies and are sometimes incoherent, they reflect systematic distortions of past memories. Because of their

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<sup>18</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Au-delà du principe de plaisir*, in *Essais de psychanalyse*, trans. Jean Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis (Paris: Payot, 1981), 41-115.

<sup>19</sup> See Carine Fréville's essay in this volume, "Transpositions, répétitions et réécritures de remémorations traumatiques dans les œuvres de Malika Mokeddem."

<sup>20</sup> To date there is no broad-spectrum work on representations of violence in Francophone literary and visual works, but see for example the collective medical and literary study, "Narrating the Unspeakable: Interdisciplinary Readings of Jean-Dominique Bauby's *The Diving-Bell and the Butterfly*," *Literature and Medicine* 20.2 (Fall 2001): 183-208, Raylene Ramsay's "Sexual Violence and Return in Indigenous Francophone and Anglophone Pacific Literatures," *Journal of New Zealand Literature* 24.2 (2007): 73-97 and Anne Donadey's comparative study "African American and Francophone Postcolonial Memory: Octavia Butler's *Kindred* and Assia Djebar's *La femme sans sépulture*" in *Research in African Literatures* 39.3 (Fall 2008): 65-81. Two book-length studies on Francophone literature and silence have been published: Marie-Chantal Kalisa, *Violence in Francophone African and Caribbean Women's Literature* (University of Nebraska Press, 2009) and Lorna Milne, *Postcolonial Violence, Culture and Identity in Francophone Africa and the Antilles* (Peter Lang, 2007).

narrativization, they are necessarily modified, altered and sometimes even fictionalized, as Kathryn Robson points out:

the narrativization of trauma is curative not because they conveys ‘what happened’ but because it modifies it, because it represents the past in a less disturbing fashion.<sup>21</sup>

Dusaillant-Fernandes shows that Scholastique Mukasonga’s novels talk about the unspeakable without dealing directly with the genocide through narrative and enunciative strategies as the multiplicity of voices, repetition, and digressions on ancestral tradition, and temporal ambiguity. Marzia Caporale in her contribution examines silence as a stylistic choice to enhance cinematic semiotic communication and questions the represent-ability of female desire in postcolonial women’s cinema by articulating a critique of historical practices.

## **Cross-generic and Transnational Representations of Trauma**

The unspeakable permeates borders and is not limited by generic or linguistic conventions. It is not confined to one region or culture: this volume uncovers the unspeakable in Algeria, Rwanda, Cameroon, Haiti, Quebec and France, among others. Furthermore, the representation of traumatic experience is not gender specific even if paradoxically gender impacts on representation. By focusing on blurred generic borders and by joining a broad range of artistic production together, a cohesive analysis of the representation of trauma emerges in this volume. The essays illustrate that the unspeakable is not limited to autobiography and can be represented by all genres (poetry, theater, film, art, fiction, autobiography, painting, etc.). The texts and art works studied here often rely on imagination and yet they interweave the personal, the collective, and the historical emphasizing generic tensions and requiring what Caruth considers as a “new mode of reading.”<sup>22</sup> The volume also tackles the ways in which the intervention of the visual supplants the unspeakable, allowing expression and contradictorily sustaining the unspeakable nature of trauma. Edwards examines the representation of the same traumatic experience across genres, from textual to visual, in order to find an

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<sup>21</sup> Kathryn Robson, *Writing Wounds. The Inscription of Trauma in Post-1968 French Women’s Life-Writing* (Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, 2004), 21.

<sup>22</sup> Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 9.

adequate language with which to narrate the trauma, as if each medium is insufficient to encapsulate the totality of the experience. El Nossery's chapter examines the specificities of literature and cinema in rendering trauma, and argues that if literature can present the world through narratives and gives access to feelings and inner thoughts, cinema can more efficiently visualize and "re-create" the scene in a realistic dimension. While Howell looks at shifting memory across time and across genres from *bande dessinée* to novel, Fréville depicts a double movement from autobiography to fiction in Malika Mokeddem's works producing what Fréville calls a "recuperative rewriting." When approaching narrative and generic tensions, the paratext reveals itself as a fertile location for the unspeakable and the unrepresentable. Several contributors point towards the importance of the postface and preface as lending authority, questioning authenticity, and bringing forth what is unsaid in the body of the text.

In conclusion, *The Unspeakable: Representations of Trauma in Francophone Literature and Art* is at the crossroads of language, culture and genre. It transcends time, space and cultural specificity. This study hopes to provide models for the "cultural translation"<sup>23</sup> of trauma so that the sufferer and the addressee may together heal their wounds. Trauma, when represented and released from silence and isolation, gives way to the arduous process of mourning and healing.

## Chapter Summaries

### Part I Performing the Unspeakable

Violence can be represented through imagination which transforms suffering, but representing the horrific events and the ensuing survivor's guilt requires the victim to relive the pain of the traumatic experience. This implies a relentless confrontation with the reality of what has occurred without the possibility of protection or denial. The only way to reduce the psychological damage from this confrontation is through the construction of a plausible narrative. Tatsiana Kuchyts Challier in "La Fiction, échappée belle de l'Histoire dans *Incendies* de Wajdi Mouawad" questions the challenging nature of theatrical experience where the author, actors-narrators, and the public are brought together in one space where the tragedy is shared. Mouawad's *Incendies* is a realistic play that portrays the horrors of the war in Lebanon, and yet it is a tale, a history and a fiction

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<sup>23</sup> Homi Bhabha. *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 163.

that creates reality through imagination. The theatrical scene becomes, as Challier contends, a place where the verb “represent” reveals its multiple meanings from “rendre présent” to “agir sur” while passing through “reproduire” and “rendre sensible.”

Visual autorepresentation of death is the main focus of Ariane Bessette’s chapter, “L’Autoreprésentation de la mort chez Hervé Guibert et Derek Jarman” which argues that Guibert’s documentary shamelessly permits the image to pass from “saying everything” to “showing everything,” without hiding symptoms, physical degradation, surgeries, or any other traumatic aspect of the artist’s decline. With Derek Jarman the self-reflexive project is different: using an immobile blue screen, Jarman depicts his progressive blindness and, inevitably, his inability to represent. Thus, *Blue* strives to break the ineffability of experience, relying on the autobiographical narration and excerpts read by relatives, providing something that the image alone cannot. By examining visual representations of death in AIDS culture and the medium used to transmit it, Bessette’s essay tackles the functions, limitations and modalities of representation of death as an experience a priori unrepresentable and unspeakable.

In “Paroles de femmes d’ici et d’ailleurs: une architecture des corps violentés dans *Les Recluses* et *Nema Lento Cantabile Semplice*,” Sylvie Ngilla studies female circumcision, rape, torture, incest and different types of verbal and physical abuse as represented in Ivoirian playwright Koffi Kwahulé’s work. Trauma is not only sublimated through the graphic and poetic depiction of violence in his writing but also through an aesthetic of chaos that Ngilla examines in Kwahulé’s plays. Ngilla focuses on the polyphonic and polyrhythmic structure of bodily voices and how syntactic repetition of the traumatic event accentuates disorientation for the characters as well as for the reader/spectator of the work. Using a fragmented approach, Kwahulé’s plays are both therapeutic and creative while demonstrating a political commitment to fight women’s abuse and oppression on an international level.

Janice Gross in her essay “Performing Beyond Trauma: Stages of Recovery in Slimane Benaïssa’s Theatre” looks at the theater’s power to reanimate and intersect multiple first-person witnesses, no matter how painful, contentious, or politically dangerous the act of telling may be. As a judicious interpreter of history, Benaïssa offers viewers access to intersecting accounts of torture using the author-character (a part played by Benaïssa in *Mémoires à la dérive*) to present a middle voice. By performing a dual process of both “acting out” and “working through” traumatic events, Benaïssa performs what Dominick LaCapra calls a “very

delicate, at times tense, relationship between empathy and critical distance.”<sup>24</sup> Gross demonstrates that, through this aesthetic balancing act, each play rehearses the horror of massacre, hatred, torture and unspeakable inhumanity in order to achieve an ethical negotiation. More influential than novels or poetry, as Gross argues, theatre as practiced by Slimane Benaïssa provides restorative potential by enabling present-day audiences to join a larger community of witnesses for the future.

## **Part II Constructing Narrative Voice and Exploring Generic Tensions**

In “La Mission de Scholastique Mukasonga: entretenir le souvenir et faire perdurer la mémoire des siens,” Valérie Dusaillant-Fernandes demonstrates how the Rwandan Tutsi novelist Scholastique Mukasonga testifies to the years of terror she experienced in both autobiography and fiction. Throughout her works, Mukasonga describes in great detail the violence and humiliation she suffered, her experience in a refugee camp, her exile and narrow escape from death. However, it was not until 2010 when Mukasonga wrote her first fictional account *L’Iguifou: Nouvelles rwandaises* that she was fully able to capture the traumatic memories that haunted her. Dusaillant-Fernandes studies this account in conjunction with *La Femme aux pieds nus* to demonstrate how Mukasonga maneuvers around the unspeakable using multiple voices, repetition, and various generic conventions, attempting to put to rest the traumatic memories attached to genocide. Mukasonga’s enunciative and narrative strategies allow her to sustain her memory of the dead and to bring a diasporic community of survivors to mourning.

In another exploration of the Rwandan genocide, Catherine Gilbert’s study “Making the Impossible Possible? Collaboration in Rwandan Women’s Testimonial Literature” examines the role of the literary collaborator in the testimonies of five women: Pauline Kayitare (2011), Annick Kayitesi (2004), Yolande Mukagasana (1997, 1999), Esther Mujawayo (2004, 2006), and Marie-Aimable Umurerwa (2000). The essay argues that collaborative texts inevitably raise crucial questions of ownership, transparency, and fidelity to the original narrative. When the collaborator is Western, a power dynamic is introduced which potentially places the survivor-witness in a vulnerable position. While such collaboration is fraught with ethical difficulties, Gilbert contends that the

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<sup>24</sup> Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2001), 147.

collaborative relationship can nevertheless create an open and receptive space in which survivors can tell their stories on their own terms and, as the memory of the genocide is still fresh, collaboration may be necessary to enable the transmission of the past, both to a Rwandan and Western audience.

Often trauma can be depicted through several steps, first in fictional form and then autobiographically. In “Transpositions, répétitions et réécritures de remémorations traumatiques dans les œuvres de Malika Mokeddem,” Carine Fréville argues that the Algerian author weaves an intertextual web in her works with numerous exchanges between her personal experience and her fiction. Mokeddem’s works lay bare the process of memorial reconstruction of trauma as she attempts to move beyond limits of the *non-dit* and the unspeakable. Fréville analyzes how Mokeddem’s progressive and repeated writing of trauma from fiction to autobiography and back to fiction allows the author to dissociate herself from trauma and then to autobiographically recuperate the experience.

In his chapter “De la tranchée à la trachée: l’oralité dans le témoignage de guerre littéraire,” Diego-Alejandro Aguilar Beauregard examines *Le Grand troupeau* (Jean Giono, 1931), *Voyage au bout de la nuit* (Louis-Ferdinand Céline, 1932), *Les Canadiens errants* (Jean Vaillancourt, 1954) and *La Route des Flandres* (Claude Simon, 1960) to demonstrate how the body and orality work together to speak of violent death in war. Oral representations of the body’s orifices and its abundant excrement can lead to transmissible accounts of trauma. Aguilar Beauregard focuses specifically on war testimonials to argue that words are materialized in an organic form that summons traumatic memory of war injuries suffered both personally and by others. The body, common to all humanity, ensures the universality of testimony, and the living character of secretions that prolong the oral discourses of the dead allows the literal and figurative reproduction of testimony.

Mame-Fatou Niang’s essay “*Kenbe La! Haïti ou l’écriture de l’urgence*” explores the impact of cultural, literary and visual productions addressing the traumatic Haitian earthquake of 2010. Some accounts were wrapped in a veil of silence that could only be lifted through artistic work, others like author Dany Laferrière’s writings testified alone and quickly as if the memory was going to vanish, and still others like Sarah Berrouet and Faubert Bolivar worked with organizations as if their words had no meaning unless produced in community. A catastrophe of this magnitude forcibly raises questions about the possibility of effectively and accurately communicating trauma. Niang demonstrates the impact of various artistic forms while questioning if representation changes over time, if it is



possible to represent suffering without falling prey to sensationalism, and if conventional forms are sufficient for expressing what was suffered.

Through a reading of African novelists Sony Labou Tansi, Ahmadou Kourouma, and Véronique Tadjo, in her chapter “Représenter l’acte meurtrier: de l’exécution politique au massacre génocidaire” Roxana Bauduin demonstrates that over the past forty years, Francophone African novels have been coping with trauma within their historical context. While the novels of the 70s-80s generation metaphorically evoked suppression of opponents, after the Rwandan genocide, writers conveyed language’s incapacity to represent the degradation and objectification of human beings. Journalistic testimonial overtook a writing style previously dominated by fables and tales. Bauduin demonstrates that the way in which murder has been depicted across time reflects the real terror that has evolved behind it.

### **Part III Women and Trauma**

Natalie Edwards in her essay “Rape and Repetition: Virginie Despentès and the Rewriting of Trauma” analyzes the way in which Despentès represented her experience of rape in three different genres—novel, film and autobiographical essay—as she tried to find an adequate way in which to recount the horrific event. Edwards argues that Despentès attempted to overcome silence but at the same time felt compelled to manipulate several different genres over a period of twenty years. Moreover Edwards demonstrates that Despentès’s fictional and then filmic representations of rape were a first step towards finding the language with which to narrate her experience, and because novelistic and visual media insufficiently encapsulated her experience, she finally turned towards the autobiographical essay. Yet Despentès still found words incapable of narrating the event itself, and instead opted for an ellipsis, recounting only the lead-up and the aftermath of the attack. By placing her autobiographical account of rape within a theoretical framework, thus putting her experience into a practical application, Edwards contends that Despentès not only performs an important social function, but also comes closer to catharsis.

In “Narrating the Unspeakable in New Caledonia: Sexual Violence, Narration, and Truth in the Works of Claudine Jacques,” Julia Frengs elucidates the relationship between representations of sexual trauma and power dynamics by examining Jacques’s narrative techniques in terms of aesthetics. She specifically explores the effectiveness of narration in articulating blanks, silences, and the *non-dit* of rape and sexual trauma in

New Caledonia. Frençs argues that Jacques repeatedly casts doubt on narration's capacity to communicate truth—whether experienced by fictionalized personas or filtered through the author's *ad hominem* lens—demonstrating that in many cases, the narrator (and often the reader) can become complicit in the (mis)representations of sexual violence.

In her 1965 essay "Against Interpretation," critic Susan Sontag described the essential nature of art as "incantatory" and "magical" and theorizes the highly communicative value of an aesthetic of the unspoken when she states: "silence never ceases to imply its opposite, and to depend on its presence."<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, feminist criticism from H el ene Cixous to Luce Irigaray has investigated silence as an oppressive condition imposed upon women by a phallogratic epistemology that aims to deprive the female subject of the use of the logos. In her chapter entitled "The Aesthetic of the Unspoken: Representing Female Silence in Claire Denis's Film *White Material*," Marzia Caporale argues that like all Denis's movies, *White Material* revisits and deepens the investigation of silence as a stylistic choice to enhance cinematic semiotic communication and it questions the re-present-ability of female desire in postcolonial women's cinema by critiquing French colonialism—a practice that is patriarchal by definition and that traditionally excludes women from agency.

N evine El Nossery's essay "Traduire la souffrance au f eminin dans la litt erature et le cin ema francophones" identifies stylistic, rhetorical and structural strategies explored in two different mediums, Le ila Marouane's novel *Le Ch atiment des hypocrites* (2001) and Yamina Bachir-Chouikh's movie, *Rachida* (2002), in order to formulate understanding on the ethical implications of these techniques and to see how they affect the ideological system of the recipient. El Nossery suggests that if literature can represent the world through words that can transmit feelings and inner thoughts, it cannot literally capture the images that correspond to the event in reality. On the other hand, cinema, through the power of the image, can effectively re-create the scene in its real dimensions. Furthermore, some components in cinema such as movement, gestures, facial and bodily expressions, sound, music, and light can produce a copy that closely mimics reality.

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<sup>25</sup> Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1966), 458.

## Part IV Memory and Amnesia in the Representation of Trauma

Jennifer Howell in her chapter “A Father’s Pain, a Daughter’s Story: Transcending the Trauma of Loss” argues that contemporary *bande dessinée* by children of Algerian War survivors are often cohesive narratives in which the fragmentary nature of trauma is hidden beneath layers of solid character development, narrative stability, and engaging images. By comparing Anne Sibran’s novel *Bleu-figuier* (1999) and Tronchet and Sibran’s album *Là-bas* (2003) based on the novel, Howell investigates the evolution from childhood memories to novel to *bande dessinée* and the specific narrative strategies used to represent Pied-Noir trauma. As reality and even postmemory is blurred across these generic shifts, Howell emphasizes the differences between mono-modal and multi-modal narrative discourses as they relate to (post)memory, H/history, and the representation of trauma.

In “Unspoken Algeria: Transmitting Traumatic Memories of the Algerian War,” Amy L. Hubbell examines the artwork of Nicole Guiraud and Zineb Sedira and films by Charly Cassan and Jean-Pierre Lledo on the transmission of unspeakable trauma suffered by both French and Algerians. After decades of official silence, now the most troubling memories of Algeria are appearing at an ever-increasing frequency. Despite the emerging public accounts, as the battle for Algerian memory continues the myth of silence remains. Through a variety of visual representations ranging from documentary to painting, each artist approaches, as Hubbell argues, the fragmented memory of a painful past and the struggle to articulate trauma. While their strategies are diverse, each artist incorporates testimonial to access the long-silenced segments of their history, thus conveying what is articulable from their suffering. Through an analysis of their visual representations and with support from interviews with the artists, the essay demonstrates that the traumas of the Algerian War are not as much unspeakable as they are unheard.

Afaf Zaid’s chapter “L’Écriture du silence chez Abdellatif Laâbi ou la poétique de l’indicible carcéral” suggests that a prisoner’s testimony may carry liberating poetics, ensuring that the text generates aesthetic and varied images that absorb inhuman experience. Zaid states that traumatic experience can be conveyed through literary and poetic devices, and that by enhancing narrative strategies and writing processes, testimony may become a real work of art. Abdellatif Laâbi’s testimonial account in *Le Fou d’espoir* reveals the unspeakable experience of a Moroccan prison while relying on both individual and collective memory. Laâbi intertwines the inmate-victim’s testimonial with the artist-writer’s pen to preserve this specific memory and to fight amnesia. In the process, Laâbi paradoxically

reconciles imprisonment with freedom, identity with alterity, and politics with poetics as he drew on “la folie des mots” to survive.

Susan Ireland in “Trauma and Imprisonment in Works Representing the *Harkis*” portrays the Algerian War of Independence (1954-1962) as a defining moment in relations between France and Algeria because the resulting traumas still have repercussions today. Although the war officially ended with the signing of the Accords d’Evian in March 1962, thereafter an estimated 100,000 *harkis* were killed by angry compatriots who viewed them as traitors; those who managed to flee to France or were finally repatriated there found themselves isolated in temporary housing camps and felt betrayed by the French. Ireland’s essay examines the omnipresent image of imprisonment which is used becomes a metaphor for the aftermath of trauma. Indeed, all of the narratives from fiction to autobiography portray the protagonists as being locked in prisons of various kinds. Through the prism of trauma studies and drawn on the notions of narrative recovery (Kathryn Robson), postmemory (Marianne Hirsch), and multidirectional memory (Michael Rothberg), Ireland looks at the ways in which the theme of incarceration is reinforced by the interrelated images of haunting, branding, burial, exhumation, and ruins, which serve as symbols of repression, amnesia, and memory, and of the difficulty of speaking of trauma on the individual, national, and collective levels.

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